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Teacher Knowledge  
and  
the Role of Theory in Practice in TESOL

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Submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of EdD

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## Abstract

The research project explores teacher knowledge and the role of theory in the practice of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers. It addresses issues which are relevant more widely to the field and profession of English Language Teaching (ELT). It includes a literature-based survey of the types and sources of knowledge relevant to the work of ESOL-ELT teachers, which are collated into a conceptual framework (CF). The CF includes aspects of teacher knowledge and learning such as the ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie 1975/2002) and ‘personal practical knowledge’ (Clandinin 1985; Clandinin & Connelly 1987). Relevant contextual factors are analysed, with four levels of policy identified as impacting to varying degrees on ESOL teachers’ practice. These (policy) contextual factors include notions of ‘best practice’, ‘appropriate methodology’, and the ELT-ESOL curriculum. A further contextual area of influence on the role of theories in ESOL teachers’ practice is the recent history of teaching methodology, including ‘ELT methods’, which is analysed in a ‘genealogy of ELT’. Several of these ELT methods have traditionally embodied elements of theories from Applied Linguistics. One such ELT ‘method’ (or ‘approach’) - Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) - is identified as influential on the thinking of ESOL teachers. The question of theory and the relationship between theory and practice are discussed with reference to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and his use of Aristotelian concepts, such as *praxis*. Views from ELT and mainstream education regarding the role of theory and practice are also discussed. In addition to the theoretical and conceptual analysis of the research question, an ‘empirical’ data-collection element of the research design involves conducting ‘semi-structured’ qualitative research interviews with eight ESOL teachers who work in the same UK Further Education College as the researcher. A qualitative, interpretivist research approach is adopted, which draws on several research methodologies and ‘paradigms’ such as phenomenology and critical realism. Data analysis methods draw on ideas from ‘Grounded Theory’, and use *NVivo* computer software to process the research interview data. Findings from the interview data are briefly presented (in Chapter 5) and illustrative quotations are included in Chapter 6. Conclusions and recommendations are presented, relating to issues of ESOL teacher education, teacher development, policy, and areas for future research (in Chapter 7). They highlight the potential value for ESOL practitioners of a greater examination of the role of theory in their practice.

## **PREFACE**

### **Teacher Knowledge**

As discussed in section 3.3 and elsewhere in the dissertation, the term ‘teacher knowledge’ has been used in various ways. In this dissertation it is used - following Kumaravadivelu (2012) - to refer to all the forms of knowledge teachers might possess and might use in their practice, including their ‘theoretical and practical knowledge as well as their dispositions, beliefs and values’ (Kumaravadivelu 2012: 21-22). Such knowledge might be ‘teacher-generated’ or be sourced from research.

### **EFL, ESOL, and ELT**

Clarifications regarding terminology in the field of English language teaching are provided in the following distinctions, which are based largely on those provided by Williams and Williams (2007).

*ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)* refers to the teaching of English in English-speaking countries to ‘non-English speaking migrants or refugees, typically delivered by voluntary and/or government supported institutions’ (Williams & Williams 2007: 3). ESOL is increasingly used to replace ESL (English as a Second Language).

*EFL (English as a Foreign Language)* refers to the teaching of English either in countries (for example, France, China or Brazil) where it ‘does not have a significant role as a language of communication in the major state institutions’ (Williams & Williams 2007: 3), or the teaching of English in English-speaking countries (for example, the UK or Australia) to visitors, often short-stay visitors, and is conducted mostly in private language schools.

*ELT (English Language Teaching)* is a general term which covers both EFL and ESOL.

## CONTENTS

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Contents</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Appendices</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Certificate of Originality</i>	<i>xii</i>

### **CHAPTER ONE: DISSERTATION OUTLINE, AIMS, ASSUMPTIONS 1**

Overview of Chapter 1	1
1.1 The research aims and research questions	1
1.2 Methodology: how the research questions will be answered	2
1.2.1 How the research questions are answered across the dissertation	2
1.2.2 Three sources of knowledge with which to answer the research questions	3
1.2.2.1 The professional knowledge of the researcher	3
1.2.2.2 Literature	4
1.2.2.3 Interviews with ESOL teachers	5
1.3 Why the issue is important	6
1.4 Outline of the dissertation chapters	6
1.5 Summary of Chapter One	7

### **CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT: POLICY, BEST PRACTICE, A GENEALOGY OF ELT 8**

Overview of Chapter 2	8
2.1 The policy context	9
2.1.1 Introduction	9
2.1.2 ESOL and the student population	10
2.1.3 Four ‘levels’ of FE ESOL policy	11
2.1.3.1 Policy context level one: National policy	11
2.1.3.2 Policy context level two: The <i>ESOL Curriculum Framework</i>	12
2.1.3.3 Policy context level three: FE college teaching policy	13
2.1.3.3.1 The student-centred, needs-based curriculum	13
2.1.3.3.2 The ELT-ESOL syllabus	14
2.1.3.3.3 SQA assessments	15
2.1.3.4 Policy context level four: Best practice in ESOL	16
2.1.3.4.1 Communicative approaches	19
2.1.3.4.2 Sources of best practice	21

<b>2.2 The context for theory and practice in ESOL - a genealogy of ELT</b>	<b>22</b>
Overview	22
2.2.1 Introduction - a genealogy of ELT	22
2.2.2 The ‘global-local’ ELT context of methodology, policy, and best practice	24
2.2.3 Applied Linguistics	27
2.2.4. The recent (post-1945) history of ELT methods and ‘post-method’	28
2.2.4.1 What are ELT methods?	29
2.2.4.2. ELT Methods -1945-1990	30
2.2.4.3 The ‘decline of methods’ and ‘post-method’	33
2.2.4.4 The decline of methods and a focus on the teacher	34
2.2.4.5 The nature of teachers’ relationship with ELT methods	36
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	 <b>41</b>
Overview of Chapter 3	42
 <b>3.1 Perspectives on the issue of theory and practice from philosophy and the philosophy of education</b>	 <b>43</b>
Overview of section 3.1	43
3.1.1 Alasdair MacIntyre	43
3.1.2 MacIntyre’s view on the nature of practice	44
3.1.3 Aristotelian categories and concepts	47
3.1.4 The practitioner and agency	51
 <b>3.2 Theory and practice in general education and ELT-ESOL</b>	 <b>52</b>
Overview of section 3.2	52
3.2.1 A definition and understanding of ‘theory’ and preliminary comments on its role in practice	52
3.2.2 Views on theory and practice from general education	53
3.2.2.1 The ‘problem’ with theory in education	53
3.2.2.2 Teachers ‘against’ theory	55
3.2.2.3 The relationship between theory and practice: teacher ‘application’ of theories and thought and action	57
3.2.2.4 The relationship between theory and practice: the factor of teacher judgement	58
3.2.2.5 The relationship between theory and practice: two paradigms of teacher knowledge	60
3.2.3 Theory and practice in ELT-ESOL	60
3.2.3.1 What counts as theory in ELT?	60
3.2.3.2 The theory-practice relationship in ELT-ESOL	61
3.2.4 ‘Solutions’ to the theory-practice ‘divide’	63
3.2.4.1 A focus on the teacher: praxis, practitioner research and reflective practice	63
3.2.4.1.1 Praxis	63
3.2.4.1.2 Practitioner or ‘action’ research	63
3.2.4.1.3 The reflective practitioner	65
3.2.4.2 How experts ‘use’ or ‘adapt’ theory	67
3.2.4.3 Theory as science – teaching as a science or art?	67

<b>3.3 Teacher Knowledge and the Conceptual Framework</b>	<b>68</b>
Overview	68
3.3.1 Introduction	69
3.3.2 Conceptual frameworks	69
3.3.3 Teacher knowledge	72
3.3.3.1 The scope of teacher knowledge	73
3.3.4 An explanation of the Conceptual Framework of the sources and types of Teacher Knowledge of ESOL teachers	75
3.3.4.1 Two paradigms of teacher knowledge	76
3.3.4.2 Three categories for the types and sources of teacher knowledge	76
3.3.4.3 The lists of types and sources of teacher knowledge	78
3.3.4.4 Factors ‘personal’ to the teacher (which ‘filter’ the role of other factors in the CF)	79
3.3.5 Systematic knowledge	79
3.3.6 Prescriptive knowledge	80
3.3.7 Craft knowledge	82
3.3.7.1 Personal Practical Knowledge	82
3.3.7.2 Tacit knowledge	83
3.3.7.3 Teacher expertise	84
3.3.7.4 Further aspects and elements relating to Craft Knowledge: Experiential learning, Reflective Practice, Classroom/Action Research, Peer observations, the Approach of colleagues, and Knowledge of the teaching context and learners	84
3.3.8 Factors ‘personal’ to the teacher (which ‘filter’ other elements in the CF)	85
3.3.8.1 The ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (including experiences of language learning)	85
3.3.8.2 Socialisation into the profession	86
3.3.8.3 The professional knowledge context	87
3.3.8.4 Teachers’ beliefs	88
3.3.8.5 Beliefs about language learning	89
3.3.8.6 A sense of plausibility	90
3.3.8.7 Teachers’ professional history/identity (teaching ‘personality’/ style/motivations), values and ideology	90
 <b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESEARCH DESIGN</b>	 <b>93</b>
Overview of Chapter 4	94
 <b>4.1 The research aims and overall design</b>	 <b>94</b>
4.1.1 Introduction	94
4.1.2 Planning the research project	94
4.1.3 Paradigms and philosophical positions	95
4.1.4 Decisions for the researcher	96
4.1.5 Epistemology and ontology	97

4.1.5.1 Assumptions underpinning the research methodology	97
4.1.5.2 A ‘critical realist’ perspective	98
4.1.5.3 The interpretivist perspective	101
4.1.5.4 Hermeneutics	101
4.1.5.5 Phenomenology	104
4.1.6 A qualitative research framework	104
4.1.7 Reflexivity	106
4.1.8 Insider research	107
4.1.9 Post-structuralist and critical perspectives	107
4.1.10 Ideological drivers in TESOL	108
4.1.11 Validity, reliability, quality, trustworthiness and generalizability	110
4.1.12 Ethics	111
<b>4.2 Research methods</b>	<b>112</b>
4.2.1 The data collection method: the interview	112
4.2.1.1 The ‘qualitative research interview’	113
4.2.1.2 The qualitative interview and the research methodology	114
4.2.1.3 Semi-structured interviews	115
4.2.1.4 ESOL teachers discussing language learning, ideas, theories, methods	116
4.2.1.5 Planning the interviews and developing the schedule	117
4.2.1.6 Using an interview schedule	118
4.2.1.7 Interventions, tactics and prompts	118
4.2.1.8 Research interview skills	119
4.2.2 Recruiting the sample	119
<b>4.3 Data Analysis</b>	<b>121</b>
4.3.1 Qualitative data analysis	121
4.3.2 The objectives of the data analysis	121
4.3.3 Interpretation of the data	122
4.3.3.1 Data analysis - ‘Grounded Theory’	122
4.3.3.2 GT coding and early analysis	125
4.3.3.3 Further considerations for data-analysis	126
4.3.3.4 Data analysis – <i>Nvivo</i>	127
4.3.4 The Coding Process	128
4.3.4.1 ‘Pre-codes’	128
4.3.4.2 Memos	129
4.3.4.3 Considerations of language	130
4.3.4.4 Transcription	130
<b>CHAPTER 5 A BRIEF REPORT OF THE INTERVIEW FINDINGS</b>	<b>132</b>
Overview of Chapter 5	132
5.1 An evaluation of the interview process and the data collected	132
5.1.1 The interview process and questioning	132
5.1.2 The type of data collected	133
5.2 An overview of findings interview data	133
5.2.1 Teacher 1 Key influences on practice	134
5.3 Results from the coding of the interviews	135



## **CHAPTER 6 WHAT ROLE DOES THEORY PLAY IN ESOL TEACHERS' PRACTICE?**

**137**

Introduction to Chapter 6	138
Overview of Chapter 6	138
<b>6.1 The role of theory in the ESOL knowledge-base, in teacher education and in developing practice</b>	<b>139</b>
Introduction	139
6.1.1 The role of theory in 'informing' practice	140
6.1.2 The role of theory in providing key concepts, principles and language; in illuminating, 'naming', 'making sense' of practice and giving 'coherence' to practice; and in 'making the implicit explicit'	141
6.1.3 The role of theory in providing a 'sense of plausibility' to a teacher's practice	143
6.1.4 The role of theory in the socialisation of teachers into ESOL practices, into the profession, and 'social practices'	144
6.1.5 The role of theory in developing a teacher's practice	144
6.1.6 The role of theory in developing 'situated knowledge'	145
6.1.7 The role of theory in the form of ELT methods in ESOL teachers' practice	146
<b>6.2 Influences on the role of theory in practice</b>	<b>147</b>
Introduction	147
6.2.1 Contextual factors – policy	147
6.2.2 The policy context providing teacher freedom to choose theories/ methodology	148
6.2.3 A personalised pedagogical approach within a policy context	149
6.2.4 Contextual constraints on the role of theory in ESOL teachers' practice	149
6.2.5 The influence of the 'policy culture' on the role of theory in practice	149
<b>6.3 The role of theory in practice 'in combination with' other sources and types of knowledge: Systematic + Craft + Prescriptive knowledge</b>	<b>150</b>
Introduction	150
6.3.1 The role of theory in combining to create 'new' teacher (personal practical) knowledge	151
6.3.2 Craft knowledge as 'working theories', personal theories' or 'theories-in-use', and the role of theory in practice	152
6.3.3. Pedagogical content knowledge and theory and practice	153
6.3.4 Tacit knowledge and theory	153
<b>6.4 The 'filter' of personal factors on the role of theory in practice</b>	<b>155</b>
Introduction	155
6.4.1 Teachers' beliefs	155
6.4.2 Prior teaching and learning experiences	156
<b>6.5 Summary of Chapter 6</b>	<b>156</b>

<b>CHAPTER 7 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>157</b>
Overview of Chapter 7	157
7.1 Reflection on the research aims	157
7.2 Implications for practice and recommendations	158
7.2.1 Critical reflection, the ‘lens’ of theory	158
7.2.2 The role of craft knowledge	159
7.2.3 The role of theory and context	160
7.2.4 Exploring theory and practice	161
7.2.5 Types and sources of knowledge in the CF	162
7.3 Final comments	162
 <b>APPENDICES</b>	 <b>164</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>184</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1: Qualifications and experience of research participants</i>	120
<i>Table 2: All nodes and number of coded references</i>	136

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: ‘Timeline of Language Teaching Methods’, Teaching English for Everyone website</i>	31
<i>Figure 2: Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education and classroom practice (Borg 2006: 41)</i>	74
<i>Figure 3: A visual representation of the conceptual framework for the study showing the types and sources of teacher knowledge of FE ESOL teachers</i>	75
<i>Figure 4: Sources of new ideas cited across all teaching episodes (Kennedy 2002)</i>	77

<i>Appendix 1</i>	<i>‘Ten principles of effective teaching and learning’ in <i>What's next for learning and teaching in Scotland's colleges</i> (Scottish Further Education Unit 2008: 60-61)</i>	164
<i>Appendix 2</i>	Invitation to take part in research	165
<i>Appendix 3</i>	Plain Language Statement	166
<i>Appendix 4</i>	Consent Form	168
<i>Appendix 5</i>	Follow-up message to RPs after interviews	169
<i>Appendix 6</i>	Interview Schedule	169
<i>Appendix 7</i>	Version of the Interview Schedule sent to RPs pre-interview	171
<i>Appendix 8</i>	An explanation of the interview schedule	172
<i>Appendix 9</i>	Example of memo	175
<i>Appendix 10</i>	Summaries of ‘key influences on practice’	176
<i>Appendix 11</i>	Nodes and coding	180
	<i>11a: An initial list of codes based on the Conceptual Framework</i>	180
	<i>11b: An early version of coding including the coded references and notes</i>	181
	<i>11c: The second version of coding including the number of coded references</i>	182
	<i>11d: All nodes and number of coded references</i>	183

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Finally, I thank my family and friends for their support and encouragement, especially Heather for her constant support.

### **Certificate of Originality**

I certify that this thesis is my original work and that all references to, and quotations from, the work of others contained therein have been clearly identified and fully attributed.

Ken Shirley

# CHAPTER ONE DISSERTATION OUTLINE, AIMS, METHODOLOGY

Overview of Chapter 1	1
1.1 The research aims and research questions	1
1.2 Methodology: how the research questions will be answered	2
1.2.1 How the research questions are answered across the dissertation	2
1.2.2 Three sources of knowledge with which to answer the research questions	3
1.2.2.1 The professional knowledge of the researcher	3
1.2.2.2 Literature	4
1.2.2.3 Interviews with ESOL teachers	5
1.3 Why the issue is important	6
1.4 Outline of the dissertation chapters	6
1.5 Summary of Chapter One	7

## Overview

Chapter 1 sets out the research aims and the research questions of the thesis. Also in Chapter One the methodology regarding how these research questions will be answered is explained; that is, specifically how the different types of knowledge (my professional knowledge, the literature and the interview data) will be used to answer the research questions. A brief view of why the issue important and an outline of the chapters of the thesis are also provided.

## 1.1 The research aims and research questions

The aim of the thesis is to explore the role which theory plays in Further Education (FE) English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers' practice. A further closely-related aim is to identify the types and sources of knowledge which ESOL teachers draw on in their practice.

The research aims in the form of research questions are:

- 1/ What role does theory play in ESOL teachers' practice?
- 2/ What types and sources of teacher knowledge do ESOL teachers draw on?

## **1.2 Methodology: how the research questions will be answered**

### **1.2.1 How the research questions are answered across the dissertation**

1/ What role does theory play in ESOL teachers' practice?

Research question 1 is answered directly in Chapter 6, with earlier chapters (2 and 3) establishing the context and understandings of concepts related to the research question. That is, Chapter 2 analyses two areas of context; the policy context for FE ESOL teaching (2.1) and the broader professional and research context of ELT/ESOL (2.2). It is argued that these two broad areas of context inform and influence teachers' use of theories to a significant degree. Chapter 3 firstly examines ideas from philosophy relating to the research focus (3.1), then provides an initial analysis of the issue of theory and practice in TESOL (3.2), introducing some key themes and topics which are developed further in Chapter 6.

2/ What types and sources of teacher knowledge do ESOL teachers draw on?

The inclusion of the second research question - What types and sources of teacher knowledge do ESOL teachers draw on? – arises from a view that what might be considered as 'theory' in teaching is not only the theory about teaching and learning traditionally found in teaching textbooks, research articles or teacher education programmes (discussed in terms of 'systematic knowledge' in 3.3.5), but rather includes other forms of 'teacher knowledge' (such as 'prescriptive knowledge' - discussed in 3.3.6 - and 'craft knowledge' - discussed in 3.3.7). Following this understanding, the types and sources of teacher knowledge which might be regarded as forms of 'theory', having elements or characteristics of theory, or which might interact with theory in a teacher's work, should be identified. Therefore, various sources and forms of teacher knowledge are incorporated into a conceptual framework (CF) in 3.3. Although these types and sources of teacher knowledge may not all necessarily 'count' as 'theory', the extent to which they do so and the way they interact with theory is significant when examining the role theory plays in practice.

Several of the types and sources of teacher knowledge – set out in the Conceptual Framework (3.3) - are used in the interview schedule (*Appendix 6*) and subsequently as coding and analytical categories in the process of data analysis (*Appendix 11d*).

### **1.2.2 Three sources of knowledge with which to answer the research questions**

The two research questions regarding the issue of theory in the practice of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers - set out in 1.1 and 1.2.1 - will be answered by the researcher using three sources of knowledge. These three sources of knowledge are: firstly, the professional knowledge of the researcher; secondly, relevant literature (such as journal articles, conference papers and books); and thirdly, interview data (collected during research interviews with eight ESOL teachers).

#### **1.2.2.1 The professional knowledge of the researcher**

The professional knowledge of the researcher is useful in answering the research questions in a number of ways and for several reasons. I have worked in English Language Teaching (ELT) for twenty-five years as a teacher, teacher manager, or teacher educator in various teaching contexts (in the UK and abroad). I have worked in UK Further Education ESOL for the past seven of those years (as explained in the definitions of ‘Key Terms’ in the Preface, ESOL is widely viewed as a ‘sub-field’ of the broader, global field of ELT). As a result of these experiences, I have gained a degree of understanding and a range of insights into the professional practice of ESOL teachers. For example, I am familiar with the teaching materials and teaching methodology which many ESOL teachers use. Furthermore, I have some insight into the dilemmas and challenges these teachers typically face, such as that of drawing on various ideas about teaching to form an appropriate teaching methodology, or approach (Holliday 1994, Richards & Rogers 2001). With particular regard to this thesis, during my career in ELT I have also developed my own understanding of the issues addressed in the research questions, namely the role of theory in practice and the sources and types of knowledge which teachers draw on in their teaching. The relevance and role such ‘practical’ experience and insights might have in a research project where the researcher has experience of the research context s/he is studying is discussed further in the Methodology Chapter 4. The Methodology chapter discusses issues concerning the different approaches and understandings about conducting research, making reference to such notions as ‘the insider researcher’ (4.1.8), ‘reflexivity’ (4.1.7), and ‘interpretivist approaches’ (4.1.5.3); all of which - in differing ways - acknowledge the valuable role (as well as drawbacks) of a researcher researching a context with which they are familiar.



A further point regarding the contribution of ‘the professional knowledge of the researcher’ to the methodology of this thesis relates to the issue of the ‘knowledge-base’ of ELT. The ‘knowledge-base of ELT’ refers to all the information about ELT that is in the public domain in some form; this is most typically found in books, professional journals, research papers, and so on (the question of what the ‘knowledge-base’ of ELT consists of is discussed briefly in 2.1.3.4.2). In addition to my experience of the practice of ELT-ESOL arising from my teaching career as outlined above, I also have a degree of familiarity with certain elements of the ELT knowledge base. That is, in addition to my years of teaching practice, I have also gained a certain familiarity with the ELT knowledge-base through teacher education programmes, private reading, and ongoing professional development. This familiarity has been extended through the process of producing this thesis by drawing further on sources of literature as discussed below in 1.2.2.2.

As argued further in the Methodology chapter, the approach outlined in this section of drawing on and valorising the knowledge and experience of the ‘practitioner’ is regarded as a positive element in the research design, and is in fact a common characteristic of EdD theses (Malfroy & Yates 2003). This point is, furthermore, reflected in the decision to interview fellow ESOL practitioners as part of the research design, as explained in 1.2.2.3 below.

#### **1.2.2.2 Literature**

As indicated at the start of section 1.2.2, in addition to the professional knowledge of the researcher discussed in 1.2.2.1, the second of the three sources of knowledge which will be drawn on to answer the research questions is the literature which appears most relevant to the research focus. While it is suggested in 2.2, 3.2, and elsewhere in the thesis that the research questions have not been directly addressed to any great extent in the field of ELT hitherto, there nevertheless exists a wide range of literature (such as journal articles, conference papers and books) from both ELT and mainstream education which addresses issues pertinent to the research focus. These literature sources have been identified - following the approach outlined in 1.2.1 - according to the researcher’s own priorities and understandings of the research focus.

A final element in the iterative process of working to answer the research questions - involving reading, writing, and reflecting - is to draw on the experiences and insights of fellow ESOL teachers, as explained in the following section.

### 1.2.2.3 Interviews with ESOL teachers

Interviews were conducted with eight ESOL teachers working at a UK Further Education College. These teachers were questioned by the researcher in order to further understand the role various forms and sources of teacher knowledge and theories play in the practice of ESOL teachers. The interview data-collection element was included in the research design in order to gather further insights from the practice of TESOL beyond those offered from a literature-based analysis and the researcher's own perspective.

Conducting interviews offered the advantage of gaining further perspectives, insights, examples and illustrations of issues relating to the research focus directly from practicing ESOL teachers, adding the dimension of 'voices from the language classroom' (Bailey & Nunan 1996) to the thesis. This is important because the thesis is written starting from the perspective of practice (with myself as the practitioner-researcher). This aligns with one aspect of the approach of Doctorate in Education programmes, where theses are primarily written from the perspective of 'practice'; that is, they are generally written by researchers whose main experience and expertise relate directly to 'teaching' rather than 'studying'/researching education, and their interests arise from their teaching context. As San Miguel and Nelson (2007) note, professional doctorates are generally 'designed for mid-career professionals who do not aspire to become academics but rather to undertake research that emerges from, and will be useful to, their own workplaces and professions' (San Miguel & Nelson 2007: 73). Following this approach, this thesis - while attempting to provide a robust theoretical and conceptual analysis of the research questions - primarily begins from the 'chalkface', and aims to understand the practice of ESOL with the classroom as the starting point. Such a view informs the decision to incorporate perspectives from the eight teachers - in the form of several illustrative quotes (Chapter 6) and summaries the teachers' of 'Key Influences on Practice' (Chapter 5 and *Appendix 10*), which aim to capture and valorise the experiences, words, thoughts and reflections of teachers who are immersed in the process of resolving the 'theory-practice dilemma' on a daily basis - albeit most likely not consciously in these terms. While this third source of knowledge is a useful contribution, given the limitations in the data from interviews in terms of fully answering the research questions (discussed in Chapter 5) it plays a subsidiary and supportive role in answering the research questions.

One significant benefit to the research design is that the process itself of conducting the interviews and analysing the interview data contributes to the iterative process of reflection, examination of assumptions, consideration of the literature and furthering of thinking for

myself as the researcher, as mentioned above. This point is illustrated by the creation of the Conceptual Framework of the sources and types of teacher knowledge (3.3).

### **1.3 Why the issue is important**

The issue of teachers' use of theories and ideas about teaching is important as it permeates all areas of teachers' work. It not only relates to the development of 'correct' technique or efficient teaching routines, but it also has a bearing on the principles which inform a teacher's approach, including the moral and ethical dimensions of teachers' work (these issues are discussed in 3.1). Furthermore, the question of teachers' use of theories touches on an area where teachers may have a degree of freedom - albeit to differing degrees - in making choices about their practice in areas of their work which are not always codified or set out in policy guidelines (issues discussed in 2.1). That is, the research focus relates to situations where teachers might enjoy a certain freedom in making decisions about their practice (this is discussed in 6.2.2). The aim of this research project is to explore what role theories about teaching and learning have in making such decisions. In Lortie's (2002) preface to the second edition of his work 'Schoolteacher' (Lortie 1975/2002), he urges teachers to ask themselves the following 'important questions' regarding the - often moral - objectives which many teachers 'add' to the formal curriculum of their teaching institution: 'What do *I* to emphasize? What underlies that choice? If challenged, how would I defend it?' (Lortie 1975/2002: viii, emphasis in original), questions which are germane to the research focus.

### **1.4 Outline of the chapters**

Chapter 2 analyses two areas of context; the policy context for FE ESOL (2.1) and the broader professional and research context of ELT (2.2). Chapter 3 firstly examines ideas from philosophy relating to the research focus (3.1), then analyses the issue of theory and practice in TESOL (3.2), and finally sets out the CF (3.3). Chapter 4 outlines the research design, including the research approach and methods for data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 includes a brief report of the findings from the research interviews. Chapter 6 answers research question 1, and Chapter 7 presents implications for practice and recommendations.

### **1.5 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter has presented the research aims and the research questions, and has explained the methodology which is used to answer the how these research questions. A brief view as to why the issue important and an outline of the chapters of the thesis are provided.

## CHAPTER TWO CONTEXT: POLICY, BEST PRACTICE, A GENEALOGY OF ELT

Overview of Chapter 2	8
<b>2.1 The policy context</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1.1 Introduction	9
2.1.2 ESOL and the student population	10
2.1.3 Four ‘levels’ of FE ESOL policy	11
2.1.3.1 Policy context level one: National policy	11
2.1.3.2 Policy context level two: The <i>ESOL Curriculum Framework</i>	12
2.1.3.3 Policy context level three: FE college teaching policy	13
2.1.3.3.1 The student-centred, needs-based curriculum	13
2.1.3.3.2 The ELT-ESOL syllabus	14
2.1.3.3.3 SQA assessments	15
2.1.3.4 Policy context level four: Best practice in ESOL	16
2.1.3.4.1 Communicative approaches	19
2.1.3.4.2 Sources of best practice	21
<b>2.2 The context for theory and practice in ESOL - a genealogy of ELT</b>	<b>22</b>
Overview	22
2.2.1 Introduction - a genealogy of ELT	22
2.2.2 The ‘global-local’ ELT context of methodology, policy, and best practice	24
2.2.3 Applied Linguistics	27
2.2.4. The recent (post-1945) history of ELT methods and ‘post-method’	28
2.2.4.1 What are ELT methods?	29
2.2.4.2. ELT Methods -1945-1990	30
2.2.4.3 The ‘decline of methods’ and ‘post-method’	33
2.2.4.4 The decline of methods and a focus on the teacher	34
2.2.4.5 The nature of teachers’ relationship with ELT methods	36

### Overview

Chapter 2 outlines the policy and the broader professional and research context of ELT.

Section 2.1 examines the policy context, identifying four ‘levels’ of FE ESOL policy (2.1.3): National policy; the *ESOL Curriculum Framework*; FE college teaching policy (including the student-centred, needs-based curriculum, the ELT-ESOL syllabus and SQA assessments); and fourthly, best practice in ESOL (which is largely based on ‘communicative approaches’).

Section 2.2 further outlines the context for theory and practice in ESOL, including the ‘global-local’ ELT context of methodology, policy, and best practice (2.2.2). A genealogy of ELT

explores the role of ELT methods – including (in 2.2.4) the recent (post-1945) history of ELT methods, ‘post-method’, and the nature of teachers’ relationship with ELT methods.

## **2.1 The policy context**

### **2.1.1 Introduction**

The role that teacher knowledge and theory plays in ESOL teachers’ practice is influenced by several factors which might be viewed as ‘external’ to the teacher. These external, or ‘contextual’, factors combine to create the environment in which teachers operate and develop their practice. These contextual factors are ‘external’ to the extent that teachers normally have minimal or no input into their creation. For example, teachers generally have little influence in determining such contextual factors as national policy goals or the characteristics of the student population.

Based on this research project and my own experience, the most significant of these ‘contextual factors’ for Further Education (FE) English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers are; the nature of the student population (2.1.2), FE ESOL policy, ESOL course guidelines, the ESOL curriculum, prevalent views regarding appropriate pedagogy and what is currently perceived as ‘best practice’ in English Language Teaching (ELT) (all discussed in 2.1.3), trends in the broader context of (global) ELT (2.2.2), and the degree of freedom of action which teachers enjoy within a teaching institution (6.2.2). These contextual factors are important to the issue of theory and practice because they constitute the conditions in which teachers resolve issues regarding the role of theory in their practice. Beyond simply providing a context in terms of background to the research focus, these contextual factors are significant in influencing teachers’ decisions about aspects of their practice. It is also noted, however, that these contextual factors are not determinants on teachers’ practice. Teachers interact with these factors, and might in some cases ignore or react against them, for example, where teachers ‘reorganize the existing curriculum’ (Shrofel 1991: 60) in some manner, for example in adapting teaching materials.

Kennedy (2002) identifies ‘prescriptive knowledge’ as a category of teacher knowledge which is generally acquired through institutional policies, and is often codified - or at least is ‘more

codified than craft knowledge’ (craft knowledge is discussed in 3.3.7). It includes a ‘theoretical rationale’ of some sort, but is ‘less theoretical than systematic knowledge’ (discussed in 3.3.5), and is also ‘more susceptible to fads, as public policies wax and wane’ (Kennedy 2002: 356). As discussed below, for FE ESOL the prescriptive knowledge which teachers might access and experience resides in a number of levels of policy.

### **2.1.2 ESOL and the student population**

Two important elements of the context for ESOL FE teachers’ work are the state of the ESOL sector and the profile of the ESOL FE student population.

ESOL is one branch of the ELT sector, covering:

...all English language tuition for adult speakers of other languages. This includes all settings where teaching and learning takes place, and encompasses embedded language support to enable learners to access other subjects as well as discrete English language provision

Ward 2007: 1.

The context for this research project - a Scottish FE college ESOL department - is a typical example of the type of provision described by Ward.

Regarding those whom the ESOL FE sector services, the Scottish Executive (2007) describes the student population for publicly-funded ESOL provision in Scotland as including ‘new migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, along with settled minority ethnic communities’ (Scottish Executive 2007: 6). To this can be added ‘overseas students and their spouses’ (Ward 2007: 2), and the more general category of ‘young adults’ (Education Scotland 2008a). A more recently reported trend is that the student population appears to be more settled and with older family members also resident (Education Scotland/The Scottish Government 2015).

The Scottish Executive (2007) in its *Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland* further defines adult ESOL learners as those:

for whom English is not a first language and who need spoken and written English for everyday life and to participate in the labour market, learning, their local communities and wider society

Scottish Executive 2007: 6.

This statement reflects Ward’s (2007) observation that the purpose of ESOL is ‘usually presented in terms of advancing economic prosperity and bringing about greater social inclusion and community cohesion’ (Ward 2007: 113), though the weighting of these various

aims may vary across policy statements. There is often an additional focus on developing English language and employment skills with a view to improving migrants' life situation (Ward 2007). ESOL policy includes considerations of 'immigration, race and integration' (Ward 2007), for example, in the manner in which changing trends and patterns of immigration are reflected in the ESOL student population (Paton & Wilkins 2009c), and also in changing levels of demand for ESOL provision (Sunderland 2009).

### **2.1.3 Four 'levels' of FE ESOL policy**

The policy framework for ESOL teaching in Scottish FE colleges can be viewed in terms of four levels. The first, is the national policy for the ESOL sector, the *Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland* (Scottish Executive 2007) and its 2015 update *Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020* (Education Scotland/The Scottish Government 2015), which sets out a national government strategy for ESOL. Second, Education Scotland's *ESOL Curriculum Framework* (Education Scotland 2008b) and its accompanying website, which states recommendations for the content and methodology for an ESOL curriculum in Scotland. Thirdly, is a particular college's policy regarding teaching and learning, which may not be extensively codified, but can be found in elements of the curriculum, such as the course book-based syllabus and SQA assessments. Fourthly, and most relevant to the issue of theory and practice in ESOL classrooms, is the self-regulated framework of the individual ESOL teacher's (and the ESOL department staff's shared) conception of best practice, incorporating understandings and interpretations of a 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT) approach, 'appropriate methodology' (Holliday 1994) and 'appropriate pedagogy' (Kramsch & Sullivan 1996), notions and concepts which are discussed in 2.1.3.4.1.

#### **2.1.3.1 Policy context level one: National policy**

The first level of the policy framework for ESOL teaching in Scottish FE colleges is the national policy for the ESOL sector of the Scottish Government. Following a review of the provision of the ESOL in Scotland, the *National 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL) Strategy: Mapping Exercise and Scoping Study* (Rice *et al.* 2005), the Scottish Executive produced a 'blueprint' for the development of ESOL provision in Scotland, the *Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland* (Scottish Executive 2007). The background to the 2005 scoping exercise was the 'rapid expansion' of provision of ESOL in Scotland, following 'the dispersal of refugees and asylum-seekers to Glasgow (from 2000 onwards)' and the Scottish



Executive's initiative in 'promoting adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL since 2001' (Rice *et al.* 2005: ii). The subsequent 2007 *Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland* aimed to 'complement the Scottish Executive's existing vision' for community learning and development, adult literacy and numeracy and lifelong learning, as well as a developing a 'national languages strategy for Scotland' (Scottish Executive 2007: 5). Addressing the key guiding principle of 'quality', the *Strategy* aims for a provision of ESOL which 'uses best practice in the teaching and learning of languages' (Scottish Executive 2007: 5). ESOL teaching and learning should:

- Be based on current thinking and best practice for teaching adult learners, and should incorporate the principles of reflective practice.
- Incorporate best practice in language learning methodology

Scottish Executive 2007: 14.

The 2007 strategy was 'refreshed' in 2015 in the *Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020 The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Strategy for Adults in Scotland 2015* (Education Scotland/The Scottish Government 2015), which 're-affirmed' its 2007 vision.

#### **2.1.3.2 Policy context level two: The *ESOL Curriculum Framework***

The second level of ESOL policy is the *ESOL Curriculum Framework* (Education Scotland 2008a). Education Scotland, established in July 2011, is an executive agency accountable to the Scottish Government. It is charged with 'supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education and thereby securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages' (Education Scotland 2008a). Education Scotland's website includes an 'ESOL Curriculum Framework', which is offered as a 'useful tool for ESOL practitioners working in all sectors throughout Scotland'. It outlines several key indicators that show evidence of 'outcomes of provision' (Education Scotland 2008b); namely, that learners are 'successful language learners, confident language users, responsible multilingual citizens' and 'effective communicators' (Education Scotland 2008b). It, furthermore, sets out a rationale for a learner-centred approach; that is, that through taking a learner-centred approach 'the diversity of existing knowledge, skills and expertise that an ESOL learner will bring to his or her learning experience is recognised and valued' (Education Scotland 2008b). The website's section on ESOL also includes sections for practitioners - such as *Reviewing your*

*practice* (Education Scotland 2008c) and *Working with groups* (Education Scotland 2008d) - with advice and guidance on practice.

### **2.1.3.3 Policy context level three: FE college teaching policy**

A third level of ESOL policy is the FE college policy and the college curriculum. Particular college teaching policies address issues of quality and standards for FE teaching and learning. In a similar manner to the 'ESOL Curriculum Framework', the *Learning and Teaching Strategy* (2009) includes 'key principles' for teaching and learning, which consist of fairly generalised guidance statements, such as 'use appropriate methods of delivery to meet the needs of our diverse student body'. College teaching policy also refers to a number of other resources, such as the report by the Scottish Further Education Unit (2008) *What's next for learning and teaching in Scotland's colleges*, and particularly to the 'Ten principles of effective teaching and learning' (Scottish Further Education Unit 2008: 60-61) in that report. These 'Ten principles' are included in *Appendix 1*.

#### **2.1.3.3.1 The student-centred, needs-based curriculum**

A further policy framework within which teachers form their pedagogy is the nature and design of the curriculum and syllabus, which can be characterised in ESOL FE as a course book-based, student-centred, and needs-based syllabus, the delivery of which is informed by a broadly 'communicative' methodology, which is widely regarded as representing current best practice in ELT-ESOL, discussed below.

There are differing definitions of 'curriculum' and 'syllabus' (and also 'course'), and attempts at drawing distinctions are sometimes unclear (Graves 1996, Hall 1997). In the discussion below, the term 'syllabus' – as suggested by White (1988) - refers to 'the content or subject matter' of a course, whereas 'curriculum' includes the syllabus along with further factors such as the educational aims of a college or educational system (White 1988: 4), and possibly also the 'philosophy, purposes, design, and implementation of a whole programme' (Graves 1996: 3). Elements of the ESOL curriculum include the SQA assessments (discussed below, 2.1.3.3.3), and the policy-informed goals in ESOL of assisting students to develop their education and skills, and to progress to mainstream FE and training courses. In terms of the issue of teachers' decisions about practice, the focus is on syllabus design as a process of 'planning for language teaching and learning', an on-going activity conducted within the context of 'broader curriculum decisions' (Breen 1987a: 81). Although initial decisions about

syllabuses are generally made by managers or course leaders, teachers - arguably in all contexts - have some influence regarding their students' experience of the chosen syllabus. The notion of teachers as 'course developers' is useful here. 'Course development' involves 'planning a course, teaching it, and modifying the plan' (Graves 1996: 3); that is, to 'make decisions about what to emphasize, leave out, augment, and review, and how to practice, how much, with whom, and when' (Graves 1996: 4). This occurs 'even when following an assigned text or syllabus' (Graves 1996: 4). How these decisions are made will be informed by teachers' understanding from their experience, beliefs, training, views on ELT theories as well as their perceptions of what students need from an ELT syllabus.

#### **2.1.3.3.2 The ELT-ESOL syllabus**

ELT-ESOL has adopted many different types of syllabuses and an even greater number of 'prototypical' syllabuses, versions of the originals (Breen 1987a). Syllabuses - such as the lexical, task-based, content, process or skills-based syllabus - generally reflect the dominant paradigm of the time, in terms of teaching and learning languages (Breen 1987a,b), and ELT methods/methodology. The 'circular nature' of the 'paradigmatic arguments' (Hall 1997) around different conceptions of designs for syllabuses - structural, functional-notional, situational, or communicative - mirror similar debates on method discussed in 2.2. Crookes (2009) identifies a similarity between ELT's and UK primary education's experience of policy in their 'repeated cycles of innovation, institutionalization, erasure, and return' of educational ideas (Crookes 2009: 71). It is within such a context that teachers form their own beliefs and approaches to the ELT-ESOL syllabus, either following or ignoring such changes in fashion.

White (1988) identifies two lasting and significant outcomes arising out of the 1970s Council of Europe 'Threshold Level' project started 1971; the needs-based focus and meaning-based approaches to syllabus (White 1988: 17-18). With the later addition of 'contextualised language use' (White 1988: 22), these three factors remain tenets of common currently used ELT syllabus, at least in UK-type ELT-ESOL. The term 'needs-based' here refers primarily to an approach which prioritises the perceived needs of the learner or of groups of learners, and can be interpreted in terms of learner-centred approaches to syllabus design and pedagogy. Such a needs-based, learner-centred approach might also include the notions of a 'meaning-based' approach and 'contextualised language use'. The notion of a 'meaning-based approach' reflects an understanding that language should be taught for 'communicative' use; that is, with

the goal of immediate out-of-class use in mind - or at least the aspiration of future use - in the real world, rather than as an academic subject. This notion gained prominence with the increasing influence of the global use of English, and also with the increasing influence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), discussed below. CLT methodology further argued that language is best acquired through using language in an - albeit artificial, classroom-based - ‘communicative’ context. The notion of ‘contextualised language use’ can also be found within the broad communicative approach, where English is to be taught and used with a particular social context in mind - namely that context which students will require most. This approach continued in ‘post-method’ approaches (discussed in 2.2.4.3), which also emphasize the importance of context (Bax 2003).

#### **2.1.3.3.3 SQA assessments**

Many ESOL courses in Scotland include one (or several) Scottish Qualifications Authority National Qualifications (SQA NQ) ESOL assessment component or ‘unit’ (SQA ESOL). These assessments act as frameworks of accountability and standards, for example, in regulating and facilitating student progression to internal and external courses, such as HNDs. In addition to enabling ESOL students to progress to mainstream courses, including SQA assessments in ESOL courses allows students to obtain recognised qualifications and chart their progress through the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Despite these positive aspects of the SQA ESOL components, for some, the requirement to administer the assessments represents an example of the contextual constraints and difficulties experience by teachers more generally (Forde *et al.* 2006). With regard to this, Rice *et al.* (2005) remarked in their survey of ESOL in Scotland that:

It is clear that the SQA still has work to do to “sell” the SQA ESOL NQ Units to teachers. Teachers are concerned about the current state of the units (which are still being revised), including the specifications and aspects of delivery

Rice *et al.* 2005: v.

This appears to remain true in some respects, for example, as the units are still currently being revised and updated (SQA, *New Nationals ESOL*).

SQA units and preparation for the assessments are integrated into the ESOL curriculum.

The inclusion of the SQA component might appear to have relatively little direct impact on teaching, as it is mainly an assessment procedure. However, the impact of testing and

assessment on teaching is complex and it is difficult to identify the possible alterations to the content, tone and expectations - the 'washback effect' (Bailey 1999) – which might result from teaching and preparing students for an assessment.

The first three levels of policy outlined above - in national and college policy documents - offer guidance and provide recommendations for practice for ESOL teachers. One possible criticism of these recommendations is that they are often stated in fairly general terms, such as the adoption of a 'learner-centred' approach. However, more positively for teachers, this also allows a certain degree of freedom in shaping their teaching approach (as is discussed in 6.2.2). Furthermore, several elements of these policy recommendations are evident in ESOL teachers' practice in the interview data. For example, several teachers report that they adopt a learner-centred approach. Notwithstanding these similarities, the main influences on ESOL teachers' practice appear to be sources outwith the policy documents - though referred to by such documents - for example, current notions of best practice.

#### **2.1.3.4 Policy context level four: Best practice in ESOL**

The fourth 'level', or component, of the policy framework involves ESOL teachers' interpretation of best practice, and what constitutes an 'appropriate' teaching approach, within the constraints of the curriculum and guidelines of their teaching institution, and with a consideration of the local student population. This fourth level involves teachers' - as individuals and collectively as a department - interpretation of elements of policy as outlined in the first three levels. For example, as noted above, 'best practice' is recommended in policy documents, and the relative level of freedom EL/ESOL teachers enjoy in making decisions regarding this (6.2.2) makes this a significant factor in their use of teacher knowledge and theories to shape their practice. A significant influence in this fourth layer of policy context is the nature of the student population (2.1.2), which informs aspects of practice to the extent that particular student characteristics - such as language level, educational background, expectations, learning styles, motivation and personal circumstances (McKay & Tom 1999) - might place certain limits or requirements on what is possible or appropriate in the classroom. A further influence is the curriculum; at the FE college where the research data was collected the curriculum includes a skills-based syllabus (White 1988), incorporating a 'set' ELT course-book, plus an SQA component (*SQA ESOL*).

The over-arching, 'informal' regulatory framework of 'best practice' operates as the expectation that teachers will adopt a teaching approach that reflects generally-held, current views of how the practice of English Language teaching should be conducted. Such a teaching approach would inform many aspects of the 'delivery' or 'classroom implementation' (Johnson 1989) of the ESOL curriculum. The term 'teaching approach' here covers all aspects of classroom teaching and decision-making (including teaching techniques, language practice activities, materials, classroom interaction, and so on). Some examples of the type of assumptions about adult second language learning which would be included in such an approach (taken from a 'handbook' for teachers of adult second language learners) are the following; 'language is an interrelated and meaningful whole', 'learning a language is an integrated process', 'mistakes are a normal and necessary part of language learning', 'the classroom atmosphere affects learning', and 'the learner is an active partner in the learning process' (McKay & Tom 1999: 15-16). The enactment of such assumptions about good practice - which might be viewed as teaching 'principles' - is the responsibility of the teacher, with it also being their task to interpret what exactly these principles refer to. These tasks of interpretation and enactment might be a collective, ongoing process, through staff meetings and so on.

In general education, this profession-wide standard is often termed 'good' or 'best practice'. However, given the recent history of ELT (see 2.2.4), in an ESOL context it is more likely to be framed in terms of ELT methods or methodology - although the term 'best practice' is used in ELT. As Winch and Gingell (2004) note, the 'search for an effective teaching method is essentially the search for what constitutes good practice' (Winch & Gingell 2004: 53). For several decades, the 'standard' ELT- ESOL methodology - or teaching approach - has been the 'communicative approach' or, to give it its 'packaged up' method name (Hunter & Smith 2012), 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT). This dominance, if not global, exists at least in the 'language teaching literature and on teacher training courses in the West' (Cooke & Simpson 2008: 42). Hunter and Smith's (2012) survey of keywords in one of the principle UK-based ELT professional journals provides some evidence of the influential nature of the communicative approach and of the manner in which by the early 1980s 'communicative' ideas and terminology had a 'dominant status in ELT professional discourse' (Littlewood 2014: 350). Littlewood (2014) points out that there has never been consensus regarding exactly what 'communicative' is, either at the level of foundational 'principles' or at the level

of classroom practice. Consequently, different versions of CLT exist, such as a ‘strong’ and a ‘weak’ version (Howatt 1984). Commonalities, however, have also been identified. Pham (2007) identifies common agreement ‘within the communicative theory of language and language learning’ (Pham 2007: 194) in what at least some of the leading scholars in the area understand by CLT as the following:

All see the essence of language learning to be based on real communication rather than simply on learning the vocabulary, grammar, and structure of a language ... [and that] the need for meaningful communication supports the language learning process, and thus classroom activities should focus on learners’ genuine communication

Pham 2007: 194.

Critical and dissenting voices against the continued dominance of CLT exist (for example, Bax 2003), although the ambiguous and ubiquitous nature of ‘communicative’ teaching makes identifying the target of criticism problematic. Furthermore, it has been argued that a ‘post-method’ environment (Kumaravadivelu 1994, 2006) - where the ‘historic’ search for a ‘best method’ to teach ELT described in 2.2.4 has been abandoned - renders any reference to methods such as CLT irrelevant. In turn, it has been suggested that ‘post-method’ methodology (see 2.2.4.3) itself aims to be an alternative to method, validated by defeating the concept method (Bell 2003), and rather, that the idea of ‘method’ does still have resonance amongst many EL teachers (Bell 2007).

Significantly for the research focus, implicit in all the debates regarding method, post-method and communicative approaches is the central role of the teacher in determining the nature of classroom practice. That is, in the debates around methodology, it is often assumed that the teacher will identify the best approach and implement this based on their training, knowledge, experience and judgement, in a manner which accords with the policy framework outlined above. As in other branches of ELT (for example, EFL abroad), the teaching approach which is present in the ESOL classroom is based on – to sometimes quite a significant degree - the individual teacher’s interpretation of current best practice.

Despite this relative freedom, there exist constraints, boundaries and expectations which limit, regulate and inform the choices ESOL teachers make about their practice. Regarding the curriculum, there are certain prescriptive elements and procedures which act as frameworks of accountability and regulation, such as those relating to aspects of student assessment

(including SQA assessments discussed above) and college progression procedures. ESOL teachers are reported to experience frustration with some of these professional constraints, for example, with increases in certain administrative aspects of the job. As Cooke and Simpson (2008) note, ESOL teachers are currently facing ‘challenges of centralization, accountability, managerialism, and audit culture’ (Cooke & Simpson 2008: 41).

ESOL teachers’ degree of freedom to make of choices about their practice - particularly relating to their choice of methodology - is further influenced by the expectations regarding the type of teaching approach amongst students, colleagues and managers. In this regard, the shared professional experiences - in FE ESOL and elsewhere - and similarities in the teacher education of teaching staff might often result in a degree of shared perspective when forming a contextually appropriate pedagogy. These features of teachers’ experience and education would also extend to the issue of methodology, and suggests that there may be a degree of alignment in methodology or teaching approach. For example, arguably, many FE ESOL teachers would describe themselves as using a broadly ‘communicative’ approach (as do those interviewed in this research project). While ESOL teachers may draw on other approaches, most:

have been influenced by CLT to a greater or lesser degree, either directly through their professional training, or indirectly through materials and textbooks written according to CLT principles

Cooke and Simpson 2008: 42.

The latter point regarding the influence of coursebooks is discussed further in 2.2.2. The factors of the shared experience of socialisation into ELT/ ESOL (3.3.8.2), and the acquisition of a similar body of professional knowledge through education and training are also discussed in 3.3.5.

#### **2.1.3.4.1 Communicative approaches**

Given this apparently widespread disposition towards the adoption of communicative approaches in ELT/ESOL, the absence of any direct policy regarding this, and the relative freedom teachers have in choosing their teaching approach, the issue remains of which version of this ‘standard’ methodology FE ESOL teachers do or should adopt, and how this might translate into practice. Littlewood (2014) identifies four main strategies that teachers might adopt, which ‘form a cline, overlapping and merging into each other’ (Littlewood 2014: 354).



Firstly, teachers could try to follow CLT as closely as possible, within local policy constraints. Secondly, they could keep CLT as a 'reference framework', but adapt it for specific contexts. Thirdly, - and relating specifically to those teachers starting from a 'non-communicative' standpoint - they could 'integrate elements of CLT' into their own, possibly 'traditional', approach. Fourthly, teachers could reject such concepts as CLT, traditional or others, and instead:

choose ideas and techniques from the universal, transnational pool that has been built up over the years and evaluate them, not in relation to any notion of CLT, but according to how well, in their own specific context, they contribute to creating meaningful experiences which lead towards communicative competence

Littlewood 2014: 354.

Littlewood's first strategy is problematic in that - as noted above - 'pure' CLT is difficult to identify. The second strategy, inasmuch as it addresses specific contexts, aligns with an increasingly accepted view that relevant pedagogical knowledge should be produced with regard to specific socio-cultural contexts, and furthermore that it will be more effective where it is produced and negotiated 'locally' (Holliday 1994, Canagarajah 1999, Pennycook 2000), for example, in that it might aim to be more effective in terms of being more socio-culturally sensitive and appropriate (Luk 2005). One element of best practice in ELT concerns the need to develop culturally and contextually 'appropriate' pedagogy in response to local conditions (Bax 2003). The term 'appropriate' here covers a number of considerations within the practice of ELT relating to social and cultural 'situatedness', including interpersonal or affective goals, images of professionalism, student expectations and culturally-sensitive materials (Kramsch & Sullivan 1996). The factor of the needs, goals and so on of the student-learner appeared to be a significant starting point for teachers interviewed in the research project when considering the ideas they use in their lessons. Further regarding Littlewood's third strategy, as noted above, many current UK ESOL teachers are trained in communicative approaches, and so this might well be their starting point rather than an optional add-on, unless a pre-training view is considered.

Littlewood's fourth strategy is perhaps closest to what many ESOL teachers do at present, in the 'post-method environment' (Kumaravadivelu 1994; Bell 2003), and is also what arguably many have always done. Some have argued before Littlewood that many EL teachers already take what might be termed a 'pragmatic approach' to their practice, similar to Littlewood's fourth strategy, where they 'take whatever practical solutions are available' (Bell 2003: 328).

This approach might take the form of ‘an eclectic *bricolage* approach to materials, adapting, pick-and-mixing, cutting and pasting and creating their own resources’ (Baynham *et al.* 2007: 39). This ‘eclectic approach’ is regarded by some as a ‘compromise method’ (Richards 1984), albeit one that is limited by ‘the multiple pressures of fashion, resource availability, “hard sell”, and employers’ stipulations’ (Richards 1984: 111). A version of this strategy which includes Littlewood’s more evaluative and thoughtful element - rather than a simply pragmatic approach - is sometimes termed as a ‘principled eclecticism’ (Baynham *et al.* 2007: 39).

While discussions of communicative approaches, method and post-method continue to be relevant to a situation where teachers’ consider and develop their practice, it should be noted that these broad approaches are not the only sources of teachers’ pedagogic knowledge, theories and teaching approach. That is, a general method or approach is not the only aspect of theory or technique which teachers draw on. The nature of adult second language learning, including ESOL, requires student to read, listen, speak, write, and to learn vocabulary, good pronunciation, and so on. Such a range of skills and language knowledge means that teachers draw on a wide range of theories and techniques which are often outwith the scope of any particular ELT method. These ideas and theories about second language teaching and learning, along with discussions of methods (such as CLT), contribute to understandings of best practice.

#### **2.1.3.4.2 Sources of best practice**

It is argued above that ESOL teaching policy is closely related to the profession’s understandings of best practice. More detailed information about this, in addition to the general adoption of a communicative approach, can be found in various places. These include ELT professional journals and other publications, websites, professional bodies (such as IATEFL and SATEFL), conference papers, and teacher education programmes (McDonough 2002). ESOL draws considerably on (global) ELT and Applied Linguistics (discussed in 2.2.3), but also on adult education - such as the field of adult literacy - and ESOL in other countries, such as Australia (Paton & Wilkins 2009b).

In particular, descriptions of best practice are to be found in teacher education programmes and in the syllabuses of the accompanying qualifications. The Applied Linguistics/ELT/ ESOL conception of good practice is largely codified in the ‘criteria for the award of qualifications and research degrees’ (McDonough 2002: 13). The content of teacher education programmes

is perhaps the clearest representation of what constitutes conceptions of best practice within the ELT profession, as this content effectively summarises the ELT knowledge-base – both ‘practical’ and ‘theoretical’ – which should be passed on to the next cohort of qualifying teachers. Furthermore, this course content is organised and codified with a view to what teachers should do in their practice; they are ‘practically-oriented’ courses, with components that address theory. The influential Certificate (CELTA) and Diploma (DELTA) courses, and their teaching examinations, can be regarded as reflections of current understandings of best practice, based on research and hitherto accumulated knowledge and professional expertise. As such, professional certificate-awarding bodies – to some degree - act as arbiters of what constitutes good practice, and in this regard are influential teaching policy ‘makers’. A final point is that a further source of ESOL best practice is the practice of ESOL teachers themselves, their interpretations of ideas, innovations and so on.

With regards to characterising the policy framework for ESOL teachers’ practice, the sources of recommended practice listed above - teacher qualification awarding organisations, ELT publications, websites, professional bodies, special interest groups – can be regarded as examples of ‘policy institutions’ and ‘policy communities’ (Parsons 1995), which contribute to policy initiation and formulation. The influence that these policy institutions and communities have on the practice of ESOL FE teachers is difficult to gauge. ESOL teachers – such as those interviewed in this research project – have varied and complex relationships with the above policy institutions and policy communities. Teachers engage with, and are influenced to varying degrees by such sources of recommended best practice as publications, conferences, professional bodies and teacher education programmes, and will interpret and ‘implement’ policy to varying degrees. Some indication of the presence or otherwise of these various sources of best practice in teacher thinking can be found in the *Summaries of ‘key influences on practice’* (Appendix 10).

While national policy strategy papers (such as Scottish Executive 2007) exist, there is a ‘localized complexity’ of policy operation (Ball 1994), given that ESOL practitioners’ enactment of policy guidelines – for example, at the level of different colleges or as individuals - is rather indirect as it is mediated through individual (or school/department) understandings of best practice. This generally ‘messy process’ of teacher learning and understanding of best practice as it impacts on the policy-to-practice relationship (Stritikus 2003) is discussed further in 6.2.

## **2.2 The context for theory and practice in ESOL – a genealogy of ELT**

### **Overview**

The previous section 2.1 discussed several contextual factors relating to the role of theory in practice for ESOL teachers in terms of the policy context. This section continues to analyse contextual factors relating to the profession of ELT/ESOL and focuses on the theory, ideas or ‘knowledge’ context for ESOL teachers.

This section begins with an introduction to the section and the approach of a genealogy (2.2.1), followed by an analysis of the ‘global-local’ nature of ELT (2.2.2). Section 2.2.3 addresses the relevance of the field of Applied Linguistics and its relationship with ELT-ESOL. The recent (post-1945) history of ELT methods and ‘post-method’ is examined in 2.2.4. This begins with an account of what ELT methods are (2.2.4.1), which is followed by a critical review of ELT methods 1945-1990 (2.2.4.2), including a diagram-timeline illustrating the recent history of ELT methods. Following sections analyse the ‘decline of methods’ and ‘post-method’ (2.2.4.3), the increasing focus on the role of teacher rather than method (2.2.4.4), and finally the nature of teachers’ relationship with ELT methods (2.2.4.5).

### **2.2.1 Introduction – a genealogy of ELT**

In addition to the policy context discussed in 2.1, a further area of context and influence regarding the role of teacher knowledge and theory in ESOL teachers’ practice is the recent history of the ELT (global) sector and the role of theory as framed in terms of (the search for the best) ELT method. The role of method - including CLT (see 2.1.3.4.1) - in recent ELT history has been influential in the way teachers have thought about theories of teaching and language learning, where for example, for some periods ‘best method’ often equated to ‘best practice’ (Winch & Gingell 2004). This recent history continues to influence the way ESOL-ELT teachers think and talk about the ideas and theories they use in their practice (Bell 2007), making it further relevant to the research focus.

The following analysis of this situation in TESOL is informed by the approach taken by genealogies. A genealogy is ‘a hypothetical construction - a story that offers a plausible account of how something originated’ (McEwen 2011: 126). It may take various forms, including ‘descriptive and analytical vignettes’ (Gale 2001). This is the approach adopted in the following genealogy which provides a critical account of English Language Teaching (ELT) from the mid-twentieth century to the present, with particular regard to the role of

methodology, or methods, in ELT. Firstly, there is a brief analysis of the global-local ELT context of methodology, policy, and best practice.

### **2.2.2 The ‘global-local’ ELT context of methodology, policy, and best practice**

English Language Teaching (ELT) is a global phenomenon, and includes in its scope a wide range of teaching and learning contexts. The geographical locations for ELT can be divided into countries where English has the status of either a first (official) language, a second language, or a foreign language (Graddol 1997). In these contexts, English may be taught in private or public institutions, from pre-school to university level. Formal study might be combined with on-line learning (‘blended learning’), or with informal methods (Graddol 2006). This wide range of sites of learning, student populations and forms of delivery makes the task of characterising and making generalisations about aspects of practice - such as the role of theory in practice - problematic in some respects. For example, even in countries where there is a national policy regarding ELT, this would not necessarily be widely reflected in practice as ELT sector provision is often fragmented across a range of public and private, regulated and semi-regulated teaching institutions (Graddol 2006). UK ESOL FE is unusual in this regard - as discussed in 2.1 - as policy documents do exist for that ELT context. However, as noted in 2.1, these policy documents largely reflect general trends in (global) ELT and conceptions of ELT best-practice (such as learner-centred approaches), which underlines the importance of developments in (global) ELT to FE ESOL. ELT-wide views about good practice exert considerable influence on the everyday practice and on the professional discourse of ESOL practitioners, including their choices of methodologies (Cooke & Simpson 2008)

The history of ELT is well-documented in many respects, and includes accounts of practice, debates and research both from the field of Applied Linguistics (AL) – discussed in 2.2.3 - and the ELT profession (Howatt 1984; Howatt & Smith 2014). Much of this documentation and literature has come from the ELT ‘centre’; that is, from native English-speaking countries. This ‘Western’ centre has been termed ‘BANA’, British and North American (Holliday 1994), although Australia or New Zealand would apply here too. Non-English speaking countries such as Germany, Finland, Japan, Turkey and China are also influential. The BANA centre is defined not only in geographical terms, but also by the particular educational perspectives, values and traditions it represents, and by its privileged status in terms of its wealth of funding,

amount of research activity and number of publications. Although this model has been revised in some aspects (for example, by Kachru *et al.* 2006), it is relevant in terms of the historic influence ‘centre’ countries have had on favoured methodologies, or methods, in ELT. That is, the centre has enjoyed greater prestige and influence in championing certain ELT methods and ideas about language teaching than ‘periphery’ countries with the result that new ‘brand name’ types of methods (McDonough 2002) from the BANA centre have often exerted considerable influence (Ricento 2000). One example of this is the adoption in some Asian countries, such as South Korea, of CLT (Brumfit & Johnson 1979, Littlewood 1981).

As noted in 2.1.3.4.1, there are various ‘versions’ of CLT (Littlewood 2014), and in some respects this represents an often ‘unexamined’ element of ELT-ESOL practice. For example, while all teachers in the research interviews are expected to follow a broadly ‘communicative’ approach, there is some variation in their accounts regarding this; for example, with reports of the incorporation of some ‘non-communicative’ approaches.

The global nature of ELT is illustrated in its published materials and the phenomenon of the global ELT coursebook (Pegrum 2004). The ‘coursebook’ is included as a ‘type or source of knowledge’ for ESOL teachers in the CF (*Figure 3*) and - as was noted in 2.1.3.4 - it is also a central component of the ESOL syllabus. The relationship between the adoption of new ELT methods and published materials appears close (Gray 2002). In this regard, instances of best practice can be found in the approaches evident in published materials and their accompanying teacher instructions, which provide a source of information regarding methodology especially for early-career teachers.

The context of FE ESOL in Scotland represents only one part of an international network of ELT practice, where developments such as the appearance of innovations in methodology are internationally relevant. This interconnectedness has always existed to some extent given the international nature of ELT, but has increased with the revolution in communications, the Internet, global travel and in parts, migration (Graddol 1997, 2006). A further aspect of this international character is the intercultural nature of ELT. Many ELT classrooms are multicultural and multilingual, with students and teachers of different nationalities, and as such can be regarded as sites of cultural and linguistic exchange (Singh & Docherty 2004). ELT can also have trans-national element. In the UK ESOL sector, the student population includes those who have moved from their home countries as economic or educational

migrants, with short or long-term plans for a life in the ‘host’ country (Scottish Executive 2007). Many ESOL teachers - including myself and most of those interviewed in this research project – have taught ELT abroad for several years, where experiences of learning a language and living abroad are significant in terms of developing empathy with ESOL students who are living through sometimes comparable circumstances. Teachers’ language learning experiences in a ‘target language’ context – that is, learning a language in a country where the language to be learnt is normally spoken - can also be a period of ‘apprenticeship of learning’ (Lortie 1975/2002), as discussed in the CF (3.3.8.1). Many ESOL teachers have experience of working abroad and with particular nationality groups. Again, these factors can influence and inform ESOL teachers’ thinking about their own pedagogy, for example in recognising and taking into account the possible importance of the educational background of their learners.

Partly arising from its international character, the political, and politically sensitive at times, dimension of ELT has formed part of the discourse of ELT-AL, with debates around ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Phillipson 1992), post-colonial discourses (Canagarajah 1999), and ‘Critical Applied Linguistics’ (Pennycook 2001). This dimension of ELT directly affects the theory-practice issue; for example, in terms of the content of the methods themselves and how such factors as ideology, values and identity influence teacher decision-making. The political and international character of ELT influences position-taking on a range of ELT issues, for example the debate around the need for an ‘official’ international version of English, an ‘English as a Lingua Franca’ (Graddol 2006, Jenkins 2007), which involves the politics of which version of English should be taught (Bex & Watts 1999, Clyne & Sharifian 2008, Phillipson 2008). These issues are evident in FE ESOL, where teachers must make decisions about which varieties or registers of English might be most useful in forming an appropriate pedagogy - or approach to teaching language to their particular groups of students.

Much innovation in ELT pedagogy has historically come from the native-speaker centre, or at least been disseminated through journals and publications from the centre (Pennycook 2001). The centre has been highly influential in developing understandings regarding theory and practice. It has been partly responsible for the faddishness in the adoption, rejection and general obsession with (new) methods (discussed below in 2.4.4). This ‘top-down’ dissemination of ELT methods is not only important for its international character, but also for the way it operates for individual EL teachers (Prabhu 1990). For many teachers, their

experience of methods (possibly following a pattern of a method's appearance, rise in popularity, subsequent decline, recycling in a new form (as discussed below in 2.2.4.5) has been one of the main ways in which they experience the task of resolving issues of theory and practice in ELT.

A final point regarding the international context of ELT is that it is increasingly complex, largely due to the changes associated with the period of globalisation, with such key developments at end of the twentieth century as large-scale immigration of Spanish-speakers to the US and the need for a lingua-franca in Europe (Howatt 1997). The dichotomies suggested by 'BANA-centre' versus 'periphery', 'native speaker' versus 'non-native speaker' are in some respects misleading as, given the changes associated with globalisation, such as migration, English increasingly operates in bilingual and multilingual contexts in both native English-speaking and non-native English-speaking countries (Kirkpatrick 2008). Multilingualism and empowerment discourses have gained ground in recent times, emphasizing contextual factors and the need to develop locally-relevant pedagogies (Pennycook 2008), which have arguably always existed albeit in an often covert form (Canagarajah 1993). One challenge of the issue of theory and practice in ELT is the need to develop culturally and contextually 'appropriate' pedagogy in response to these changes (Bax 2003).

### **2.2.3 Applied Linguistics**

Bound up with the more recent history of ELT is that of Applied Linguistics (AL), which developed out of the field of Linguistics, partly due to an interest in the US in foreign language learning during and after World War II (Howatt 1984). AL is an interdisciplinary field with an interest in a wide range of language-related issues. It is generally seen to have 'a practical involvement in society', in contrast with linguistics 'proper' (McDonough 2002: 11). Since the 1970s, it has mostly focused on the teaching and learning of languages, while also giving some attention to speech therapy, translation and language planning (Davies 2005). Its particular interest in language teaching has meant that AL, for some, became almost synonymous with ELT (Widdowson 1984). However, it would be more accurate to regard AL as the academic discipline and ELT-ESOL as the teaching profession, with the work of AL mostly taking place in university departments and the activity of ELT in schools and colleges. Historically, AL has generally been regarded as 'an autonomous, problem-solving discipline' (McDonough 2002: 11), for example in relation to issues in ELT. The term 'applied



linguistics' itself reflects this 'linguistics-informing-practice' position, which contributed to the establishment of an institutionalised research-practice divide early in the history of AL. Exhortations to improve the AL-ELT relationship have been made periodically, with appeals for a greater relevance of AL work to the teaching profession, better communication between AL and ELT, and so on. There is disagreement as to the current state of the relationship, with some suggesting that there is a 'growing rift between theorists and researchers on the one hand, and teachers and other professionals on the other' (McDonough 2002: 23). One criticism of AL which is relevant to the discussion of methods and choices about methodology is that it has too often highlighted advances in research in linguistics without sufficient consideration of the implications for practice (McDonough 2002). A further notable aspect of AL is that it has a number of 'feeder' disciplines, such as psychology, political science, sociology, anthropology and general education, which makes for a situation where AL conducts its theory-building using other fields, while having a concurrent role in establishing its own theoretical base and in feeding those of others such as ELT (Corson 1997). Applied Linguistics:

occupies a middle ground, a mediating position, between basic disciplines with their associated canons of theory-building and research methodology, and the world of professional practice

McDonough 2002: 17.

This introduces a further element in the problematic relationship between AL and ELT. That is, one criticism of AL's use of a range of feeder disciplines is that it has drawn too heavily on some disciplines, for example on linguistics and psychology, and has not drawn sufficiently on others, such as educational theory, in order to address ELT issues (McDonough 2002). This is relevant to the issue of theory and practice as it seems that while the question of theory and practice has been addressed to a great extent in general education, it has not been so fully addressed in AL-ELT. This is possibly also due to the distraction of debates around ELT methods, as discussed in the following section.

#### **2.2.4. The recent (post-1945) history of ELT methods and 'post-method'**

In order to understand the current role of theory in practice in ELT it is informative to examine the legacy of a historic, profession-wide preoccupation with 'methods' and the search for the 'best method' through which to learn second language learning.

#### **2.2.4.1 What are ELT methods?**

The various methods present in the recent history of ELT can be regarded as representing many of the theories about second language learning used by teachers in their practice to the extent that the role of ELT methods might cautiously be equated to the role of theory in practice for the current discussion. While every aspect of the teaching and learning process is not covered by every method, much relating to the discourse and understandings of teachers in ELT refers in some way to the legacy of the role of ELT methods. As a result, in this section, certain other areas relating to the role of theories in practice which have not played such a historic role in ELT receive less coverage.

Although there are several uses of the term ‘method’ in ELT (Bell 2003), it most commonly refers to a set of prescribed pedagogic procedures, or ‘correct principles’ for teaching and learning a second language, often based on some overarching notion, understanding or theory of (usually second) language learning (Richards & Rodgers 1986). Richards and Rogers (1982) provided an influential definition of an ELT method, explaining it in terms of three levels: ‘approach’, ‘design’, and ‘procedure’. ‘Approach’ is understood as a ‘theory of language and of language learning’, ‘design’ is the ‘linguistic content, a specification for the selection and organization of content, and a description of the role of teacher, learner, and teaching materials’, and ‘procedure’ relates to ‘techniques and practices’ of a method (Richards & Rogers 1982: 153).

Within this general framework of method there exist various versions. In more developed versions, a method will include a comprehensive set of procedures for teachers along with a unified theory of second language learning, the latter providing the rationale or theoretical base for the proposed classroom practices (Kumaravadivelu 1994). Less sophisticated or less developed versions will not be so complete, and might even be vague regarding either the method’s theory of language learning or its recommendations for practice (Richards & Rogers 2001). The degree of weighting towards either the proposal of a unified theory of language learning or guidelines for practice might reflect the origin of the method. For example, the emphasis might reflect whether the method was developed in a university faculty or by a language learning ‘guru’, or whether or not it was largely based on research in the field of linguistics or psychology (Prabhu 1990). While methods might explicitly draw to a greater or lesser degree on scientific research (Bell 2003), all methods, at least to some degree, reflect

certain theories or beliefs about how language is acquired (Richards 1985). These theories or beliefs might be based on intuition, common-sense, personal experience or research, or be a combination of these factors. The names of methods, for example the ‘Grammar-Translation Method’, the ‘Natural Approach’ or the ‘Total Physical Response’ method (Richards & Rodgers 1986, Freeman & Freeman 1998) illustrate how methods can embody certain fundamental beliefs, intuitions or theories about how languages are learned.

The phenomenon of methods is relevant to the issue of theory and practice because theories about second language learning and teaching - particularly as they relate to classroom practices in ELT - have often appeared to teachers in the form of methods. Indeed, rather than a discourse of theory and practice, the discourse of the recent past in ELT has been one of ‘method’ and ‘postmethod’ (Canagarajah 2016).

#### **2.2.4.2. ELT Methods – 1945-1990**

The ‘Timeline of Language Teaching Methods’ (*Teaching English for Everyone*) below (Figure 4) is based on a survey of ELT methods by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), and includes many of the methods mentioned in this chapter and elsewhere in the dissertation. A more detailed ‘chronology’ is found in Howatt and Widdowson (2004) ‘A chronology of English language teaching’ (Howatt and Widdowson 2004: 373-379), which reaches similar conclusions to those illustrated in the timeline below regarding the approximate time periods of each method’s ‘popularity’. It is clearly difficult to find precise and consistent means to date the levels of popularity and influence of a method. For example, Howatt and Widdowson (2004) adopt the approach of using the date of publication of key texts to identify the start the period of influence of some methods; such as ‘The Lexical Syllabus’ (Willis 1990) or ‘The Silent Way’ (Gatenga 1963, 1976). While the timeline provides a useful overview, it appears improbable that there were ‘chronologically distinct’ or ‘internally cohesive’, “settled” methods (Hunter & Smith 2012: 438), and the process ‘ignores both the continuity with earlier developments and diversity of contemporary opinion’ (Hunter & Smith 2012: 430). While Hunter and Smith (2012) - regarding the evaluation of the role of methods in ELT - caution against a ‘procession-of-methods view of the past’ (Hunter & Smith 2012: 438), the *Figure 1* ‘Timeline of Language Teaching Methods’ (*Teaching English for Everyone*) is useful both in providing an overview of the history of methods and as an example of a common characterisation of the discourse around ELT methods, where the ‘general tendency’ has been

‘to “package up” the past by assigning methods labels to bounded periods of history’ (Hunter & Smith 2012: 430).

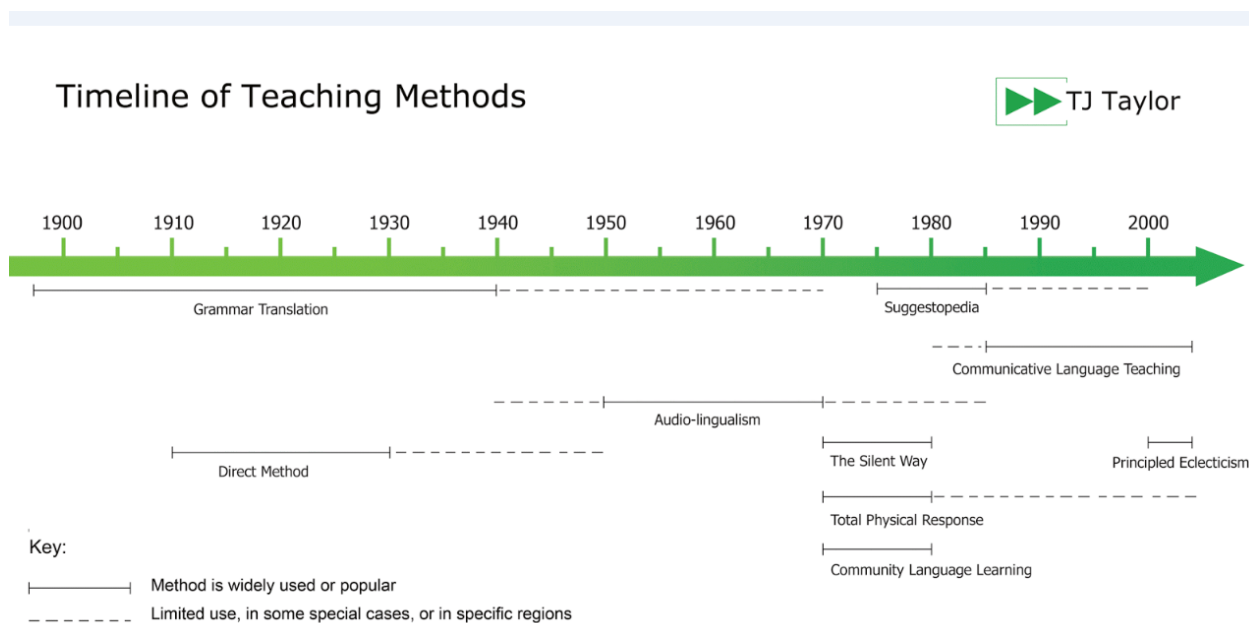


Figure 1: ‘Timeline of Language Teaching Methods’, *Teaching English for Everyone* website

According to Howatt (1983), historically speaking, it was not until ‘the late sixteenth century in Elizabethan London that any really serious attempt was made to teach English as a foreign language’ (Howatt 1983: 262). The genealogy focuses on issues in the twentieth century, during which Howatt and Widdowson (2004) identify four discernable phases in the development of English language teaching: a ‘foundational phase’ (1900-46); a ‘consolidation phase’ (1946-70); and the third and fourth phases of research and development (1970s onwards), during which the rapid rise of ‘global English’ and the establishment of CLT as an ‘industry norm’ were key developments (Howatt & Widdowson 2004). These latter two phases coincided with the period from 1945 to 1990 - generally agreed to represent the greatest influence of methods in ELT (Howatt & Smith 2014). These latter phases were mainly characterised – in terms of methods – by the rise and fall of audiolingualism in the third phase, and in the fourth by a proliferation of new methods (Howatt & Widdowson 2004), as discussed below.

Audiolingualism arose from an episode at the beginning of this later period, and was influential in establishing a pattern which would continue in subsequent years with regard to the relationship of new ideas, theories and teachers’ practice, and to the processes through which

practice was developed (Pennycook 1989). During World War II, the US army sought to develop ways to train its personnel to be proficient in foreign languages, given the global nature of the conflict. They developed what came to be called the ‘structural approach’ (Howatt 1984), or ‘Army method’, which later developed into the ‘Audio-lingual method’ (Richards & Rogers 2001). The ‘scientific basis’ of Audio-lingualism was behaviourist psychology, which, when applied to the question of language learning, was developed into a series of intensive training sessions in correct language behaviours through repetitive drills, led by instructors (Richards & Rogers 2001). At the time the Audio-lingual method was ‘believed to be the first language teaching theory based on solid scientific foundations’ (Marton 1988 xiii). Despite its initial popularity, by 1960s the Audio-lingual method began to fall out of favour with the ELT profession for several reasons, one of which was the trend in ELT in the 1960s and 1970s of a focus on ‘practical communication’, leading to an increased emphasis on ‘situational teaching and on communication, often at the expense of grammar and other linguistic studies’ (Howatt 1997: 264).

Significant too in the decline of Audio-lingualism was the appearance and increase in popularity of other ELT methods. The period approximately from 1970 to 1990 saw a proliferation of new methods, as illustrated in the timeline ‘Timeline of Language Teaching Methods’ (*Teaching English for Everyone* website) above (Figure 4). These new methods included the Silent Way (Gatenga 1963, 1976), Total Physical Response (Asher 1977), Communicative Language Teaching (Munby 1978, Littlewood 1980, Johnson 1982), Counseling Learning (Curran 1972, 1976), and Suggestopedia (Lozanov 1979). While certain elements may still be used, the complete methods as envisaged by their authors/originators are generally not now widely used in ELT. However, CLT – discussed further below and elsewhere (for example, 2.1.3.4.1) – became an established method during this latter phase and continues to be influential (Littlewood 2014). The manner in which these newer methods appeared - and largely replaced Audio-lingualism - set a pattern which would continue through several more cycles, where as one method became discredited, or fell out of fashion, another appeared, with some living on under new guises (Prahbu 1990). This pattern came to constitute the ‘grand narrative’ of ELT-AL of the twentieth century with a progression or evolution in the development of evermore (potentially) successful, scientific, or efficient language teaching methods (Canagarajah 2016). This search for an efficient method was ‘in tune with the ideologies of modernity. That is, the method would provide an objective way to handle the challenges in teaching in all contexts’ (Canagarajah 2016: 20).

#### **2.2.4.3 The ‘decline of methods’ and ‘post-method’**

The timeline illustrates a process by which at the end of the twentieth century the proliferation and range of methods seen during the period 1970 to 1990 had ended, leaving CLT and ‘Principled Eclecticism’ as the remaining most influential methods. CLT was discussed in 2.1.3.4.1. ‘Principled Eclecticism’ (Larsen-Freeman 2000) refers to a ‘desirable, coherent, pluralist’ approach to language teaching, which uses a ‘variety of language learning activities, each of which may have very different characteristics and may be motivated by different underlying assumptions’ (Mellow 2002).

As well as this decline in the rate of the appearance and range of new methods, it appeared that the general popularity and influence of/ belief in methods too was lessening to such a degree that, as some argue, the era of methods ended - or at least the focus on methods declined and the terms of debate altered – and the advent of a ‘post-method’ era was declared (Kumaravadivelu 1994, Canagarajah 2016). There has, however, been disagreement over whether methods have in fact disappeared, or whether they do maintain their relevance, especially with a role for teachers in understanding their practice (Bell 2003, Akbari 2008, Howatt & Smith 2014). In this respect, it seems possible that methods do still exert considerable influence on teacher thinking (Bell 2007). One factor countering the assertion that the era of methods is over is the continued appearance of new methods (not included on the Timeline above) such as the ‘Lexical Approach’ (Willis 1990), ‘Content and Language Integrated Learning’ (CLIL) - also termed the ‘Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach’, or CALLA (Freeman & Freeman 1998) and whose origins are diverse, as noted by Georgiou (2012). A further recent ‘new’ method is Task-Based Learning and Teaching (TBLT), again whose origins can be traced to CLT, but whose ideas have been brought together by some, for example by Ellis (2003).

The apparent decline in popularity and influence of methods towards the end of this ‘era of methods’ might be explained by a certain fatigue and growing mistrust of new methods (mentioned above), along with doubts as to the value of formal language learning theories as embodied in methods, especially those coming ‘externally’ from science, research or gurus (Prabhu 1990). There was, in particular, some erosion in the belief that scientific methods were capable of producing a definitive method or a unified theoretical framework for ELT. The decline in methods coincided with a post-modernist shift away from a search for unified theories (Bell 2003). In fact, the above-mentioned ‘Eclectic Approach’ can be viewed as one

of the responses to a lack of method in the ‘post-method era’, and one which partially filled the gap of methods. As its name suggests, this approach offered none of the coherence offered by methods (Grundy 1999), leaving teachers to a more ‘pick and mix’ individual approach, albeit, hopefully, a ‘principled’ one. Again, it is possible that teachers had always adopted a form of eclectic approach and had been selective in their use of methods, possibly incorporating aspects of various methods and adapting methods to their teaching contexts; for example, in situations where the latest method might seem culturally inappropriate or where the claims of method did not seem wholly plausible to a teacher (Prabhu 1990). It is difficult, again, to assess how widespread local and individual understandings or interpretations of methods were.

#### **2.2.4.4 The decline of methods and a focus on the teacher**

Coinciding with, and perhaps contributing to, this relative decline in the influence of methods was something of a turn away from methods and a move towards a focus on the teacher and the classroom. Theory-building and thinking about successful teaching-learning processes in ELT focused increasingly on the teacher and the learner, rather than the pre-set teaching guidelines offered in ELT methods. Although teaching theory from the academy and ELT methods continued to inform practice in many respects, there was a perceptible shift away from scientific methods delivered from the academy to a focus on the teacher and teacher thinking. An increased value was given to the thoughts, perceptions and beliefs of the teacher and an increased importance given to the teacher as factor in the teaching and learning process (Kennedy & Kennedy 1996).

During the later stages of the era of methods, developments regarding theories of learning which were influential in education generally also influenced ELT. Kolb’s (1984) ‘experiential learning’ and Schön’s (1983) notion of ‘reflection-on-practice’ (discussed further below in 3.2.4.1.3) - in differing ways - contributed to an increased emphasis on the role of the participants in the teaching-learning process, and on their experience of the process. The interest in methods was to some extent replaced by an interest in learning styles, learner-centredness, and - especially arising from Schön’s writing - notions of practitioner knowledge and practitioner learning became more influential (Carr & Kemmis 1986). Particularly relevant to the subject of language learning, was an increased understanding of the shared role of teachers and learners in co-constructing meaning (Vygotsky 1978). With a shift towards the classroom as the site of learning and theory-building, traditional views of ‘theory’ can be seen

as changing somewhat as events in the classroom and its players acquired a greater importance in decision-making about appropriate teaching procedures. For some, it appeared that solutions to teaching problems could be found by those most directly involved: teachers. This view was evident in the Action Research ‘movement’ (Carr & Kemmis 1986, Wallace 1998) and in views about the reflective practitioner (Moon 1999b). Both ‘movements’ (discussed in more detail in 3.2.4) shared a broad view that practitioner learning - and for some this includes practitioner ‘theory-building’ - could and should arise directly from experience. Such ideas greatly influenced teacher training and ideas about teacher development in ELT, as well as how classroom practices might be understood and developed more generally.

Although scientific methods from traditional sources of research, such as published university-based research, still informed practice at the end of the twentieth century, there was a noticeable shift towards events in the classroom and its players - the teacher and learners – as being of greater interest. McDonough (2002) draws on Ellis (1994) to suggest that ‘Action Research’ was a positive development for ELT, especially in the way it redressed the imbalance caused by years of ‘top-down’ methods by turning the focus towards the teacher. There was an increase in the number of teachers doing research on topics arising directly from their classroom experiences. This was generally undertaken as an alternative, or complement, to traditional in-service teacher education, but was also seen as a form of in-service professional development and empowerment (Wallace 1998). However, there could appear a tension in action research, with an ‘opposition of goals’ at times, with researchers looking for general statements or theories, and teachers looking for solutions to classroom issues (McDonough 2002). Reflective practice was similarly incorporated into the ELT mainstream, as a component of initial and in-service teacher education and also ELT teaching qualifications.

The move towards reflective practice and ‘action’, or ‘classroom’ research in ELT offered a more significant role for teachers in examining and developing their practice than was common in the era of methods. AL ‘perhaps belatedly, expanded to borrow sociological and educational method’ to understand ELT processes (McDonough 2002: 26). The introduction of action research and reflective practice in ELT might be regarded as representing a move towards finding a ‘solution’ to the theory-practice or research-practice, research knowledge-teacher knowledge dilemma, which had previously been largely dealt with in ELT in the problematic form of the methods (a point further discussed in 3.2.4).



#### **2.2.4.5 The nature of teachers' relationship with ELT methods**

Regardless of their origins or inspirations, it was (and is) in the form of their recommendations for classroom practice that methods exerted the greatest impact on the EL teaching profession. It was in this form that teachers and schools most often experienced a particular method, whether as teaching guidelines, teaching methodology manuals, or in published teaching materials (Canagarajah 2016). Teachers would most likely not be made aware of the more research-based or theoretical aspects of the methods, although such aspects of methods might be studied at undergraduate degree or Masters' level Applied Linguistics courses. The general theoretical underpinnings of certain methods, while not generally made explicit at the time of their introduction to the profession, might well, however, be incorporated into general practice over time (Bell 2003).

The nature of many teachers' relationship with methods was predominantly a 'top-down' one, where the teacher was initiated into methods through various means and then required to enact the method in their practice (Richards 1984). This might involve several turns during a career, either as fashions in methods changed or as teaching was conducted in institutions with differing preferred methods. The top-down nature of the relationship between methods and teachers is indicative of the general character of the research-practice relationship in ELT during the era of methods (Prabhu 1990). This consisted of AL-ELT operating in a broadly positivist framework - not unusual in education generally during much of the last century - with theory coming out of the academy to be passed on to teachers (Pennycook 1989). The manner in which methods operated in ELT is perhaps a particularly clear illustration of this type of process and relationship, although some methods came from non-traditional, non-academic centres of theory-building, such as the language-teaching 'guru' Michael Thomas, or from an institution's method, such as that of the Berlitz schools. In some respects, this broadly positivist framework can be characterized simply as a divide between AL and the ELT profession (Pennycook 1989). However, AL was only one factor influencing the choice of which methods teachers adopted. Factors such as the extent to which publishers or institutions adopted certain methods, and the degree to which a method might be 'exportable' around global ELT were also significant. The manner in which AL was often 'disconnected' from ELT contributed to a situation where, for example, global publishers (Block 2002) or the British Council were arguably more influential in rubber-stamping or popularizing new methods amongst teachers than AL.

One consequence of the peculiar relationship teachers had with methods was that teachers might be disempowered in terms of the range of opportunities they enjoyed to make choices regarding their use of ELT methods (Pennycook 1989). That is, arguably, the influence of methods limited the extent of teachers' involvement in examining and determining the workings of theories in their teaching contexts. Particularly in its strongest form, for example in a Berlitz School, the focus on adhering to the favoured method took an element of agency or freedom away from teachers with regard to their opportunities for critical engagement with the theory and practice. That is, teachers' 'authority' might be reduced by the authority of the method (Pennycook 1989).

As mentioned above (2.2.4.1), different methods might provide varying degrees of detail regarding recommended practices, either offering a broad outline which might subsequently be interpreted in various ways at the level of practice, or describing a complete set of procedures in detail (Richards & Rogers 1982, Bell 2003). Methods with more detailed descriptions - or 'prescriptions for practice' (Bell 2003: 326) - would provide recommendations for every aspect of the teaching-learning process, including forms of modelling language and language practice, what language should be taught and in what order, the forms interaction between students and teacher, the behaviours of students and teachers, the use of a student's mother tongue, teaching materials, and so on. In such cases, little room for flexibility, originality, creativity or agency on the part of the teacher would remain; rather, choices about how to proceed would largely be taken at the stage of the design of the method (Richards 1984). The term 'approach' in ELT is sometimes used interchangeably with 'method' (although there is disagreement on this point). Although method is more commonly used, the term 'approach' is informative as it highlights one aspect of the more prescriptive versions of a method; that is, its role as a 'guiding', all-encompassing description of how to approach the activity of EL teaching. Teachers were, in many respects, akin to research subjects, as they tried and tested methods which might well subsequently be discredited, rejected and replaced by a new method (Pennycook 1989). In what Richards (1984) termed 'the secret life of methods' the widespread, cumulative effect of ELT methods 'conspires to reduce teachers' freedom of action in choosing method, perhaps also teachers' beliefs about what constitutes good language teaching' (Richards 1984: 111). This lack of agency and authority on the part of teachers in examining and making decisions regarding the role of theory in practice is an important element of the legacy of AL-ELT's historic preoccupation with methods. With

regard to the role of theory in practice, it would suggest that AL, EL teachers and the ELT profession have some re-balancing or readjustments to make regarding the manner in which the theory-practice issue is addressed.

The apparently passive role of teachers in their adoption of methods and the lack of opportunity for decision-making about pedagogy is misleading in some respects. Particularly as the popularity of methods declined - partly due to a lack of any perceived advantage of one method over another - there was a growing recognition that many teachers had most likely been fairly pragmatic in their levels of commitment to the adoption of methods (Bell 2003). Despite the ubiquity of methods in ELT, opportunities remained for teachers to adapt, re-interpret, creatively combine or (perhaps passively) reject or ignore methods. The option of following their own path and of developing their own approach to practice existed. As Akbari (2008) notes, the ELT profession was 'slow to formally acknowledge' teachers' mixing and matching of methods, for example based on contextual demands. In the course of their practice, teachers learned about a number of aspects of second language teaching which were not directly related to the influence of methods. As a result of their own language learning experiences, during pre-service and in-service teacher education and through their own experiential learning during their careers, teachers developed a wide range of skills, techniques, knowledge and beliefs, some of which might add to or contradict the content of the ELT methods they were believed to be using (Akbari 2008). These factors are discussed in 3.3.

Factors which are highly influential in determining teacher behaviours and decision-making might not be greatly altered by the question of which methods were popular at any one time. One such factor is the considerable contextual or situation-specific knowledge and experience teachers acquire and develop; for example, local, cross-cultural knowledge, or linguistic knowledge (for example, bi-lingualism) (Bax 2003). Further factors, such as the development of craft knowledge, institutional knowledge, or specialized knowledge (for example, young learners), might contradict the recommendations of prevailing methods. Strongly-held personal beliefs about teaching and learning (discussed in 3.3.8.4) might, furthermore, regulate the degree to which methods are adopted or resisted (Canagarajah 1993).

For much of the second half of the twentieth century, in many ELT contexts, the form that theories about second language learning and teaching most commonly took for teachers was

method. These methods appeared to teachers as pre-packaged sets of teaching procedures with accompanying explanations of why such approaches were desirable. On one hand, this filtering ‘down’ of contemporary ideas and thinking about teaching approaches might be seen to represent a process of training, education and socialisation into the ELT profession, common to other sectors of education. Moreover, the coherent and prescriptive nature of some ELT methods might be viewed as a welcome guide-to-practice for teachers, both novice and experienced. This might be one of the more positive aspects of the phenomena of methods; that is, the contribution of a degree of coherence to teachers’ approach to practice in the complex task of teaching language. A method might act as an organizing heuristic for the teacher. In a similar fashion, a method might provide students with an understanding of the overall approach to teaching and learning of a second language teacher, course or institution. For many EL teachers, the issue of methods and which method to use was unavoidable during the era of methods. The preoccupation with method informed much of the discourse of profession, as the merits of various methods were debated. The prevailing best method would have a significant influence on perceptions of best practice and form a significant part of teachers’ initial teacher education. While the influence of methods on teachers’ pedagogy and beliefs is disputable and difficult to gauge, especially retrospectively, teachers were most likely curious about developments in methods and especially the latest method, given the ubiquity and professional relevance of methods. In many respects, for teachers, the content of the latest method might represent the answer to the question of how theories which are relevant to ELT could relate to their practice. The situation during the era of methods, where the complex range of ideas and research relating to second language teaching and learning was transformed into ‘concrete’ classroom procedures and techniques reflecting those ideas, appeared to save teachers the considerable effort and difficulty involved in answering these questions themselves. Rather, the focus, at least in teacher education, was on assisting teachers in their understanding and effective application of preferred methods. In its strongest form, much of the emphasis in teacher education would be on training in the proficient use and delivery of the new method.

For the teacher, the AL-ELT profession’s focus on method might be regarded as having limited access to a range of views of the role that theory might play in practice. Perhaps due to a combination of the all-or-nothing commitment to or rejection of a method, along with the continued search for a unified theory and approach, opportunities to deal with the issue of

theory and practice, especially from the point of view of the ELT teacher, were missed. The nature of the workings of theories in practice was reduced to the transfer of pre-designed methods into the classroom. Decades of such top-down packaging of teaching approaches, which were often subsequently discredited, possibly contributed to an ambivalence to theory on the part of some ELT teachers, already fostered by the rather dysfunctional AL-ELT relationship (Clarke 1994). Although other research and thinking took place in AL-ELT, for many teaching practitioners in the second half of the twentieth century methods represented the embodiment of the latest, most developed ‘theories’ about second language learning which might be most relevant to their practice. In this regard, teachers’ access to theories, except those on Master’s courses, was generally selective, and not selected by them. Here, again, the influence of methods appears to have taken a degree of agency away from teachers and may have ‘led to deskilling teachers’ (Canagarajah 2016: 20). A further consequence of this historic role of methods is that it restricted, or at least delayed, alternative explorations and discussions regarding the role of theory in practice for ELT and AL.

## CHAPTER THREE LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Chapter 3	42
<b>3.1 Perspectives on the issue of theory and practice from philosophy and the philosophy of education</b>	<b>43</b>
Overview of section 3.1	43
3.1.1 Alasdair MacIntyre	43
3.1.2 MacIntyre's view on the nature of practice	44
3.1.3 Aristotelian categories and concepts	47
3.1.4 The practitioner and agency	51
<b>3.2 Theory and practice in general education and ELT-ESOL</b>	<b>52</b>
Overview of section 3.2	52
3.2.1 A definition and understanding of 'theory' and preliminary comments on its role in practice	52
3.2.2 Views on theory and practice from general education	53
3.2.2.1 The 'problem' with theory in education	53
3.2.2.2 Teachers 'against' theory	55
3.2.2.3 The relationship between theory and practice: teacher 'application' of theories and thought and action	57
3.2.2.4 The relationship between theory and practice: the factor of teacher judgement	58
3.2.2.5 The relationship between theory and practice: two paradigms of teacher knowledge	60
3.2.3 Theory and practice in ELT-ESOL	60
3.2.3.1 What counts as theory in ELT?	60
3.2.3.2 The theory-practice relationship in ELT-ESOL	61
3.2.4 'Solutions' to the theory-practice 'divide'	63
3.2.4.1 A focus on the teacher: praxis, practitioner research and reflective practice	63
3.2.4.1.1 Praxis	63
3.2.4.1.2 Practitioner or 'action' research	63
3.2.4.1.3 The reflective practitioner	65
3.2.4.2 How experts 'use' or 'adapt' theory	67
3.2.4.3 Theory as science – teaching as a science or art?	67
<b>3.3 Teacher Knowledge and the Conceptual Framework</b>	<b>68</b>
Overview	68
3.3.1 Introduction	69
3.3.2 Conceptual frameworks	69
3.3.3 Teacher knowledge	72
3.3.3.1 The scope of teacher knowledge	73
3.3.4 An explanation of the Conceptual Framework of the sources and types of Teacher Knowledge of ESOL teachers	75
3.3.4.1 Two paradigms of teacher knowledge	76
3.3.4.2 Three categories for the types and sources of teacher knowledge	76

3.3.4.3 The lists of types and sources of teacher knowledge	78
3.3.4.4 Factors ‘personal’ to the teacher (which ‘filter’ the role of other factors in the CF)	79
3.3.5 Systematic knowledge	79
3.3.6 Prescriptive knowledge	80
3.3.7 Craft knowledge	82
3.3.7.1 Personal Practical Knowledge	82
3.3.7.2 Tacit knowledge	83
3.3.7.3 Teacher expertise	84
3.3.7.4 Further aspects and elements relating to Craft Knowledge: Experiential learning, Reflective Practice, Classroom/Action Research, Peer observations, the Approach of colleagues, and Knowledge of the teaching context and learners	84
3.3.8 Factors ‘personal’ to the teacher (which ‘filter’ other elements in the CF)	85
3.3.8.1 The ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (including experiences of language learning)	85
3.3.8.2 Socialisation into the profession	86
3.3.8.3 The professional knowledge context	87
3.3.8.4 Teachers’ beliefs	88
3.3.8.5 Beliefs about language learning	89
3.3.8.6 A sense of plausibility	90
3.3.8.7 Teachers’ professional history/identity (teaching ‘personality’/ style/motivations), values and ideology	90

## Overview

Chapter 2 set out key aspects of context which contribute to understanding the role of theory in practice in FE ESOL.

Chapter 3 further presents and discusses key themes and concepts which contribute to answering the research questions. Firstly, in 3.1 there is a discussion of ideas from philosophy and educational philosophy relating to the nature of educational practice and the role of practitioners, with particular regard to the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre. In 3.2 key issues regarding the role of theory in practice in ESOL-ELT are directly addressed. Finally, in 3.3 further key concepts are set out in the form of a conceptual framework of the sources and types of teacher knowledge, which answers the second research question.

### **3.1 Perspectives on the issue of theory and practice from philosophy and the philosophy of education**

#### **Overview of section 3.1**

Ideas and writers from the field of philosophy and the philosophy of education are referred to at different points in the dissertation. In this section, this is done further in order to address the issue of the role of theory in practice. In this section, several ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre which are relevant to the research project are explored: the nature of practice, the social aspect of teaching, the traditions and history of practitioners (3.1.2), the use of Aristotelian categories and concepts (3.1.3), and the factor of agency in decision-making (3.1.4).

#### **3.1.1 Alasdair MacIntyre**

The work of the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (b. 1929) has much to offer in providing an orientation towards the issue of theory and practice in education from a philosophical perspective. Although rarely addressing education directly in his writing, as Dunne and Hogan (2003) note, much of MacIntyre's work 'flows easily into discourse about the aims of education and the kind of undertaking engaged in by teachers' (Dunne & Hogan 2003: 203). Carr (2003) also notes that MacIntyre's work is a 'useful peg upon which to hang discussion' of the 'wider non-institutional human and moral significance of both teaching and education', as well as its 'social and professional role' (Carr 2003: 255). MacIntyre's approach to moral philosophy - particularly as represented in what are viewed as his later works such as *After Virtue* (1981, 1985) and *Whose Justice?, Whose Rationality?* (1988) - is one of 'a study of moral formation that strengthens rational human agency and helps to develop a political community of rational agents' (Lutz 2014: Section 3). Lutz (2014) further characterises MacIntyre's approach as a 'search for a truthful ethics and politics of agents in communities', which 'draws on action theory, sociology, the philosophy of science and the theme of "revolutionary practice" drawn from Karl Marx's Theses on Feuerbach' (Lutz 2014: Section 3).

In *After Virtue* MacIntyre sets out to follow Aristotle and 'investigate practical reason and the role of moral formation in preparing the human agent to succeed as an independent practical reasoner' (Lutz 2014: Section 4ai). MacIntyre's use of Aristotelian concepts and their relevance to the issue of theory and practice is discussed below (3.1.3). MacIntyre's focus on the human agent's exercising of practical reason and making of ethical choices is relevant to



education and teaching in several ways. Many teachers hopefully feel that they are able to act with some degree of agency in their work, and furthermore that their choices and actions are rational and informed in a positive manner by their commitment to conduct their work in an ethical manner. Crookes (2009) notes that while there is no code of ethics in TESOL – unlike some professions - ethics is informative as a ‘way of understanding purposes, roles, and institutions’, and the role of language and an educator’s responsibility as a moral agent (Crookes 2009: 142). Given the moral and ethical character of professional practice and given the dilemmas and complexities educators often face, it would seem that practical reasoning has an important role.

MacIntyre’s approach in *After Virtue* is one of a ‘critique of modernity’, particularly as this is embodied in the approach of ‘analytical philosophy’, which was highly influential in education in the 1960s, but met with growing criticism from the 1980s (Carr 2005a). This critique of analytical philosophy argued that its approach lacked attention to historical, social and cultural contexts, that it was over-technical and conservative, and - especially for MacIntyre - that its approach separated reason and morality (Carr 2005a). In order to challenge this, MacIntyre drew particularly on the (pre-modern) Aristotelian philosophical tradition, aspects of which are discussed below (3.1.3). MacIntyre’s work addresses several of the themes related to the research project, including the nature of practice, the social aspect of teaching at the centre of practitioner work, the sense of community, tradition and history of practitioners (as illustrated in the 2.2 genealogy), on what basis teachers should make choices and decisions, and the factor of agency.

### **3.1.2 MacIntyre’s view on the nature of practice**

In *After virtue: a study in moral theory* (1981, 1985) MacIntyre offers his ‘philosophical elaboration’ of the concept of practice (Fitzmaurice 2010), summarised in the following (much quoted) definition of practice:

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended

MacIntyre 1985: 187.

The notion of ‘goods internal to a practice’ (MacIntyre 1985: 188) refers to those ‘goods’ – by which MacIntyre appears to mean skills, abilities, or forms of competency related to a practice, or the ‘standards of excellence’ required for the practice - which can only be achieved by ‘engaging in some kind of practice’ (MacIntyre 1985: 188), that is, through the ‘experience of participating in the practice in question’ (MacIntyre 1985: 189). ‘External goods’ refers to the more extrinsic types of gains from engaging practice, such as social prestige or financial rewards (his examples include the rewards of candy for a child who wins a game of chess, or fame for an artist). Varying interpretations regarding these notions and regarding the nuances in distinctions between the notions of internal and external goods– as with MacIntyre’s view of practice – exist (Hager 2011). One notable point with regard to those internal goods specific to a particular practice is that such goods will likely be tacit as they include ‘know-how, feels, and knacks that underpin good practice’ (Hager 2011: 555), and such goods represent ‘capacities that are hard to put precisely into words’ (Hager 2011: 555-6), yet are shared by and fairly readily identifiable by successful practitioners (Hager 2011). These ideas are discussed further in 3.3 in discussions of ‘tacit’ (3.3.7.2) and ‘craft’ knowledge (3.3.7).

MacIntyre proposes a conception of practice in which *a priori* assumptions, relevant training, theory, ‘technical’ or ‘practical’ skills are ‘transformed and enriched’ (MacIntyre 1985: 193) by the challenges and the commitment inherent in a particular form of practice. Furthermore, in MacIntyre’s terms, these ‘internal goods’ are realised, acquired and developed - in discussing the internal goods of the artist - ‘in participation in the attempts to sustain progress and to respond creatively to problems’ (MacIntyre 1985: 189-190), that is through the practitioner’s interaction with events and their ongoing engagement and deployment of their own resources to further their practice. With regard to identifying exactly what counts as ‘the good’, Kemmis (2012) cautions that this is ‘always contested’, and that it ‘must always be determined anew for changing times and circumstances’ by the individual or group involved (Kemmis 2012: 895).

The issue of whether teaching counts as a practice following MacIntyre’s account remains contested (Hager 2011). While MacIntyre gives little detail in his discussion of practice in *After Virtue* (AV) of whether he considers education to count as ‘practice’ or not, elsewhere he has suggested that teaching might not in fact count as practice, rather seeing it as involving ‘a set of skills and habits put to the service of a variety of practices’ (MacIntyre & Dunne 2002:

5). Although Clayton (2005: Section 6) speculates that MacIntyre's discussion of practice may principally refer to politics, others (for example, Carr 2003, Noddings 2003) believe his concept of practice is indeed applicable to education and the practice of teaching. Dunne (MacIntyre & Dunne 2002, Dunne 2003) too argues that several of the themes of AV (further discussed below) – such as the role of tradition, virtues, or the dialectic between practice and institution – can relate to teaching (MacIntyre & Dunne 2002). There is the semantic question, too, more generally as to the precise use of the term 'practice', following the recent 'practice turn' (Schatzki 2001, cited in Hager 2011), and given the 'elusiveness of capturing practices in words' (Hager 2011: 556). Nevertheless, an understanding of practice is accepted in this study which aligns with many of the above points, and following those characterisations from MacIntyre.

Further aspects of MacIntyre's analysis of practices include an understanding of their social dimension and the view that practices have histories and traditions. In AV MacIntyre highlights the importance within practices of tradition, as represented in generations' worth of accumulated - possibly uncodified - knowledge. Practices 'have a history' (MacIntyre 1985: 190), and consequently for those involved, 'To enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice' (MacIntyre 1985: 194). Fitzmaurice (2010) interprets MacIntyre's view of practice as one which involves 'standards of excellence' and where to enter into a practice requires one 'to accept these standards and to judge one's own performance against them' (Fitzmaurice 2010: 47). MacIntyre stresses that these standards are specific to practices and are specific in terms of their historical situatedness. In *Whose Justice?, Whose Rationality?* (1988), amongst critiques of several different aspects of liberalism, MacIntyre focuses on the self-proclaimed timelessness and the ahistoricism of 'the project of modern, liberal individualist society' (MacIntyre 1988: 335), where liberalism is 'transformed into a tradition', rather than a situation where the specific traditions and characteristics of a society or community are important. MacIntyre, furthermore, highlights the social nature of practice and the particular, embedded nature of relationships of those involved, where 'every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it' (MacIntyre 1985: 191). His emphasis on the communal and social nature of practices, again, is contrasted with certain liberal individualist views of practice (Lutz 2014).

The above points made by MacIntyre regarding the fundamentally social character of practice, its sense of community, and the importance of history and tradition within practices have been taken up by other writers on education. Carr (2005b) states that one of the lessons of practical philosophy for practitioners is that they are engaged in a practice with a historical tradition ‘which enshrines the goods internal to their practice’ (Carr 2005b: 40), and that these goods represent the ‘largely unarticulated body of practical knowledge and standards of excellence implicit in their practice’, which ‘are conveyed’ through the historical tradition (Carr 2005b: 40). This view is reflected in the decision to include a genealogy of ELT (2.2) in this dissertation, which traces the recent history and traditions of aspects of ELT practice and which offers an interpretation of theory in practice with regard to ELT methods. Importantly, practices are not ‘fixed’ or ‘immutable’, but are continually ‘re-interpreted and reconceived’, through engagement – involving ‘reflectively revising and reconstructing’ (Carr 2005b: 40) practice in the light of current challenges. This again echoes descriptions of craft knowledge (3.3.7) and the development of ‘personal practical knowledge’ (3.3.7.1), which are discussed in 3.3.

### **3.1.3 Aristotelian categories and concepts**

A further aspect of MacIntyre’s philosophy is his use of Aristotelian categories and concepts, including ones which relate to theory and practice. The work of MacIntyre has been drawn on to address issues in education, including, as Carr (2005a) notes, with the use of Aristotelian categories and concepts to produce a philosophical analysis of the nature of practice in education; for example, by Kemmis and Smith (2008a/b) in an analysis of *praxis* (discussed below), and by Dunne (1993), whose ideas are discussed below. These writers have drawn on Aristotle’s writing on practical moral action, often choosing to use the original Greek terms.

Two such terms used by Aristotle are *techne* and *phronesis*. With regard to the research focus, Dunne (1993) discusses the origins of the ‘exploration of the distinctions and relations’ in the area of theory and practice in Aristotle – particularly in *Nicomachean Ethics- Book 6* - where Aristotle sets out an understanding of knowledge and action with a ‘threefold distinction’ between theory (*episteme*), and two forms of practical knowledge - *techne* and *phronesis* (Dunne 1993: 174). Aristotle drew a distinction between technical and practical reason in the concepts of *techné* and *phronesis* respectively. *Techne* - the type of knowledge of an ‘expert maker’ - is associated with making or productive activities, or *poiesis*, which have a pre-

envisaged end or purpose, or *telos* (Dunne 1993). With regards to current theory-practice debates, Dunne draws a ‘parallel’ in the role of *techne* as ‘a systematic body of knowledge in a specified field’ to be drawn on ‘for guidance’ (Dunne 1993: 157), and characterises this role as the ‘quasi-theoretical status’ of *techne* (Dunne 1993: 157). This is represented in one ‘modern conception of theory’ which regards theory as ‘generalized lawlike knowledge’, in contrast to practice, which is viewed as ‘the domain where this theory is exploited or applied’ (Dunne 1993: 157) in a theory-practice ‘dualism’. This understanding of the role of theory in practice is discussed elsewhere with regard to ESOL (for example, in section 3.2.2) in terms of a ‘theory-applied’ model of education where applied linguistics research or ELT methods are developed for teachers to apply. Also in 3.2.4, changes in research interest and teacher education away from this ‘theory-applied’ view of the role of theory in practice are identified. Aristotle’s second form of practical knowledge, *phronesis*, refers to the forms of practical reasoning relating to the question of how to act in a morally appropriate manner. As a form of knowledge - in contrast with *techne* - *phronesis* is notable for its ‘experiential nature, the immediacy of its involvement in concrete situations’ (Dunne 1993: 228). *Phronesis* is very much a ‘concept of practical knowledge’, which is ‘embedded in practice’ (Dunne 1993: 129). Dunne draws on Gadamer’s emphasis on the ‘intimate’ relation to *phronesis* of experience, such that ‘*phronesis is a form of experience*’ (italics in original) (Dunne 1993: 127). Consequently, *phronesis* is a form of knowledge that can only be gained through practice and ‘on the basis of practical experience’ (Carr 2005b: 39). This aligns with the position expressed in Chapter 1 (1.2.1), arguing of the difficulties in separating theory and practice when considering teacher knowledge and forms of knowledge ‘in action’. Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* is relevant to an evaluation of the role of theory in practice in several respects. It is significant in establishing the notion of a knowledge which is unique to practice in some manner, and in the importance it places on experience. These aspects of *phronesis* contribute towards a rejection of the ‘theory-practice dualism’ (Barthold 2012: Section 2b) on a number of levels. Dunne (1993) notes that the ‘undermining of various separations – between being and knowing, matter and form, means and end, particular and universal ... makes of *phronesis* a very fluid reality’ (Dunne 1993: 127). This ‘fluid reality’, however, leaves a number of questions unresolved; one of which is that while *phronesis* is an ‘indispensable prerequisite for good practice’ (Carr 2005b: 39), there are limits on its adequacy to solve all problems in practice. For example, a practitioner will also need the ‘ability to transcend the limits of her practical knowledge and understanding’ (Carr 2005b: 39), for example when faced with

problems not resolvable based on their own knowledge. Brookfield (1995) makes a similar point, arguing the value of the ‘lens of theory’ in evaluating and resolving teaching dilemmas, such as those not previously experienced or resolvable with hitherto acquired craft knowledge (see 3.3.7 for a discussion of craft knowledge).

Dunne (1993) interprets *phronesis* as a form of knowledge which, given its formation and realization ‘in concrete applications’, ‘never resolves itself into formulated knowledge that can be possessed apart from these applications’ (Dunne 1993: 127). There seems to be an individual and personal aspect to *phronesis*, based on personal experience and interpretation of that experience. It involves individual learning through practice, the ‘responsiveness and resourcefulness in these situations that come to it only from the character and dispositions of the person, formed in the course of his life history, and not from any knowledge that can be made available in treatises or manuals’ (Dunne 1993: 228). In this respect, *phronesis* can be associated with several forms of teacher knowledge discussed in 3.3 such as tacit knowledge (3.3.7.2), craft knowledge (3.3.7) and ‘personal practical knowledge’ (3.3.7.1). A further interpretation of *phronesis* suggests a different type of knowledge-formation process, which ‘entails the ability to transform a prior communal knowledge, that is, *sensus communis*, into a know-how relevant for a new situation’ (Barthold 2012: Section 2b), and as a process of developing expertise.

A further important concept arising from Aristotle is *praxis*. While *techne* is associated with *poie/sis*, *phronesis* is the type of knowledge evident in a form of human activity, or practice, which Aristotle terms *praxis* (Carr 2005b).

Dunne (1993) summarizes *praxis* as being:

conduct in a public space with others in which a person, without ulterior purpose and with a view to no object detachable from himself, acts in such a way as to realize excellences that he has come to appreciate in his community as constitutive of a worthwhile way of life

Dunne 1993: 10.

While the *telos* (the aim or purpose) of *poesies* and the ‘usefulness’ of *techne* is the production of some object; the *telos* of *praxis* is to attain ‘practical wisdom and knowledge’ (*phronesis*) (Carr & Kemmis 1986). *Praxis* involves a more ‘personal and experiential’ knowledge - ‘practical knowledge’, or *phronesis*, which is useful and appropriate knowledge for *praxis* - a

kind of knowledge that might be regarded as ‘nontechnical, but not however nonrational’ (Dunne 1993: 10). Aristotle’s *praxis* describes situations which are ‘complex and changing and therefore always calling for a flexible response’ (Dunne 1993: 159). The concept of *praxis* addresses the issue - mentioned in the discussion of *phronesis* - of the individualised nature of that knowledge, since *praxis* is understood as being not only ‘a realization of one’s self’, but also involving other people. Indeed, there is strongly social aspect to *praxis* since it involves less ‘detachment’ than the productive activity of *poie/sis* (Dunne 1993: 10). Drawing on Habermas, Dunne suggests that *praxis* is ‘a type of human engagement that is embedded in a tradition of communally shared understandings and values’, and is ‘a kind of enactment through which they constitute themselves as persons in a historical community’ (Dunne 1993: 176). Habermas’s view of *praxis*, too, emphasizes the ‘mediation of the social and the individual’ (Dunne 1993: 177).

In terms of the relevance of *praxis* to education, Kemmis (2012) and Kemmis and Smith (2008b) identify two views of what *praxis* is. The first, a view in the Aristotle tradition, is where *praxis* is viewed as ‘action that is *morally-committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field*’ (italics in original) (Kemmis & Smith 2008b: 4), and which ‘aims for the good of those involved and for the good for humankind’ (Kemmis 2012: 894). In the second, more aligned to Hegel and Marx, *praxis* is understood as ‘action with moral, social and political consequences - good or bad - for those involved in and affected by it’; the kind of action – ‘collective social *praxis*’ - that makes history (Kemmis 2012: 894). Kemmis (2012) notes that the former, ‘Aristotelian sense’ understanding is more common in ‘much Anglo–American–Australian usage today’ (Kemmis 2012: 894). Kemmis (2012) argues that the practice of education ‘must always be *praxis* in both the neo-Aristotelian and the post-Hegelian, post-Marxist senses’ (Kemmis 2012: 895). For Kemmis, the practice of education is *praxis* in the former understanding inasmuch that it aims to act for the ‘good for persons and the good for humankind’, and it is *praxis* in the latter sense as it ‘aims at the reproduction and transformation of rising generations of children, young people and adults into modes of personal and moral life and modes of social and political life that are oriented towards the good for each and for all’ (Kemmis 2012: 895).

In the context of debates about theory and practice, Aristotle’s practical philosophy has continued to be esteemed as a reminder of the principle that an overemphasis on science or

theoretical knowledge ‘forgets that knowledge stems out of and must return to praxis’ (Barthold 2012: Section 2b). With regard to means and ends, for Aristotle ‘the “end” of a practice is some ethically worthwhile “good” that is internal to, and inseparable from, the practice and only exists in the practice itself’ (Carr 2005b: 39). Practice then does not involve a separation of means and ends, or of theory and technical knowledge, but rather should be viewed as a ‘single dialectical process of practical reasoning’ (Carr 2005b: 39). This tradition of rejecting a theory-practice dichotomy continued in various forms from Marx to further thinkers such as Habermas, associated with the Frankfurt School and Critical theory (Corradetti 2011), and also in Dunne’s (2003) defence of teaching as a practice, where he draws on MacIntyre’s AV.

### **3.1.4 The practitioner and agency**

Thus far there has been a discussion of the concept of practice, practical knowledge (*phronesis*) and morally committed action, *praxis*, with an understanding of *praxis* suggesting a non-dichotomy of theory and practice. Important, too, in a conception of practice is the role of practitioners, their experience, and the factor of practitioner’s agency. For MacIntyre, a practice is not simply a set of technical skills, but is rather an activity which involves the distinctive human actions and qualities which relate to and are part of that practice:

what is distinctive in a practice is the way in which conceptions of the relevant goods and ends which the technical skills serve - and every practice does require the exercise of practical skills - are transformed and enriched by those extensions of human powers

MacIntyre 1985: 193.

A starting point for understanding the role of the practitioner is their particular orientation towards their practice and their own conceptualisation of their fundamental beliefs and understandings on the nature and purpose of their practice. To explore this subject is one aspect of this research project and also a reason to include the research interviews in the research design.

For Dunne (1993) the ‘most important clarification of teaching occurs at the level at which we decide what kind of interaction it is’ (Dunne 1993: 367). Dunne (1993) argues that while Aristotelian concepts such as ‘technique’ and ‘practice’ may ‘seem like high-level abstractions’, in fact the ‘different orientation that each of them establishes ramify into the most minute details of how a teacher will set about a task’ (Dunne 1993: 367). Again, this



understanding is important to the research focus, as outlined in Chapter 1, where the nature and sources of teachers' thinking are assumed to be important in understanding classroom actions. Rather than a 'technicist' focus on 'procedures, competencies and outcomes', the approach and aim of the research project is - in Dunne's terms - to 'enter the core reality of a practice' (Dunne 2005: 158). An understanding of practice not only gives due importance to methods and techniques, but also to the 'human qualities and dispositions' of the practitioner (Fitzmaurice 2010: 46). This is discussed in 3.3 where beliefs, experiences, teacher identity and other factors attempt to account for this.

## **3.2 Theory and practice in general education and ELT-ESOL**

### **Overview of section 3.2**

The previous section (3.1) discussed several ideas from the philosophy of education relating to the role of theory in practice. In this section the issue of theory and practice in general education and ESOL-ELT is discussed and further key concepts and understandings are introduced. This section furthermore includes a preliminary response to answering research question one as it (as in previous sections) clarifies the scope of the issue and signals positions on the issue (further responses to the research questions are in Chapter 6). In this section the following subsections are included: a definition and understanding of 'theory' and preliminary comments on its role in practice (3.2.1), views on theory and practice from general education (3.2.2), theory and practice in ELT-ESOL (3.2.3), and 'solutions' to the theory-practice 'divide' (3.2.4).

### **3.2.1 A definition and understanding of 'theory' and preliminary comments on its role in practice**

A dictionary definition of the term, theory is:

...an explanation or system of anything; an exposition of the abstract principles of a science or art; an idea or explanation that has not yet been proved, a conjecture; speculation as opposed to practice; an ideal, hypothetical or abstract situation

Chambers 2008.

This list of understandings of the term ‘theory’ - in lay terms - provides an initial indication of some of the aspects of how theory might be viewed in terms of education; in short, theory as an explanation or account of the teaching and learning process, which though might well be an idealised version of that process, is presumably potentially useful for interested parties. This general positive view towards theory is reflected by a writer on the philosophy of education, who characterises theory as a ‘form of esoteric knowledge’, which might - in professional terms - contribute to form an ‘esoteric cognitive base’ (Entwistle 2008: 255). The question of what might be included in this cognitive base is discussed in 2.1.3.4.2.

The dictionary definition above also includes an understanding of ‘theory’ in contrast with - or at least as it relates to - ‘practice’; ‘theory’ collocates strongly with ‘and practice’. This has been a common approach in attempts to conceptualise theory and to understand the role of theory in education; that is, where theory is defined in terms of practice. This is often done - as Dunne (1993) notes - with theory as ‘generalized lawlike knowledge’ and with practice as the ‘domain where this theory is exploited or applied’ (Dunne 1993: 157). This characterisation of the relationship between theory and practice, furthermore, introduces the practitioner as the conduit, interpreter, or ‘applier’ of theory. This is noted by Kant in his definition:

A set of rules presented in a certain generality and with disregard of particular circumstances is called a theory...a practitioner must exercise his judgement to decide whether a case falls under a general rule

Kant, cited by Rubel 1963: 253.

This factor of the judgement of the practitioner is discussed further below (3.2.2.4). Schön (1983), too, highlights the central role of the practitioner as the skilled interpreter and discerning user of what might be over-general, flawed or incomplete theories. Schön warns of the limitations of theories as universal solutions to practitioners’ dilemmas or as infallible guides:

An overarching theory does not give a rule that can be applied to predict or control a particular event, but it supplies language from which to construct particular descriptions and themes from which to develop particular interpretations

Schön 1983: 273.

The ‘language’ referred to here by Schön might be understood not only as being academic or professionally useful terminology, but also as abstractions, the mental (re-) constructions of ideas and explanations for phenomena which are experienced or observed by practitioners in

their practice. Section 3.3 examines areas of teacher knowledge such as craft knowledge, tacit knowledge and personal practical knowledge, including with regard to the question of to what extent these types and sources of knowledge might combine both theory and practice.

Schön's ideas offer a perspective on the theory-practice dichotomy and the role of theory in practice with particular attention to the viewpoint of the practitioner. In Schön's view, most important are the 'theories-in-use' - or 'operational theories of action' - used by teachers, rather than 'systematic knowledge' (Kennedy 2002) (discussed in 3.3.5); that is, traditional, research-based theory, those 'espoused theories' which are 'used to describe and justify behavior' (Argyris & Schon 1974: viii). Schön's ideas are discussed further in the discussion of 'reflective practice' later in this section (3.2.4.1.3).

Finally, the adjectives 'ideal', 'hypothetical' and 'abstract' in the dictionary definition above indicate the emotive dimension of the term 'theory', as having both positive and negative connotations (Thomas 2007).

### **3.2.2 Views on theory and practice from general education**

The continued relevance of the theory-practice question in education is evidenced by the ongoing debates about the relationship between theory and practice in education (Thomas 2007; Misawa 2011). This section draws on research and debates from 'general' (i.e. not specifically ELT-ESOL) education to identify key concepts and issues in the question of the role of theory in ESOL-ELT. Aspects discussed are: the 'problem' with theory (3.2.2.1) and teachers' scepticism about theory (3.2.2.2), the question of teacher 'application' of theories and thought and action (3.2.2.3), teacher judgement as a factor which mediates the theory-practice relationship (3.2.2.4), and Hargreaves' (1996) 'two paradigms', which examines the dichotomy of theory/practice (3.2.2.5).

#### **3.2.2.1 The 'problem' with theory in education**

Entwistle (2013) suggests three reasons for 'problems' with theory in education and with the 'often mourned but rarely narrowed theory/practice gap' (Eraut 2000: 123) - or perceived gap - between theory and practice. While his arguments are not directly addressed towards the situation in ELT-ESOL, they could equally apply to ELT and the 'methods/post-methods' context (discussed in 2.2). Firstly, educational theory is often inadequate or 'unacceptably utopian' (Entwistle 2013), as is the case with the worst of ELT methods, as discussed in 2.2.

Secondly, argues Entwistle, the ‘individualistic orientation’ of much liberal educational theory, with an accompanying focus on individualised and personalized teaching methodology, is in contradiction with the institutional situation in which most teachers operate - that is, involving groups and classes - and with the negotiated nature of the process of teaching and learning. Thirdly, much writing on theory in education assumes the autonomy of teachers within their institution, whereas in fact they may be dealing with various competing interests, including exam boards, parents, and so on (Entwistle 2013).

In a different critique of educational theory, Schwab (1971) notes the factor of the ‘coexistence of competing theories’ (Schwab 1971: 504), which can prove problematic, for example for teachers when attempting to choose between them. This would be true of the ELT sector, where competing theories of language acquisition exist. Schwab (1971) further notes that theories can be ‘radically incomplete in their views’ (Schwab 1971: 505). Although theories which are ‘vague’, ‘ambiguous’, ‘trivial’, or simply ‘unsupported speculations’ often fall by the wayside, each remaining ‘good’ theory is invariably incomplete, taking its ‘own view of the subject matter and throwing its own peculiar light upon it’ (Schwab 1971: 505). Again, this would be true of ELT, although perhaps unsurprising so, given the complex nature of language learning.

In a further view of possible problems with theory in education, Eraut (2000) suggests that it provides, or possibly burdens, practitioners with a ‘professional conscience’ which ‘urges them to judge their work according to a form of idealised practice which is unachievable’ (Eraut 2000: 123). The unfortunate consequence of attempts to resolve this can eventually lead to either ‘scepticism or to frustration and burnout’, or leads teachers to become ‘professional educators and perpetuate the cycle’ (Eraut 2000: 123).

The above are some examples of possible sources of negative views of either ‘theory’ or the role of theory in education. The following section examines further reasons for the negative connotation of ‘theory’ for some educators.

### **3.2.2.2 Teachers ‘against’ theory**

One understanding of the role of theory in teachers’ practice is that a teacher’s practice or approach might appear relatively ‘theory-free’; rather it is based on a ‘common-sense’ approach, where teaching is regarded as a ‘common sense activity which requires no specific

training whatsoever' (Verloop 2001: 436). Such a 'theory-free' approach could be partly informed by several of the types and sources of teacher knowledge discussed in the following section, 3.3, such as tacit knowledge, craft knowledge and accumulated experience. This approach could be developed either in relative isolation or through teachers' socialisation into the profession (3.3.8.2), and be based on models of teaching behaviour from the experience of as a student (3.3.8.1) along with skills and techniques from teacher training courses. This 'theory-free' view of teaching is representative of a strand of thought within education – including amongst teachers - which is positioned broadly 'against' theory. Entwistle (2008) makes the point that, 'historically', there has been 'resistance from many practising teachers to the view that theoretical knowledge of educational principles makes any significant contribution to classroom practice' (Entwistle 2008: 255), with the argument - as mentioned above - that theories are in fact simply rooted in common sense. Entwistle's mention of 'many' teachers is difficult to verify, at least in ELT. One consideration regarding such claims - noted by Entwistle himself - is that some teachers' dismissive attitude to theory might, in some cases, be due to a 'misunderstanding of what theory is, especially in relation to practice' (Entwistle 2008: 258). For example, it might be the case that even those who express this view, if asked further, will in fact refer to widely-used approaches - such as ELT methods - which are based on theories/research, suggesting that some form of theory does play a role in their work. Furthermore, when asked, many relatively experienced teachers will have a theoretically-informed position on professional questions regarding substantial theories of SLA, as occurred in the research interviews conducted for this research project.

A further point is that while some teachers may reject, deny or underplay the role of theory in their practice, a process of 'tacit' incorporation of theory into their practice and thinking about their practice – for example, through the sharing of craft knowledge (3.3.7) and socialisation into the profession (3.3.8.2) - may occur, and result in a 'familiarity with educational theory' (Entwistle 2008: 260), though one which might not be fully recognised by them as being part of their 'theoretical knowledge'. This familiarity, furthermore, may inform - albeit not explicitly - their actions to some degree, for example through the process of the rejection of certain theories perhaps through negative experience during the apprenticeship of observation (discussed in 3.3.8.1).

Pennycook (2001) identifies a current within language/ELT policy - and education in general - which is largely averse to 'theory'. This aversion might, he argues, arise for a number of

reasons; one is a general profession-wide orientation towards, and preference for, experiential professional knowledge and notions of professional autonomy. This paradigm of teaching, argues Verloop (2001), arises from ‘reactions against’ the ‘applied science’ model, and often emphasizes the ‘craft-like’ or ‘art-like intuition’ aspects of teaching, or the importance of reflection, with a teacher’s experiential knowledge recognised – or celebrated – as the ‘hallmark of teacher professionalism’ (Verloop 2001: 436).

### **3.2.2.3 The relationship between theory and practice: teacher ‘application’ of theories and thought and action**

The term the ‘application of theories’ has a strong association with a technical-rational understanding of the relationship of theory to practice, with theory produced - perhaps through university-based research - for teachers to then ‘apply’. As argued in 2.2.4.4, this characterisation of theory and practice has lost ground to more experiential forms of knowledge and knowledge-building in education. The relationship between theory and practice appears to be more fluid and complex, and to be mediated at several levels, including - as suggested above - in terms of teachers’ experience and beliefs, drawing on other sources of teacher knowledge than only systematic knowledge; contrary to the theory-applied model. However, teachers do appear to ‘use’, if not ‘apply’, theories in some mediated, interpreted manner as further outlined in 3.3.8 and Chapter 6.

One consideration regarding the task of understanding the relationship between theory and practice (or between teacher thinking and their actions) in these differentiated and rather dichotomised terms is the many factors which might prevent a theory - for example, from university research - from being ‘directly’ implemented into the classroom. Several of these factors have been discussed already, such as policy and contextual factors (Chapter 2). Further factors are the hidden nature of teaching thinking (and also practice, as so much is not surveyed), the randomness and unpredictability of classroom events, factors of intentionality on the part of the teacher, and ‘interference’ between understanding, interpreting and ‘applying’ theory. Dunne (1993), discussing the relationship between action and knowledge, notes the ‘uncertainty’ and ‘unpredictability’ in human action and its consequences (Dunne 1993: 91). Drawing on Arendt, Dunne notes that:

The essential non-transparency of action to the agent ... implies an in-built limitation on our practical knowledge and on our power of intention (since we

always do more than we can know, and can never be sure of doing just what we intend)

Dunne 1993: 92.

Arendt (1958) herself addresses the problematic nature of the intentionality and outcome in human interaction, suggesting that it is ‘because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose’ (Arendt 1958: 184). The point made by Arendt relates both to actions deriving from teachers’ own ‘practical knowledge’ and a teacher’s attempts to ‘operationalise’ their understandings of theory, if distinctions between teachers’ use of such types of knowledge could be identified with any certainty in these terms. Notwithstanding the factor of the potential - or likely - mismatch between intention and result, or interpretation and understanding, there nevertheless remains a central role for the teacher in choosing, interpreting and adapting others’ ideas about teaching. That is, the role and value of the ‘subjective’ element of the teacher’s judgement is not in doubt; as discussed in the following section.

#### **3.2.2.4 The relationship between theory and practice: the factor of teacher judgement**

Dunne (1993) draws on J.H. Newman’s writing both to highlight the factor of experience and to emphasise the factor of judgement ‘as the crucial, unsubstitutable quality of a person who knows his way around an area’ (Dunne 1993: 35). Judgement is required on the part of the teacher as even the best theory – given the (generalised) nature of what a theory is, as noted in 3.2.1 – needs to be ‘applied with discrimination to the practical situation’ (Entwistle 2013: 9), ideally in an ‘active, thoughtful, creative sense’ (Entwistle 2013: 10). Further in terms of the application of theory to practice and the judgement and thinking involved in this, Entwistle (2013) suggests that ‘application’ here might be regarded as ‘a matter of learning to ask a variety of questions about practical situations’, and of exercising judgement on practical tasks based on ‘critical intelligence’ (Entwistle 2013: 10). This might be equated with Littlewood’s (2014) ‘fourth approach’ to adapting communicative approaches in ELT discussed in 2.1.3.4.1. This ‘active’ application of theories with judgement and critical intelligence is - as Entwistle acknowledges - similar to Schön’s (1983) notion of the ‘reflective practitioner’ (3.2.4.1.3).

Further regarding teachers' judgements, Kuhn's research on scientific communities in *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1962) offers insights into how people might arrive at different decisions about which theories to use, even when using the same procedure. Kuhn (1962) concludes that there is 'no neutral algorithm for theory-choice, no systematic decision procedure which, properly applied, must lead each individual in the group to the same decision' (Kuhn 1962: 200). In terms of how these choices are arrived at, Kuhn describes the importance of the criteria for deciding between theories as acting not as rules determining a choice, but rather as 'values which influence it' (Kuhn 1977: 331). Since rules are 'intrinsically incomplete' individuals must 'choose and be guided' by them, and also need to 'flesh out' the rules, something each person 'will do in a somewhat different way' (Kuhn 1977: 333), based on a 'mixture of objective and subjective factors' (Kuhn 1977: 325). A further point is that every choice regarding a theory depends on 'shared and individual criteria' (Kuhn 1977: 325), because in addition to the individual decision-making process there is also the influence of the professional community, 'the community of specialists' (Kuhn 1962). Kuhn (1962) states – here, in the context of his elaboration of his theory of paradigm change in science - that what is important in decision-making about which theories to use is the 'manner in which a particular set of shared values interacts with the experiences shared by a community of specialists to ensure that most members of the group will ultimately find one set of arguments rather than another decisive' (Kuhn 1962: 200). With regards to ELT-ESOL, it might be that such a situation exists with the broad acceptance of 'communicative' approaches across many areas of ELT, although as Littlewood's (2014) analysis of CLT illustrates, much of teachers' use of CLT probably remains largely unexamined. While theories - including the examples of ELT methods (such as CLT) discussed in 2.2 - may have great value, it appears that the factor of the practitioner's judgement regarding how to adapt such methods is often the most significant factor influencing what occurs in the classroom. These 'fine judgements' - which cannot 'be captured and codified' (Carr 2000: 37) - involve the type of 'evaluative deliberation' which 'lies at the heart of professional expertise' (Carr 2000: 111), and which represent the 'differences between personal knowledge of working professionals' and 'public knowledge base' (Eraut 1994: 15).



### **3.2.2.5 The relationship between theory and practice: two paradigms of teacher knowledge**

Hargreaves' (1996) notion of two paradigms of 'knowledge and how knowledge is used or generated by practitioners' (Hargreaves 1996: 105) is useful in addressing the role of theory in practice. These two paradigms - 'knowledge utilization' and 'teachers' self-generated knowledge' reflect differing conceptions of the role of theory for teachers, with the former generally reflecting a 'theory applied' model - but also the 'use' of theories by teachers - and the latter assigning the role of 'theory-building' to teachers. Hargreaves (1996) recognises the situation is more complex than a simple dichotomy and points out that distinctions between the two paradigms may be 'blurred', and may fundamentally relate to the question of what counts as theory. He suggests that the differences lie in questions of epistemology and the politics relating to claims about who might 'own, define, and act as gatekeepers of what is to count as professionally worthwhile knowledge' (Hargreaves 1996: 105). This relates to questions of policy discussed in 2.1 and also to issues of teacher agency and freedoms (discussed further in 6.2). Hargreaves' two paradigms are significant as they echo recurring themes, including those dichotomies regarding the issues of theory and practice, and academy and practitioner knowledge (Thomas 2007; Kemmis & Smith 2008a). This also introduces broader questions about the extent to which teaching can be understood, improved, and whether research and theory can indeed aid teachers and society to achieve educational goals (Carr 1995, 2006).

## **3.2.3 Theory and practice in ELT-ESOL**

### **3.2.3.1 What counts as theory in ELT?**

Regarding understandings of 'theory' in ESOL/ ELT, in 2.2 it was argued that in some respects ELT 'methods' and 'methodology' have often been the form in which many theories about second language learning have appeared to teachers, although there are many other aspects of research into ELT, much of which comes from the field of Applied Linguistics (discussed in 2.2.3), which are relevant for ELT. However, for ELT - as other fields - the use of the word 'theories' has a broader reference than to only 'published Applied Linguistics research'. The ELT/ESOL practitioner 'toolkit' of theories includes a range of types of theories (including 'methods'), and types and sources of knowledge such as those discussed in 3.3 including craft knowledge (3.3.7) or a teacher's experience as a learner (3.3.8.1), which

might be regarded as ‘personal theories’ or ‘theories-in-use’, combining various forms of knowledge. Furthermore, even within the restricted notion of theory as ‘published Applied Linguistics research’, it might be difficult to define what should be included here as theory. Whereas at one time it would be found in a relatively small number of peer-reviewed printed journals, books, or conference papers, nowadays - with the general increase in the number of publications and the advent of on-line self-publishing - ‘ELT theory’ might appear in many forms and in many sources such as blogs, practitioner journals and discussion pieces on websites. With the global expansion of ELT, this potential ‘ELT knowledge-base of theory’ is enormous.

### **3.2.3.2 The theory-practice relationship in ELT-ESOL**

As discussed in 2.2.3, the field of Applied Linguistics - sometimes also including the field of ‘Second Language Acquisition’ (Ellis 2010) - and its ‘feeder disciplines’ (Corson 1997), such as psychology, sociology anthropology and general education (Cumming 2008), has been the main source of research for ELT in recent decades. Applied Linguistics ‘relies on borrowed theories, of learning, of pedagogy, and of social behaviour’, bringing these together in ‘an experimental, research-based approach’, by ‘theorising practice’ (Davies 2008: 298), the practice of ELT. Because ELT/TESOL is such a focus of interest to AL, the issues it addresses and its research agenda are very similar to TESOL (Davies 2008: 298). Whereas early applied linguistics - that is North American structural linguistics of the 1940s – ‘did see itself as *applying* a linguistic theory’ (italics in original) to ELT (Silberstein 2008: 299), the field has become more ‘nuanced’, or possibly ‘fractured’ (Silberstein 2008: 300). One reason for this is that it is not all one-way traffic from scientific research to ELT as the ‘practices of teaching English constitute their own kinds of knowledge’ (Cumming 2008: 287). This has been widely recognised within TESOL in terms of ‘constructivist views that language teachers develop - through ongoing experiences of teaching, problem-solving, and collegial interactions - unique, personally situated theories of practice’ (Cumming 2008: 287), in a manner similar to the concept of ‘personal practical knowledge’, discussed in 3.3.7.1. As discussed below (3.3.7.4), this has also been recognized in the action research ‘movement’ and a growth in the notion of the ‘reflective practitioner’.

The complex relationship of theory and practice in ELT is also due to other factors. Cumming (2008) believes that ‘identifying the role of theories in TESOL amounts to defining the scope

and nature of the field itself' (Cumming 2008: 286), an issue addressed in 2.2. Following Cumming's view, a further understanding of the role of theory in ESOL, given certain characteristics of TESOL discussed in 2.2 - such as its international nature, the varied needs of learners and the contested nature of the subject matter (for example, regarding which variety of English to teach) - is that different people in TESOL will most likely use, adapt, or generate different theories. For example, the TESOL teachers in the FE College in this research project use a particular mix of theories - partly influenced by the policy and context factors discussed in 2.1 - which is somewhat different to EL teachers elsewhere. One influential factor here is the variety of EL learners across the sector and their differing characteristics; for example, regarding their needs and goals, the language context, their educational backgrounds, their contact with English and their previous studies before attending the college (2.1.3.3.1). Another factor would be the characteristics of the teaching staff. EL teachers vary in terms of the value of and the 'extent, qualities, and sophistication' of theories they use (Cumming 2008: 288). Different theories might appear to be more or less useful, possible or attractive to either novice or experienced teachers – or teachers in different kinds of institutions, in ESOL or EFL environments. Teachers' practice, and the role of theories in their practice, is affected by social and contextual factors, and the scope and nature of the particular/local 'variety' of TESOL will reflect this (2.1.3.4). This is one reason for the inclusion of the analysis in 2.1 of the policy-context. Notwithstanding the particular factors of context, arguably all ELT teachers need to be 'proficient users' and 'skilled analysts' of the English language (Wright & Bolitho 1997).

Cumming (2008) makes the point that the roles theory play 'could never be fixed in an absolute way' in ELT - or in other fields - since they 'remain open to conflicting interpretations and divergent interests as well as historical changes and cultural differences, both within and across disciplines' (Cumming 2008: 285). In the area of language-related theories, there are 'Diverse, competing theories about the nature and functions of language' (Cumming 2008: 286), from which teachers are expected to select (wisely) (Ellis 2006). In addition, teachers are expected to adapt theories (and ELT methods), for example according to contextual factors, such as the student population or learning goals.

Silberstein (2008) argues the importance of seeing theories not as 'bounded entities' or 'fixed categories', but rather as part of a 'dynamic', 'active process' of 'theorizing', arguing that 'dynamic theorizing' would better characterize the work of teachers (Silberstein 2008: 301).

### **3.2.4 ‘Solutions’ to the theory-practice ‘divide’**

Attempts to deal with the theory-practice ‘divide’ in everyday practice in general education and ELT have continued for some time. Notably, teacher education programmes have recognised this through the inclusion of a focus on both methodology and teaching practice. Further approaches and attempts are discussed in the following.

#### **3.2.4.1 A focus on the teacher: praxis, practitioner research and reflective practice**

One approach to dealing with the ‘divide’ between theory and practice is the focus on the teacher as a producer of ‘knowledge’, as proposed in Hargreaves’ (1996) paradigm of ‘teacher-generated knowledge’. This reflects an interest in the ‘personal practical knowledge’ of teachers (3.3.7.1) and a recognition of the practitioner as being the mediator between theory and practice. In this context the notion of praxis underpins and informs such teacher-focused approaches to the relationship of theory and practice as practitioner research and reflective practice, discussed below.

##### **3.2.4.1.1 Praxis**

Underlying some attempts to deal with the theory-practice is the notion of *praxis*, the ‘interpenetration of theory with practice’ (Entwistle 2008: 258), previously discussed in 3.1.3. Educators have provided varying interpretations and ‘applications’ of the concept of *praxis*. One understanding is that a teacher might develop their own *praxis* through ‘continuous reflection’ on one’s practice to develop their own ‘practice-relevant theory’, understanding of aims, dilemmas and solutions of their classroom (Entwistle 2008). The concept of ‘reflection’, or ‘reflective practice’ (briefly mentioned in 2.2.4.4) is discussed further in 3.2.4.1.3. For others, the approach to solving the theory-practice divide lay in finding ways to involve the teacher to a greater extent in knowledge production, notably in the form of practitioner, ‘classroom’, or ‘action’ research (briefly mentioned in 2.2.4.4), which is discussed in the following section.

##### **3.2.4.1.2 Practitioner or ‘action’ research**

A notable ‘application’ of the notion of *praxis* to education came from Carr and Kemmis (1986), who proposed a form of *praxis* not only as a means to bridge the gap between research and practice, but as an approach which could potentially empower practitioners, specifically involving practitioners using ‘action research’ as a means to explore their own concerns and to

investigate their own practice. The earlier emergence of research activities - such as that of the 'teacher as researcher' (Stenhouse 1975) - is noted by McNamara and Desforjes (1978). Practitioner/action research should meet the 'minimalist definition' of research as 'containing a question/issue, data, and interpretative analysis' (Nunan 1992: 18) and be conducted by practitioners themselves, rather than by professional researchers (Burton 1998). It will likely be 'contextual, small-scale and localised', 'participatory' (Burns 1999: 30), and aim for the 'improvement of some aspect of professional practice' (Wallace 1998: 1). The topic is selected by a teacher, based on their own teaching situation (Wallace 1998: 15), and may include a problem-solving element (Nunan 1992: 19). In terms of purpose and results, it may either be 'very practical in its intended outcomes' (Wallace 1998: 15), or alternatively, it may not necessarily lead to or produce change (Nunan 1992). Many claims have been made for practitioner research, including a call for the development of an 'action research agenda' (Nunan 1993). Burton (1998) argues that teachers' involvement in some form of research is essential for the profession since 'teachers' insights on and involvement in research' form 'valuable contributions to curriculum innovation and professional renewal' (Burton 1998: 422).

In terms of the relationship between theory and practice, action research is claimed to represent a move towards a 'best practice ideal of teaching and the connection of research and practice' (McKeon 1998: 493). Research here usually refers to teachers' engagement in the activity of research, rather than reading research, although it might be the case that teachers look to theory while seeking answers to their research/teaching dilemmas. Indeed, Wallace (1998) stresses the importance of reading and understanding research for teachers' overall development, and that engaging teachers in conducting their own research could contribute to this process. Action research aims to generate a certain form of theory, as one aim is to 'build educational theory through critical reflection on their own practical knowledge' in the process of action research (Carr & Kemmis 1986: 41). The type of theory which is generated here is not separate from practice. Rather it is *praxis*, 'personal knowledge' which is evident in action in a 'practical, concrete historical situation', and which is 'authentic', 'wise' and 'prudent' (Carr & Kemmis 1986), and where 'praxis' is 'informed, committed action' (Carr & Kemmis 1986). The source of this knowledge appears to be the practitioner and their experience, and in this regard it is a form of 'personal practical knowledge' (3.3.7.1).

The notion of reflection is often included as an element of action research and is discussed in the following section. It is a further example of an attempt to resolve - in some respects - the theory-practice dilemma.

#### **3.2.4.1.3 The reflective practitioner**

The starting point for discussions of reflective practice is often Schön's (1983) application of the notion of reflection to describe skilled professional practice, which has resonated widely with educators. One reason for this resonance may be that 'reflection' - as form of learning - fits well with dominant ideas about both teacher education and student learning; that is, that learning should be individualised, learner-centred, and should relate to previous experience. Furthermore, the connotations of the term 'reflection' are such that it has wide currency within education (McLaughlin 1999). The impact of Schön's publication has contributed to, and coincided with, an increased recognition of the value of teachers' 'personal practical knowledge', discussed in 3.3.7.1. Schön's reinterpretation of the concept of reflection (following Dewey 1933) has provided a creative springboard for much writing and research on teacher learning and education. 'Reflection' as a means for teacher learning is evident in a number of techniques in teacher education, such as journal writing (Moon 1999a) or structured discussions between practitioners and novice/trainee teachers as a type of reflective conversation (Desforges & McNamara 1979). It has become a standard element and aim in teacher education programmes, where there is a focus on the 'long range development of teachers as reflective practitioners' (Pennington 1996: 320). Since the term 'reflective' has become something of a 'buzzword' and has also been used to cover a wide range of different aspects of teacher development, it has become a rather ambiguous term (Roberts 1998). Pennington (1996) offers the following brief description of the term 'reflective practitioners':

...those who continually develop their professional expertise by interacting with situations of practice to try to solve problems, thereby gaining an increasingly deep understanding of their subject matter, of themselves as teachers, and of the nature of teaching

Pennington 1996: 320.

Interpretations of reflective practice often appear without reference to particular theoretical positions, which reflects Schön's own writing, which is more a celebration of expert practitioner knowledge than an outline of a particular approach to teacher education.

Unfortunately, Schön offers a rather vague description of his concepts, using ‘example and metaphor rather than sustained argument’ (Eraut 1995:13). This has permitted widely differing interpretations of ‘reflective practice’ (Calderhead 1989), which may at times simply reflect differing views of what ‘good teaching’ is (Korthagen & Wubbles 1995), rather than contribute directly to new knowledge.

In terms of the relationship between theory and practice, following Schön’s view, practitioner knowledge is the source of knowledge, rather than theory as ‘systematic knowledge’. The focus moves towards teachers’ concerns and addressing the complexities of practice, paving the way for the possibility of practitioner theory-building, or reflection as ‘a kind of self-research’ (Bengtsson 1995: 25). In this regard the type of knowledge or theory Schön addresses is similar to a ‘personal practical knowledge’ discussed in 3.3.7.1, rather than simply traditional research-based theory. One criticism of Schön’s focus on the practitioner’s knowledge is that the benefits of more analytical approaches may be lost, and knowledge from other areas, such as other disciplines, may be overlooked (Adler 1991).

The notion of learning through reflection – often reflection on experience – might beg the question of ‘what, if anything, academic educational theory can contribute to intelligent reflection on the practice of teaching’ (Entwistle 2008: 259). Goodson (2003), in a critique of reflective practice, addresses the problem of what practitioners can or should reflect on, and cautions that ‘not all teachers’ practical knowledge is educational, beneficial or socially worthwhile’ (Goodson 2003: 130). Furthermore, too much reflection may ‘transform practical knowledge into parochial knowledge’ (Goodson 2003: 130) if a focus on the practical results is to the exclusion of broader considerations. A further risk with such a focus on ‘personal’ and ‘practical’ knowledge is that it can ‘rupture the links to theoretical and contextual knowledge’ (Goodson 2003: 51), which appears to be integral to the combination and interconnection of ‘theory and practice’, or of different forms of teacher knowledge. Verloop (2001) similarly identifies a possible loss of connection between theory, practice and experience with too much focus on reflection, as ‘teachers may become so involved with their own specific problems and ideas that they will never relate these to more general notions about the problems at hand’, and may fail to consider ‘relevant external knowledge’ (Verloop 2001: 436). Shrofal (1991) too identifies some limitations in what are the characteristics of much of reflective practice, that is ‘a focus on the personal and on practice’, arguing that this

does not ‘appear to lead practitioners or researchers/writers to analyze practice as theory, as social structure, or as a manifestation of political and economic systems’ (Shrofal 1991: 64).

#### **3.2.4.2 How experts ‘use’ or ‘adapt’ theory**

The area of teacher expertise is discussed further in 3.3.7.3. Studies in teacher expertise include explorations of how experts ‘use’ or ‘adapt’ systematic knowledge. Kennedy (2004) claims that the most important feature of expertise is that it is ‘grounded’ in ‘principled’ or ‘expert’ knowledge (Kennedy 2004: 39). Such a claim challenges in many respects the discourses mentioned above, where teaching is regarded as a natural, common-sense-based activity. Rather than simply being gifted naturals, experts are able to ‘bring a richly detailed body of both propositional knowledge and experiences to bear on any given situation’ (Kennedy 2004: 38). This propositional knowledge provides them with a ‘way of interpreting and understanding new situations’ in what Kennedy calls ‘pattern recognition’, which enables them to recognise one situation as being similar to other situations, and which can furthermore inform response options (Kennedy 2004: 38). A further point regarding expert teachers is that expert teachers can ‘justify their thinking and their actions with reference to the “expert” knowledge in their field’ (Kennedy 2004: 39). Expert knowledge here might equate to either theory - systematic knowledge (see 3.3.5) - or to craft knowledge (see 3.3.7), but it highlights the added level of professional literacy that often accompanies an increased familiarity with aspects of the knowledge-base. Expertise, however, is more than only procedural knowledge of the kind that can be articulated by expert teachers. The following section 3.3 outlines various forms and sources of teacher knowledge and learning which might contribute to expertise (for example, good judgement), several of which are developed in the classroom through the accumulation of experiences.

#### **3.2.4.3 Theory as science – teaching as a science or art?**

Larsen-Freeman (2000) offers a different perspective on the theory-practice debates and debates about the degree to which teaching might be principally regarded as intuitive, and argues the case for TESOL being a ‘science’ as well as an ‘art’. She suggests that teachers who are aware of this more ‘scientific’ approach use each lesson in the manner suggested by Britton (1987) as ‘an inquiry, some further discovery, a quiet form of research’ (Britton 1987: 15, cited in Larsen-Freeman 2000). These teachers, furthermore, Larsen-Freeman observes,



follow each lesson with ‘a period of reflection, out of which new understandings arise and are assimilated’, and concludes that such teachers ‘are scientists in the best sense of the role’ (Larsen-Freeman 2000). Amongst the justifiable celebration of the art of teaching and of the experiential knowledge of teachers, there perhaps exists an anti-theory, anti-scientist view of teaching, where untrained, charismatic, inspirational, intuitive and creative teachers do not require more than common sense, certain human qualities, subject knowledge, and an accumulation of experience to teach well. In response to this, Larsen-Freeman (2000) argues that rather than ‘objectivity, sterility and dispassion’, science - and the approach of the scientist - involves ‘curiosity and awareness and about learning to look’; the type of curiosity or ‘analytical approach’ which is evident in teachers’ reports (such as those in this research project) as they self-analyse their classroom events, experiences and their practice. Further in defence of teaching as a science, Larsen-Freeman (2000) suggests that rather than ‘omniscience and absolutes and arrogance’, science involves ‘mysteries and seeking explanations and acceptance-accepting that not all mysteries will yield their secrets’ (Larsen-Freeman 2000). In further support of this view, Carr and Kemmis (1986) in their discussion of action research also advocate a ‘more critical, scientific attitude’ (Carr & Kemmis 1986: 123).

### **3.3 A conceptual framework of types and sources of teacher knowledge**

#### **Overview**

Section 3.3 further explains (following the introduction in Chapter 1) the role of the conceptual framework in the study (3.3.1) and what it is (3.3.2). The concept and scope of the term ‘teacher knowledge’ is discussed in 3.3.3. The rest of this section -which includes ‘An explanation of the Conceptual Framework of the sources and types of Teacher Knowledge of ESOL teachers’ (3.3.4) and sections 3.3.5-3.3.8 - explains the CF and concepts and categories within it; especially (in 3.3.4 -3.3.8) with regard to the general categories of types and sources of knowledge (systematic, prescriptive and craft; factors ‘personal’ to the teacher; and knowledge utilisation and teacher generated knowledge). Many of the concepts and categories in 3.3.4-3.3.8 have already been discussed in previous sections; those which have not are explained in more detail.

### **3.3.1 Introduction**

Section 3.3 directly answers research question 2: What types and sources of teacher knowledge do ESOL teachers draw on? As explained in the introduction to Chapter 1, this second research question reflects an understanding that what counts as ‘theory’ in teaching goes beyond the theories about teaching and learning traditionally found in teaching textbooks, research articles or teacher education programmes (‘systematic knowledge’ 3.3.5), and includes other forms of ‘teacher knowledge’ (such as ‘prescriptive knowledge’ 3.3.6 or ‘craft knowledge’ 3.3.7). Following this understanding, the types and sources of teacher knowledge which might be regarded as forms of ‘theory’ - or having elements or features of theory - should be identified. Consequently, such sources and forms of teacher knowledge as ‘prescriptive knowledge’, ‘craft knowledge’, ‘personal practical knowledge’, beliefs about learning, reflective practice, ideas from the ‘apprenticeship of observation’, and popular theories of language learning are incorporated into a conceptual framework (CF). This is done as it is understood that even though these types and sources of teacher knowledge may not all necessarily ‘count’ as ‘theory’, the degree to which they do so and the way they interact with theory is highly relevant when analysing the role theory plays in practice.

In previous sections a number of areas, types and sources of knowledge for ESOL teachers have been discussed in varying degrees of length and detail (such as teacher expertise 3.2.4.2 or reflective practice 3.2.4.1.3). In this chapter, several of these topics are revisited and several others are introduced in order to clearly present the sources and types of teacher knowledge understood to be relevant to the research focus. In Chapter 6, these types and sources of knowledge will subsequently be referred to further identify their role and impact on the role of theory in ESOL teachers’ practice (answering research question 1: What role does theory play in ESOL teachers’ practice?). This section (3.3) builds on the conceptual analysis from previous chapters and sections, providing further analytical tools with which to answer the research questions. A final point is that understandings from the conceptual framework also inform the content and questions of the interview schedule (Appendix 6) and the categories for the analysis of the interview data.

### **3.3.2 Conceptual frameworks**

The use of a conceptual framework relates to questions of how best to plan, conduct and communicate research. There are differing views of what a conceptual framework should

consist of and of what its role in research should be. Miles and Huberman (1994), who are often cited on the question, provide a concise, generic description and how a conceptual framework might be used for research purposes:

A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationships among them

Miles & Huberman 1994: 18.

In their survey of views on conceptual frameworks, Leshem and Trafford (2007) found that some researchers choose to extend the scope of a conceptual framework beyond the above definition by Miles and Huberman to include the actual research design itself, including methods and so on. Although this approach is not adopted in this research project, this view points to the fact that the conceptual framework should clearly relate to the rest of the research project. That is, it is important to clarify the role of the conceptual framework in the research design and to ensure that it clearly aligns with the research design (Leshem & Trafford 2007). In this research project, the conceptual framework forms one part of the research design rather than the overarching approach in the manner identified by Leshem and Trafford (2007) in their survey. It is used as a means with which to provide a ‘theoretical overview’ (Leshem & Trafford 2007), or a ‘map of the territory’ (Miles & Huberman 1984) of part of the research focus. It sets the parameters of understanding of an issue and outlines the terms in which the research focus will be discussed, for example by setting out which concepts are to be either included, omitted, to receive greater or lesser prominence, and so on. A conceptual framework is complex, representing a ‘system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs’ (Maxwell 2005: 33) the research project.

The conceptual framework is an integral part of the research design as it constitutes some of the conceptual resources (together with the previous sections in Chapters 2 and 3) addressing the issue of theory-practice in education which will be used to examine the research question in ‘theoretical’ terms. These understandings will also be used to analyse and interpret the interview data, where the aim is not to ‘test the model’, but to use the conceptual framework as a basis and starting point for ‘unfolding inductive research’ (Leshem & Trafford 2007: 100). This approach aligns with the broadly interpretivist perspective which informs the research methodology, as explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

The conceptual framework (CF) is developed from three ‘interrelated areas’, which are identified by Leshem and Trafford (2007); namely, the works of writers and researchers, their [the researcher’s] own experience and observations, and the act of reflecting on reading, experience and developing research assumptions (Leshem & Trafford 2007: 100). The first area involves a review of relevant literature, including an analysis of published research. This is evident in this and previous chapters. The second area from which the conceptual framework is derived, ‘experience and observations’, includes, in my case, the professional and academic experiences and observations arising from my own teaching career and studies. Again, these factors are evident in the chapters thus far in terms of generalised statements and claims, and in the selections of literature and concepts that are included. That is, the CF (and discussions in previous chapters) reflects my perception of certain patterns in the work of teachers and the activity of ELT, my understanding of teachers’ work and the role of theory in practice. In addition, it incorporates my observations and understandings from research literature.

As stated above in 3.3.1, the development of a CF aims to bring together the range of aspects related to the issue of theory in practice in TESOL (that is, as in the research question 2, the sources and types of teacher knowledge ESOL teachers draw on) into a coherent - if idiosyncratic in terms of personal choices of relevant concepts - form. Maxwell (2005) addresses the issue of the unique and personal element of conceptual frameworks by including in his understanding of conceptual frameworks ‘the actual ideas and beliefs’ held by the researcher, adding that these ideas and beliefs may be ‘written down or not’ (Maxwell 2005). This indicates that a conceptual framework is not an ‘objective’ uncritical analysis, but rather reflects the researcher’s own personal decisions about which concepts are more important or more relevant than others, based on their own stated or unstated assumptions. This prioritisation of concepts and the accompanying explanation of the relationships between the chosen concepts reflects the researcher’s personal response to the research question; for example, what is not included, as well as what is, regarding which factors are deemed most beneficial in analysing the issues around the research question. Again, this understanding of the CF aligns with the broader interpretive framework of this study (discussed in Chapter 4), where the factor of subjectivity is regarded not as an acceptable ‘variable’ in the research design, but rather as a valuable, contributing feature, including the factor of my own role as researcher. In terms of research paradigms, this approach can be contrasted, for example, with a more ‘positivistic’ understanding of a CF, where for instance a literature review might aim to

produce an accurate coverage of literature relating to the research focus, and would aim to reflect a more generally balanced, objective view. Leshem and Trafford's (2007) third area of influence on the formation of a conceptual framework relates to the manner in which it develops and evolves through the iterative process of reading, reflecting and writing, a process during which assumptions or expectations may be altered. The actual process of producing the conceptual framework stimulates a development in understanding, and a clarification of the theoretical basis for the study.

### **3.3.3 Teacher knowledge**

The Conceptual Framework identifies 'the sources and types of Teacher Knowledge of FE ESOL teachers'. 'Teacher knowledge' (briefly defined in the Preface) is a useful overarching concept with which to analyse the role of theory in ESOL teachers' practice. The following brief discussion of teacher knowledge clarifies understandings of the term and outlines the concept's relevance to the issue of the role of theory in teachers' practice.

An interest in understanding the nature of teacher knowledge developed in the mid-1970s, and increased particularly from the mid-1990s (Borg 2006). This interest signalled a move away from an earlier focus on the observable behaviour of teachers towards a focus on 'teacher thinking', or 'teacher cognition' (Borg 2006), that is, the 'beliefs underlying that behavior' (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 442), and 'what teachers know and how their knowing is expressed in teaching' (Connelly *et al.* 1997: 665). This shift in research focus reflected wider changes in education away from a 'technical rationality' view, which had sought a 'straightforward way to determine which behaviour was adequate in specific circumstances' (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 442). Rather, the focus moved towards a view that 'descriptions of teachers' work and of the thinking behind it can deepen our understandings of teaching', without necessarily aiming for prescriptions regarding teacher thinking or action (Borg 2006: 14). In terms of theory and practice, the technical-rational view aligns with the 'theory applied' model - exemplified in the discussion of ELT methods in 2.2 - where a body of knowledge is developed to be 'applied' by teachers. The move towards a focus on teacher knowledge and beliefs arguably also reflected a change in understanding of the relationship between theory and practice from a technical-rational view towards an appreciation of a more interconnected and fluid relationship. Finally, it also reflects a recognition that the knowledge-base of teaching includes - or should include - forms of knowledge beyond academy-generated, 'systematic knowledge',

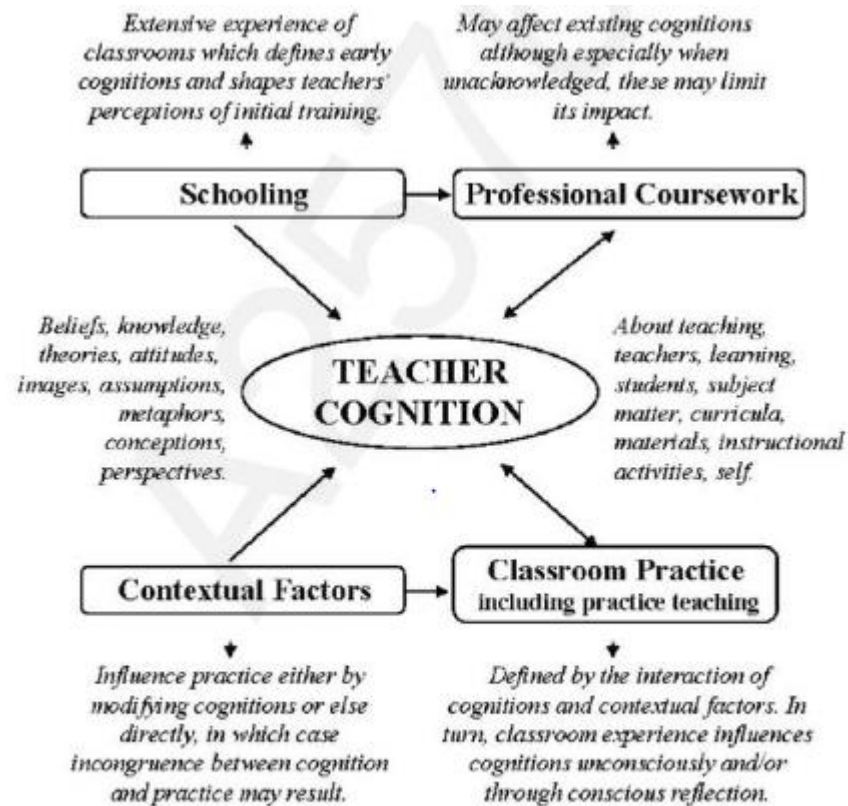
such as forms of ‘teacher-generated’ knowledge (Hargreaves 1996). In discussions of teachers’ professional knowledge different terms have been used to describe the knowledge that teachers acquire, develop and produce. Indeed, the aforementioned ‘teachers’ professional knowledge’ is but one of a ‘plethora of labels and definitions’ (Kumaravadivelu 2012: 23) used to discuss the issues of the knowledge base of teaching (Kumaravadivelu 2012).

The term ‘Teacher knowledge’ (TK) developed several years ago into a ‘wide, inclusive concept’ (Carlgren & Lindblad 1991: 511), and an ‘umbrella term’ which has been used to include teachers’ ‘theoretical and practical knowledge as well as their dispositions, beliefs and values’ (Kumaravadivelu 2012: 21-22). It is this broad, inclusive understanding of the term ‘teacher knowledge’ which is used in this dissertation – as signalled in the Preface – and which summarizes a ‘large variety of cognitions, from conscious and well-balanced opinions to unconscious and unreflected intuitions’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 446), covering the ‘whole of the knowledge and insights that underlie teachers’ actions in practice’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 446). Given the range of factors included in TK and the inclusive nature of the use of the term, it is rather difficult to break it down into its component parts. While for teachers this is rarely an issue - ‘in the mind of the teacher, components of knowledge, beliefs, conceptions, and intuitions are inextricably intertwined’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 446) – in order to understand better the role of theory in teachers’ practice, the scope of TK will be mapped and set out in the following sections.

### **3.3.3.1 The scope of teacher knowledge**

Researchers and writers interested in the area of teacher knowledge and teacher education - such as Shulman (1987), Kennedy (2002), Borg (2006) and Kumaravadivelu (2012) - have made attempts to scope the area of teacher knowledge. They use differing approaches; for example, Borg (2006) scopes the field of ‘teacher cognition’ and Kennedy (2002) studies the sources of teachers’ new ideas; Figures 2 and 4, respectively, provide visual representations of their attempts at this.

Borg (2006) in Figure 2 sets out his categories to be included in teacher cognition. Several of these categories are also found in the CF outlined below.



**Figure 1.5** Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education and classroom practice

(Borg, 2003c: 82)

Figure 2: Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education and classroom practice (Borg 2006: 41)

### 3.3.4 An explanation of the Conceptual Framework of the sources and types of Teacher Knowledge of ESOL teachers

Figure 3: A visual representation of the Conceptual Framework of the sources and types of Teacher Knowledge of ESOL teachers

Knowledge utilization	Teachers' self-generated knowledge
<p><b>Systematic knowledge:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Academic' research/academy-produced theory</li> <li>• ELT knowledge-base</li> <li>• ELT methodology</li> <li>• Subject/content knowledge</li> <li>• Teacher education programmes/courses</li> <li>• CPD: INSETT, workshops, conferences, publications, journals, websites</li> </ul> <p><b>Prescriptive knowledge:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National/college teaching policy</li> <li>• Curriculum/syllabus</li> <li>• Assessments (e.g. SQA)</li> <li>• The coursebook &amp; other published teaching materials</li> <li>• 'Best-practice'</li> <li>• 'Appropriate pedagogy' (Kramsch &amp; Sullivan 1996)</li> <li>• 'Appropriate methodology' (Holliday 1994)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Craft knowledge:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Craft knowledge</li> <li>• Personal Practical Knowledge</li> <li>• Tacit knowledge</li> <li>• Experiential learning</li> <li>• Reflective Practice</li> <li>• Classroom/Action Research</li> <li>• Peer observations</li> <li>• The approach of colleagues</li> <li>• Knowledge of the teaching context and learners</li> <li>• Teacher expertise</li> </ul>
<p><b>Factors 'personal' to the teacher which 'filter' the above</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975)</li> <li>• Teachers' experiences of language learning</li> <li>• Socialisation into the profession</li> <li>• The professional knowledge context</li> <li>• Teachers' beliefs</li> <li>• Beliefs about language learning</li> <li>• 'Sense of plausibility' (Prabhu 1990)</li> <li>• Teachers' professional history/identity (teaching 'personality'/ style/motivations), values and ideology.</li> </ul>	



#### **3.3.4.1 Two paradigms of teacher knowledge**

The visual representation of the CF (*Figure 3*) is initially divided into two parts, based on Hargreaves' (1996) notion of two paradigms of 'knowledge and how knowledge is used or generated by practitioners' (Hargreaves 1996: 105) discussed in 3.2.2.5; namely, 'Knowledge utilization' and 'Teachers' self-generated knowledge'. Types and sources of teacher knowledge corresponding to each of these two paradigms of teacher knowledge are listed in the boxes below in the CF (*Figure 3*); for example, for the category of 'Knowledge utilization', 'academic research/academy-produced theory' and 'Teacher education programmes/courses', and for the category of 'Teachers' self-generated knowledge', 'Action research' and 'Craft knowledge'. As discussed with regards to the role of theory in practice in 3.2 and throughout this thesis, there is a degree of overlap, interaction and interplay between these two 'paradigms' of teacher knowledge and the sources and types of teacher knowledge which they include. Hargreaves' categories are used in the CF as they are useful in highlighting the different types and sources of knowledge which are relevant for teachers with regards to the role of theory in practice, and as they are useful categories within which to group the types and sources of knowledge into a coherent framework.

#### **3.3.4.2 Three categories for the types and sources of teacher knowledge**

A further means to understand the many and varied sources and types of teacher knowledge is provided by Kennedy's (2002) three broad categories of sources of teacher knowledge - 'systematic', 'prescriptive' and 'craft' - arising from her study of the sources of teachers' new ideas (see *Figure 4*, below). While Kennedy (2002) used the three categories in order to group only various 'sources' of 'new ideas' about teaching, in the CF they are adapted to furthermore identify and group various 'types' of knowledge about teaching and learning. These categories have already been referred to in previous sections/chapters of the dissertation: 'systematic knowledge' (initially introduced in 3.2.1 and further discussed in 3.3.5) refers to 'academic research'/academy-produced theory and traditional views/understanding of 'theory' (discussed at length in 3.2.); 'prescriptive knowledge' is a category of teacher knowledge generally acquired through institutional policies such as those discussed in 2.1 'Policy context'; and finally 'Craft knowledge' is a term which is widely used in education and is discussed further below (3.3.4.7). Within each of Kennedy's three categories there exists a body of ideas or theories, which have been generated and articulated

in various contexts (such as journals, staffrooms, research papers, or policy documents), by various educators (for example, researchers, policy-writers, or teacher educators) and by teachers themselves (for example, in the form of reflective practice, craft knowledge, blogs, or action research).

TABLE I Sources of new ideas cited across all teaching episodes

Craft sources	
Experience as a teacher	40
Spontaneous ideas	14
Experience as a child	12
Experience as a parent	10
How I'd feel if it were me	10
Own materials	9
Fads	8
Miscellaneous other sources	16
Total	119
Prescriptive sources	
Tests and accountability systems	33
Curriculum standards and guides	23
Specific textbooks	24
School building requirements	13
Other policies	24
Total	117
Systematic sources	
Professional development programs	60
University courses	9
Colleagues	15
Research findings	8
Professional associations	3
National Board of Professional Teaching Standards	5
Total	100

Figure 4: *Sources of new ideas cited across all teaching episodes* (Kennedy 2002: 358)

As with Hargreaves' two categories discussed above, there may be a degree of crossover across sections of the CF – in this case, both in terms of the three categories ('systematic', 'prescriptive' and 'craft') and in the question of what is a 'type' of teacher knowledge and what is a 'source' of knowledge. Regarding teachers' 'use' of Kennedy's three categories of

sources and types of knowledge - as discussed in 3.2 and argued elsewhere - teachers appear to 'use', draw on and generate a range of types of knowledge whose origins and roles appear to be more complex than a simple characterisation of a 'practitioner-generated' craft knowledge versus 'systematic knowledge' (and/or) prescriptive knowledge' dichotomy. This consideration is discussed further below in the 'Craft Knowledge' section (3.3.4.7).

In the *Visual representation of the CF* (Figure 3), 'Systematic knowledge' and 'Prescriptive knowledge' are included as categories of knowledge which are the object of teachers' 'knowledge utilisation', as described by Hargreaves (1996). This is because - as is argued in 3.2.3 - teachers do not generally produce systematic knowledge and as is argued in 2.1.3 teachers are not generally responsible for formulating policy or in generating prescriptive knowledge. However, as these are generalisations, some cases suggesting a contrary view may exist; for example, teachers might be involved in research projects, be consulted on policy, or have a role in implementing and adapting policies and thus contribute to some extent towards the generation of 'Systematic knowledge' and 'Prescriptive knowledge', which they might then not in fact 'utilise' themselves. 'Craft knowledge' is categorised primarily as a form of Hargreaves' (1996) 'Teachers' self-generated knowledge', although again - as suggested above - there may be some cases which are not so clearly defined; for example, parties other than teachers may be involved in such knowledge generation and several sources of knowledge will mostly likely combine to produce knowledge.

#### **3.3.4.3 The lists of types and sources of teacher knowledge**

In the visual representation of the CF, a number of types and sources of teacher knowledge are listed under each of Kennedy's (2002) three categories of sources or types of teacher knowledge, according to the researcher's own judgement of where each best corresponds or aligns. One example which illustrates how researchers may have different perspectives in categorising is that Kennedy (2002) lists 'colleagues' as a source of 'systematic knowledge' (Figure 4), whereas in the CF 'the approach of colleagues' is listed as a source/type of craft knowledge. In the following sections, several such understandings and interpretations regarding the formation of the CF are further clarified, although not exhaustively (due to considerations of space). Several of the types and sources of knowledge have been either referred to briefly or discussed at length in previous sections (for example, those categorised

under ‘Prescriptive knowledge’ were discussed in 2.1 Policy context), while others will be discussed for the first time in the following sections.

#### **3.3.4.4 Factors ‘personal’ to the teacher (which ‘filter’ the role of other factors in the CF)**

A final dimension to understanding the types and sources of teacher knowledge which is included in the CF (and is incorporated into the visual representation *Figure 3* in the lower box) is the category of ‘Factors personal to the teacher which filter the elements in the CF’. These factors which are peculiar to each teacher - in terms of disposition, career trajectory, professional experience, beliefs, and so on - operate in the manner of ‘receptors’ or ‘filters’ for other types of knowledge, influencing which of the types of knowledge listed in the CF might be adopted, adapted or rejected. These ‘personal/individual’ factors are discussed below in 3.3.8. Again, the note of caution here is that these individual factors combine and develop - and change over time - through interaction with other elements in the CF. A further proviso is that although these factors have been termed ‘personal’ or ‘individual’ they may be shared and be of a more collegiate character rather than strictly limited to one individual teacher. The nature of the profession of teaching as a social, ‘shared’ practice - as discussed in 3.1.2 - suggests that a teacher’s knowledge will be at least be partly influenced through the process of collegiate workplace practices or socialisation, discussed below in 3.3.8.2 and 3.3.8.3.

#### **3.3.5 Systematic knowledge**

- ‘Academic’ research/academy-produced theory
- ELT knowledge base
- ELT methodology
- Subject/content knowledge
- Teacher education programmes/courses
- CPD: INSETT, workshops, conferences, publications, journals, websites

In the CF a number of types and sources of teacher knowledge are listed under the category of ‘systematic knowledge’. ‘Systematic knowledge’ (Kennedy 2002) is knowledge about teaching and learning which is found in ‘colleges and universities, research articles, journals and professional associations, and which tends to be more theoretical, codified and abstract’ than other forms of knowledge, for example, craft knowledge (Kennedy 2002: 356); it is the ‘esoteric cognitive base’ (Entwistle 2008: 255) discussed in 3.2.1. In this regard, this form of knowledge is that most commonly associated with ‘theory’, although other forms and sources

of teacher knowledge discussed in the rest of the CF may also have a claim to be ‘theories’, for example, in the form of ‘personal theories’ or ‘theories-in-use’ - as argued in 3.2.1 and elsewhere. What Kennedy refers to as ‘Systematic knowledge’ was the focus of much of the discussion regarding the role of theory in practice in 3.2. Also in 3.2 and elsewhere it is argued that such propositional knowledge interacts with other forms of teacher knowledge to form a teacher’s practice.

The various sources and types of ‘Systematic knowledge’ are listed in the visual representation of the CF (*Figure 3*) and at the start of this section 3.3.5. It is found in the sources and representations of the ELT knowledge-base and it can be understood in these terms; that is, as codified, articulated and generalisable knowledge, which might be ‘accessed’ by teachers or ‘delivered’ to teachers in various formats, such as teacher education programmes, CPD, INSETT, workshops, conferences, publications, journals and websites. One area of systematic teacher knowledge not discussed thus far - identified by Shulman (1987) in his outline of the ‘knowledge base’ of teaching - is ‘content knowledge’. For ESOL teachers this will include the subject or content knowledge regarding the English language itself (grammar, vocabulary, phonetics and so on). Additionally, it will include information about the way languages are learned and can be taught, which (as argued in 2.2) is found in ELT methodology and Applied Linguistics research.

With regard to its role in the CF and its relationship with other elements in the CF, systematic knowledge appears to operate - as is argued throughout the dissertation (for example 3.2 and in Chapter 6) - in combination with other forms of teacher knowledge, such as those discussed below under the categories of prescriptive knowledge and craft knowledge.

### **3.3.6 Prescriptive knowledge**

- National/college teaching policy
- Curriculum/syllabus
- Assessments (e.g. SQA)
- The coursebook & other published teaching materials
- ‘Best-practice’
- ‘Appropriate pedagogy’ (Kramsch & Sullivan 1996)
- ‘Appropriate methodology’ (Holliday 1994)

‘Prescriptive knowledge’ (Kennedy 2002) is a category of teacher knowledge generally acquired through institutional policies such as those discussed in 2.1 ‘Policy context’. In 2.1 ‘Prescriptive knowledge’ is discussed in terms of four levels of policy context relevant for FE

ESOL teachers: national policy for the ESOL sector; the ESOL curriculum framework; the college policy regarding teaching and learning, including the curriculum/syllabus, assessments (e.g. SQA), the course book and other published teaching materials; the local self-regulated framework of the individual teacher and the ESOL department's interpretation of 'best-practice', which might include considerations of 'appropriate pedagogy' (Kramsch & Sullivan 1996) and 'appropriate methodology' (Holliday 1994), such as a version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In the CF these sources of knowledge (factors) are listed under the category of 'prescriptive knowledge'.

For some, policy might be primarily viewed as a contextual or background factor – albeit a possibly important one - when considering its role in teachers' practice. It is less commonly identified as an influence on teacher development or learning, or as a type or source of teacher knowledge. However, Kennedy (2002) identifies policy as a possible source of new ideas or knowledge about teaching for teachers. As argued in 2.1, information about policy can be found not only in official national or college policy documents, but also in curriculum guidelines, syllabus content, published course materials and assessment materials and criteria. These documents - to varying degrees - recommend or stipulate the approach towards aspects of practice which ESOL teachers should adopt. For example, as indicated in 2.1.3.3, there are different types of ELT curriculum and syllabus which are informed by and exemplify assumptions and theories about language teaching and learning.

As with systematic knowledge, the degree to which prescriptive knowledge forms a significant part of a teacher's overall teacher knowledge or is influential on their practice will depend on variables of circumstances – such as career history and teaching institution - and on a teacher's individual preferences in terms of the choices they make regarding the degree to which forms of prescriptive knowledge they allow to alter or influence their practice (such as those discussed below in 3.3.8).

### **3.3.7 Craft knowledge**

- Craft knowledge
- Personal Practical Knowledge
- Tacit knowledge
- Experiential learning
- Reflective Practice
- Classroom/Action Research
- Peer observations
- The approach of colleagues
- Knowledge of the teaching context and learners
- Teacher expertise

Kennedy's (2002) third category of teacher knowledge which is incorporated into the CF is craft knowledge. Craft knowledge (CK) - 'the wisdom of practice' (Leinhardt 1990) - generally refers to a form of 'practical', 'hands-on' knowledge arising from the accumulation of professional experience in a particular field. It is a form of experiential knowledge, often based on lessons learnt in everyday practice; for example, through the process of problem-solving, noticing 'what works', or doesn't, in particular teaching situations. As such, it may include a context-specific or subject-specific dimension, with a 'deep, sensitive, location-specific knowledge of teaching' (Leinhardt 1990: 18). It might be the type of informal knowledge encapsulated in teacher maxims or aphorisms (Richards 1996). It may be found in the experience and advice shared in staff meetings, which may have resonance for some teachers, and be adopted as advice, or equally it might be regarded as 'fragmentary, superstitious, and often inaccurate opinions' (Leinhardt 1990: 18), and be rejected. For some, craft knowledge is a 'form of professional expertise' (Kennedy 1987, cited in Grimmet & MacKinnon 1992: 393), which 'encompasses the wealth of teaching information that very skilled practitioners have about their own practice' (Leinhardt 1990: 18). However, if CK is something that grows and is accumulated, presumably, it is not only the preserve of experts, but is developed by novice teachers from the moment of their initial teaching experiences.

#### **3.3.7.1 Personal Practical Knowledge**

The characteristics noted above of craft knowledge have been described using other terms; for example, this type of experiential 'practical' knowledge has been referred to as a teacher's 'personal knowledge' (Clandinin & Connelly 1987; Kumaravadivelu 2012), or 'personal practical knowledge' (PPK) (Clandinin 1985). Hargreaves (1996) suggests that the personal, practical, professional knowledge of teachers was first generally acknowledged and

legitimised from the 1980s. These insights which ‘guide an individual teacher’s behavior’ represent his or her ‘personal knowledge base’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 443). Craft knowledge is often described in similar terms to PPK and the two terms often appear to be nearly synonymous. Craft knowledge shares with descriptions of PPK its individualised, personalised character; for a teacher, it is ‘highly determined and “colored” by his or her individual experiences, history, personality variables and so on’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 443). This variation in forms of CK amongst teachers is partly due to the fact that teachers might draw different conclusions from similar classroom experiences. This might be accounted for by the influence of the many factors in the following section ‘Factors personal to the teacher’.

### **3.3.7.2 Tacit knowledge**

A concept related to CK is ‘tacit knowledge’, generally understood as being the knowledge that ‘we know but cannot tell’ (Eraut 1994: 15), but which ‘underlies professionals’ real-time action’ (Urr 1992: 58). Since being introduced by Polanyi (1958) the term has acquired ‘a wide range of meanings’ (Eraut 2000: 118), and has remained for some ‘a concept without consistency or clear foundation’ (Gourlay 2002: 1). Despite differing interpretations amongst users of the term, tacit knowledge is generally defined and understood in contrast with ‘codified’, ‘explicit’ or ‘formal’ forms of knowledge (that is, systematic knowledge 3.3.5); as is CK and further associated concepts such as ‘non-formal learning’ and ‘implicit learning’ (Eraut 2000). Similarities with some descriptions of CK are evident in the following summary of tacit knowledge; it is a ‘non-linguistic non-numerical form of knowledge that is highly personal and context specific and deeply rooted in individual experiences, ideas, values and emotions’ (Gourlay 2002: 2). In some respects, the two concepts can appear interchangeable, apart from in cases where the references to ‘craft’ clearly relate more to towards profession-specific knowledge and the role of this knowledge (for example, in contrast to systematic knowledge), whereas tacit knowledge - in line with the general meaning of ‘tacit’ - refers to (largely) unspoken knowledge, and following Polanyi’s discussion of tacit knowledge focuses particularly on the cognitive process of this type of learning, with ‘craft’ referring more to the professional uniqueness of the knowledge.



### 3.3.7.3 Teacher expertise

Verloop *et al.* (2001) describe the knowledge base of teaching as comprising ‘all profession-related insights that are potentially relevant to the teacher’s activities’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 443), including those which ‘pertain to formal theories’, or the ‘classical theories from research on teaching’, but also includes the ‘information about the knowledge and beliefs of expert teachers’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 443) which has emerged from recent research. Teacher expertise was discussed in 3.2.4.2 in terms of the way experienced and knowledgeable, ‘expert’ teachers use theories in their practice.

Research on teacher expertise often contrasts the skills and knowledge of experts with those of ‘novice’ teachers, and furthermore distinguishes between ‘experienced’ (rather than novice), ‘expert’, and ‘experienced non-expert’ teachers (Johnson 2010; Farrell 2013). Perhaps the most recognisable characteristics of expertise - such as ‘efficiency, automaticity, effortlessness and fluidity’ (Tsui 2009: 422) - are those which might well be expected to be acquired as experience is accumulated. Further observations are that experts ‘reason more quickly’ and ‘with fewer errors than novices’ (Fox 1996: 26), and that expert knowledge is ‘elaborate’ and ‘rich’ (Tsui 2009: 436).

Moore (2004) examines different conceptions and discourses around the idea of the ‘good teacher’. An expert might, in addition to their own behaviours and knowledge, equally be judged on successful or unsuccessful outcomes, highlighted in recent discourses of ‘competency models’, or the view of a ‘competent craftsperson discourse of teaching and teacher education’ (Moore 2004: 4). Further conceptions of expertise appear in popular conceptions from wider society about what constitutes good teaching, what Bruner (1996) terms ‘folk pedagogy’, and Carr and Kemmis (1986) term ‘folk wisdom’, which might be made public in television, films or literature.

### 3.3.7.4 Further aspects and elements relating to Craft Knowledge: Experiential learning, Reflective Practice, Classroom/Action Research, Peer observations, the Approach of colleagues, and Knowledge of the teaching context and learners

Several further types and sources of knowledge which reflect aspects and elements of Craft knowledge are included in the CF.

With regard to the nature of the acquisition of craft knowledge, the process appears to mirror aspects of the changes associated with experiential learning and the reflective cycle of Kolb

(1984), and elements of Reflective Practice (discussed in 3.2.4.1.3), with an iterative cycle of reflection on experiences. In this regard the development of craft knowledge might also be further associated with such forms of teacher development as Classroom/Action Research, peer observations and the sharing of the expertise of the approach of colleagues (for example, in staff meetings).

A final type and source of knowledge included in the CF as a form of craft knowledge is the factor of a teacher's knowledge of the teaching context and of the learners found in that context. As with several other elements in the CF, such knowledge can be regarded as having overlapping features and interacting with other parts of the CF, in this case with the prescriptive knowledge.

### **3.3.8 Factors 'personal' to the teacher (which 'filter' other elements in the CF)**

- The 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975)
- Teachers' experiences of language learning
- Socialisation into the profession
- The professional knowledge context
- Teachers' beliefs
- Beliefs about language learning
- 'Sense of plausibility' (Prabhu 1990)
- Teachers' professional history/identity (teaching 'personality'/ style/motivations), values, and ideology.

#### **3.3.8.1 The 'apprenticeship of observation' (including experiences of language learning)**

A teacher's approach to their practice may be based on prior educational experiences. The term 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975/2002; Bailey *et al.* 1996) refers to a student's experience of hours of school and/or university classes and the accompanying 'protracted face-to-face and consequential interactions with established teachers' (Lortie 1975/2002: 61), observing and 'evaluating professionals in action' (Borg 2004). Teachers may draw conclusions from those experiences about teaching at the time or later on as they start teaching. This apprenticeship of observation has a 'special occupational effect on those who do move to the other side of the desk' (Lortie 1975/2002: 61) and, uniquely among the professions, pre-service teachers experience this period of observing those working in their chosen profession (Borg 2004). Both novice and experienced teachers appear to draw on this legacy of schooling experiences, rejecting those aspects of teaching which they did not like,

while adopting or adapting those they did like into their own practice. Certain aspects of schooling experiences might remain in teacher's practice in various forms, either as core values, approaches or techniques. However, Lortie (1975/2002) points out that there are 'limits' to the value of the experience of observation as a student. It provides only 'a partial view' of the work of the teacher as students are not aware of teachers' lesson aims, preparation and so on (Lortie 1975/2002). Rather, a teacher's performance is assessed on 'a wide variety of personal and student-oriented bases' (Lortie 1975/2002: 62). Furthermore, what is learnt through observation as a student is 'intuitive and imitative' rather than 'explicit and analytical' (Lortie 1975/2002: 62), and might represent a form of practice which remains unexamined. The experience of being a learner does, however, appear to be a significant formative experience for those who go on to teach, and does appear to have a degree of influence on teaching practice. As Borg (2004) suggests, the apprenticeship of observation provides those new to teaching with 'a powerful, albeit limited, intuitive understanding of teaching, which should not be underestimated' (Borg 2004: 275).

For ESOL teachers, their experience of language learning (and teaching) at school, in further education or informally - for example, while living abroad - is a particularly significant dimension of their apprenticeship of observation. It should be noted, too, that some (EL) teachers continue to study a foreign language, some with the particular aim of gaining insight into the experience of being a learner (for example, Campbell 1996). In terms of the various influences upon teachers' pre-service expectations and images of teachers and teaching, in addition to the school and higher education experiences discussed above, Moore (2004) adds the influence of representations of teachers in the media, such as films and TV, as well as public discourse about education.

### **3.3.8.2 Socialisation into the profession**

'Socialisation' refers to the process whereby 'the selves of participants tend to merge with the values and norms', 'attitudes' and 'orientations' of their chosen profession (Lortie 1975/2002: 56). Lortie makes the point that the degree of impact of this initial socialisation varies across professions and individuals, for example where the 'predispositions of newcomers' vary (Lortie 1975/2002: 56). Rather than a complete alignment with a profession's norms, a period of socialisation would rather involve a growing familiarity with particular attitudes, and so on. Pre-service education, initial teaching experiences and the process of socialisation interact and combine with teachers' existing conceptions of teaching such as the 'apprenticeship of

observation’ and further factors discussed in this section. One important factor regarding the change from these pre-existing perceptions to the adoption of professional norms and standards (through such processes as initial teacher training and socialisation) is that the degree of change may be limited if these pre-training beliefs are not taken into consideration in training courses and early-career professional development (Borg 2003).

### **3.3.8.3 The professional knowledge context**

One dimension of a teacher’s socialisation into the profession is their experience of what Clandinin and Connelly (1996) term the ‘professional knowledge context’. This refers to the knowledge which is common, valued or privileged in a particular teaching context. The professional knowledge context is influenced by positioning around the recognition or status accorded at particular times and places to various forms of knowledge and notions of professionalism. One example of this with regards to ESOL is the changing status of various teaching approaches or ELT methods, as discussed in 2.2. For the profession, the professional knowledge context is influential in the way it ‘shapes effective teaching’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1996: 24), or otherwise. For the individual teacher, the professional knowledge context equates to a significant source of knowledge and ideas about teaching which might influence their practice. The particular combination of knowledge and ideas might be determined by such factors as the geographical location of and type of teaching institution(s) where they work, and the ‘era’ in ELT history they work in. It might, furthermore, be influenced by the policy/contextual factors discussed in 2.1. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) summarise the way different forms of knowledge interact with contexts as ‘what teachers know, what knowledge is seen as essential for teaching, and who is warranted to produce knowledge about teaching’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1996: 24). This final point relates to the sources and producers of teacher knowledge, as discussed in Hargreaves’ (1996) distinction between two ‘paradigms of knowledge and how knowledge is used or generated by practitioners’ (Hargreaves 1996: 105).

### 3.3.8.4 Teachers' beliefs

As noted in previous sections, ESOL teachers come to the profession - as all teachers do - with beliefs, experience and knowledge regarding their future work, such as views regarding student and teacher roles or the aims of education. It has also been noted that these beliefs contribute to pre-service conceptions of what good teaching is, and that these ideas and beliefs may remain important post-training and possible throughout a teaching career.

In the literature and research on teacher learning and teacher knowledge during the 1980s the concept of 'teacher beliefs' gained more prominence (Borg 2006). Pajares' (1992) much-cited review article on the emerging field of research into teachers' beliefs lists the range of understandings of the term as it had been used in various studies:

attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy

Pajares 1992: 309.

With so many associated concepts, the construct of educational beliefs is 'broad and encompassing', and consequently can be 'difficult to operationalize' (Pajares 1992: 316). For example, 'teacher knowledge' (discussed above) and 'teacher beliefs' are sometimes regarded as similar constructs – and by some as 'inseparable' (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 446) - with an element of crossover, where certain 'components' of each construct become 'blurred' (Pajares 1992). A common - though 'perhaps artificial' - distinction drawn between these two terms is that belief is 'based on evaluation and judgment', whereas knowledge is 'based on objective fact' (Pajares 1992: 313). For some, teacher belief is viewed 'roughly as referring to personal values, attitudes, and ideologies', whereas 'teacher knowledge' is seen to relate to a teacher's 'more factual propositions' (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 446). Basturkman (2012) offers a further definition of the term 'teacher beliefs' as the 'evaluative propositions which teachers hold consciously or unconsciously' (Basturkman 2012: 282). Understood in these latter terms, beliefs are important as they are not inconsequential passively-held personal opinions, but rather are perceptions which 'provide a basis for action', and consequently greatly influence teachers' 'perceptions and judgements' (Pajares 1992) and affect decision-making (Basturkman 2012). This indicates the role of beliefs in contributing to 'personal theories' and understandings, either based on experience and knowledge, or other factors such as intuition, preferences or biases.

The importance of the factor of teacher beliefs with regards to the research focus lies in the way they appear to influence practice and knowledge, as suggested above. Addressing this issue, research on teachers' beliefs about language teaching has focused on the degree of correspondence between professed beliefs and actual practice, which has produced mixed findings (Borg 2006, Basturkman 2012, Farrell & Bennis 2013). Pajares (1992) concludes that professed beliefs can be an 'unreliable guide to the nature of reality' (Pajares 1992: 326). This is partly because, although there may be some evidence of correspondence between beliefs and practice, the strength and consistency in the manner in which beliefs are held is in doubt. Thompson (1992) suggests that beliefs can be held 'with various degrees of conviction' (Borg 2006: 27), and teachers may be open and relaxed about the existence of varying views on an issue. That is, teachers may hold beliefs which they 'accept as true', while also 'recognising that other teachers may hold alternative beliefs on the same issue' (Basturkman 2012: 282), and their beliefs may be provisionally held and open to change. Finally, beliefs can be 'primary' or 'subsidiary' in terms of their effect on practice (Borg 2006).

#### **3.3.8.5 Beliefs about language learning**

In addition to those beliefs which relate generally to all types of teaching and learning, ESOL teachers also have views which are 'subject-related', relating to the language learning-teaching process, and arising from their experiences and beliefs about second language learning. In the manner of the 'apprenticeship of learning' (Lortie 1975) - discussed above - ESOL teachers bring to the profession their pre-existing views on (second) language learning. That is, they bring the type of popular, widely-held, 'layperson' beliefs or 'theories' about second language learning which might also be held by many outwith the ELT/language learning profession. Some of these beliefs - or popular theories - are reflected in (elements of) ELT methods; for example, naturalistic types of language learning or the need for good models and repetition, and so on. Many ESOL teachers have experience of language learning themselves, either as English language learners themselves - as 'non-native' speaking (NNS) teachers - or as 'native' speakers (NS), who might have experience of second language learning at school, at university or while working in the global EFL industry abroad (each of the research interviewees mention at least one these experiences).

### **3.3.8.6 A sense of plausibility**

Prabhu's (1990) notion of a teacher's 'sense of plausibility' (discussed in 3.2.1) regarding which aspects - if any - of the knowledge-base individual teachers decide are worth adopting is relevant here, too, as an influence on the degree to which contact with systematic knowledge 'informs' or plays a part in their practice. Prabhu's (1990) notion of a teacher's 'sense of plausibility' is included in the CF under 'Personal factors' as it is viewed in this sense as a 'filter' on what role other forms and sources of knowledge from craft, systematic or prescriptive might play a role in teachers' practice.

### **3.3.8.7 Teachers' professional history/identity (teaching 'personality'/ style/motivations), values and ideology**

Several further 'filters' affecting which types and sources of teacher knowledge teachers adopt and 'use' - which might also be viewed as factors which influence a practitioner's 'general orientation' to the activity of teaching - are discussed in the following.

Teachers' personal practical knowledge and what constitutes their practice is influenced by and mediated through their professional identity and their professional history. This professional identity will include their teaching 'personality', teaching style and motivations. The process of developing a professional identity starts during initial teacher education and the first experiences of teaching, and is based on such factors as beliefs, values and personal understandings. It is constructed partly by the individual, but this process is also partly group-based and rooted in the collective school or college environment (Forde *et al.* 2006); it is 'socially negotiated, yet individually enacted' (Marsh 2002: 333). The 'social dimension of organisational life' impacts on teacher identity, including the influences of the 'school culture', and the norms and values of the profession (Forde *et al.* 2006), as discussed above in the sections on socialisation (3.3.8.2) and the professional knowledge context (3.3.8.3).

Wenger's (1998) study of 'communities of practice' includes an understanding of workplace learning as 'an experience of identity', because 'learning transforms who we are and what we can do' (Wenger 1998: 215), and it transforms identities. Wenger characterises the way teachers learn about their profession as a form of 'social participation', which entails a 'process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities' (Wenger 1998: 4).

As with the individual and collective or social character of teacher identity, so too are teachers' own values, ideology and politics often reflected in those of the profession. The

ideological underpinnings of global ELT and TESOL in the UK are discussed in section 2.2.2 and 4.1.10. They have been problematised from ‘critical’ perspectives, in the manner of aspects of mainstream education. For example, (as discussed in 2.2.2), aspects of ELT-TESOL have a strong political dimension - most notably in the rise of English as a means of global communication English, where the view that this is inevitable and generally ‘natural, neutral and beneficial’ (Pennycook 1994) has been critiqued; for example, by Phillipson (1992) and Canagarajah (1999), and from a ‘Critical Applied Linguistics’ perspective (Pennycook 1994). For teachers, this aspect of ideology is reflected, for example, in the daily choice of what ‘variety of English’ to choose to focus on with their learners – whether local dialects, ‘prestige’ registers, or a version of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins 2007) - and what information about language would be most useful for their students given their life situation and life-goals.

The backdrop of global ELT also contributes to the TESOL ‘policy culture’ (Considine 1994), which reflects the values and ideology of the profession in which teachers operate. This culture includes the factors discussed elsewhere in the dissertation regarding ESOL teachers’ training, socialisation, methods and teaching materials. TESOL UK can be understood as an example of an ‘internationalized’ teaching-learning setting, where the role played by the values and assumptions of teachers, learners and policy-makers are important. Pennycook (2001) views this issue of the socio-cultural assumptions (‘Western’ traditions of education) evident in much of the ELT materials and in teachers’ approaches as the ‘unexamined given’ (Pennycook 2001: 27) in ELT. These assumptions which become part of an educational culture are related to the socio-political context of the society involved, and the values and characteristics it esteems (Crookes 2009). To very briefly characterise this in TESOL UK, most - although not all - of the teachers in the study share a British education background, and arguably share some of the ideological underpinnings of current approaches to multilingual-multicultural classroom pedagogy in the UK, which can be identified in post-war mainstream educational traditions.

Given the inherent internationalised nature of ELT-TESOL-second language learning, AL has examined the role that teacher and student cultural-linguistic identities might play in adult language learning (Heller 2002). This focus has been mainly on the learners and their dispositions towards particular learning environments and their sensitivity to mismatches, or differences, in teaching-learning styles (Horwitz 1999, Block & Cameron 2002, Nault 2006). AL has also examined the impact of cultural and linguistic identity on inter-cultural



educational practices and focuses on what constitutes socially and culturally appropriate pedagogy for multi-language settings (Kramsch 1993, Holliday 1994, Pennycook 2001). This is most relevant to the current research project in terms of the way teachers develop appropriate pedagogies based on their 'teacher knowledge'.

## CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Overview of Chapter 4	94
<b>4.1 The research aims and overall design</b>	<b>94</b>
4.1.1 Introduction	94
4.1.2 Planning the research project	94
4.1.3 Paradigms and philosophical positions	95
4.1.4 Decisions for the researcher	96
4.1.5 Epistemology and ontology	97
4.1.5.1 Assumptions underpinning the research methodology	97
4.1.5.2 A 'critical realist' perspective	98
4.1.5.3 The interpretivist perspective	101
4.1.5.4 Hermeneutics	101
4.1.5.5 Phenomenology	104
4.1.6 A qualitative research framework	104
4.1.7 Reflexivity	106
4.1.8 Insider research	107
4.1.9 Post-structuralist and critical perspectives	107
4.1.10 Ideological drivers in TESOL	108
4.1.11 Validity, reliability, quality, trustworthiness and generalizability	110
4.1.12 Ethics	111
<b>4.2 Research methods</b>	<b>112</b>
4.2.1 The data collection method: the interview	112
4.2.1.1 The 'qualitative research interview'	113
4.2.1.2 The qualitative interview and the research methodology	114
4.2.1.3 Semi-structured interviews	115
4.2.1.4 ESOL teachers discussing language learning, ideas, theories, methods	116
4.2.1.5 Planning the interviews and developing the schedule	117
4.2.1.6 Using an interview schedule	118
4.2.1.7 Interventions, tactics and prompts	118
4.2.1.8 Research interview skills	119
4.2.2 Recruiting the sample	119
<b>4.3 Data Analysis</b>	<b>121</b>
4.3.1 Qualitative data analysis	121
4.3.2 The objectives of the data analysis	121
4.3.3 Interpretation of the data	122
4.3.3.1 Data analysis - 'Grounded Theory'	122
4.3.3.2 GT coding and early analysis	125
4.3.3.3 Further considerations for data-analysis	126
4.3.3.4 Data analysis – <i>Nvivo</i>	127
4.3.4 The Coding Process	128
4.3.4.1 'Pre-codes'	128
4.3.4.2 Memos	129
4.3.4.3 Considerations of language	130
4.3.4.4 Transcription	130

## Overview

Previous chapters outlined the concepts and theories relating to ESOL theory and practice. This chapter focuses the design of the research project, outlining and justifying aspects regarding:

- Philosophical assumptions and the epistemological and ontological stance
- Research methodology, methods and data-gathering instruments
- The study sample and the process of data-collection
- The data-analysis process
- The approach towards interpretation
- Ethics, validity, reliability.

## 4.1 The research aims and overall design

### 4.1.1 Introduction

As set out 1.1, the research project aims to gain a greater understanding of a central issue in educational practice, that of the role of theory in practice; in this case for teachers of ESOL. An exploration of the literature around the issue was undertaken in previous chapters to develop *a priori* knowledge about the issue. This theoretical analysis set out key concepts and established understandings of the issue, partly in the form of a conceptual framework (see 3.3). The empirical element of the research project involves the collection of primary data using interviews with ESOL teachers. This part of the research project aims to gather the accounts of practice with which to develop *a posteriori* knowledge regarding the research issue. One aim of social science is to ‘give some theoretical account of social life’, using data from empirical research combined with theory (Hughes 1990). In a similar manner, the research design of this project combines theoretical and empirical elements, acknowledging the value both of previous research and understandings, as well as the contribution which teachers can make towards developing an understanding of the research issue.

### 4.1.2 Planning the research project

When considering the design of a research project there is a range of philosophical positions a researcher might adopt. Important in informing decisions about which position (or positions) to adopt is the researcher’s expectations of what is possible and/or preferable to achieve in terms of generating new knowledge through research. There are further choices to be made

regarding methodology and research methods, sampling, and approaches to data analysis and ethical considerations. Additionally, running through all the parts of the research design is the question of what might be considered as ‘good’, valid, reliable or rigorous research. One fundamental element in strengthening the research design in this regard is to clearly state and examine the researcher’s assumptions, beliefs and decisions about the research approach and design. The following sections explain the decisions concerning the research design, assessing strengths and limitations in terms of ‘fit’ and suitability of approach, methodology and methods to achieve the research aims.

#### **4.1.3 Paradigms and philosophical positions**

A number of broad frameworks, or ‘paradigms’, such as positivist, post-positivist, ethnographic, constructivist or realist have been identified and discussed in the research literature (for example, Denzin & Lincoln 1998a, Lincoln & Guba 2000). Each framework incorporates various positions or beliefs regarding the epistemology, ontology, axiology and ideology which should inform and underpin a research approach and design. Debate concerning such research paradigms has been prominent in the social sciences in recent decades, variously taking the form of ‘paradigm dialogs’ (Guba 1990), ‘paradigm controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences’ (Lincoln & Guba 2000), ‘paradigm wars’ (Hammersley 1992), and ‘paradigm peace’ (Bryman 2006). While the descriptions of various paradigms, for example those represented in schemas such as Lincoln and Guba’s (2000), offer a useful reference point, as Solsken (1993) cautions, paradigm labels are ‘freeze-frames of stories that are already interpretations’, where the labels can ‘become abstract and reified, disconnected from the everyday world of doing research’ (Solsken 1993: 320). Lincoln and Guba (2000) themselves appear to recognise this potential danger, and provide a useful reminder of the importance of the researcher’s own perspectives, which might be influenced by the interests and approaches specific to their field. Methodology is ‘inevitably interwoven with and emerges from the nature of particular disciplines [...] and perspectives’ (Lincoln & Guba 2000: 164). In ELT-AL research there is a range of approaches and designs, although as Shohamy (2004) notes, the boundaries of the categories of research can be unclear in terms of characterising or giving labels to particular research designs. Perhaps reflecting this situation, several different research paradigms, traditions or approaches are drawn on in the research design for this project.

#### 4.1.4 Decisions for the researcher

Decisions about which framework(s) to adopt reflect the researcher's assumptions and beliefs about what should be regarded as appropriate, valid, or 'good' means of finding answers to research questions (Stone 2005). These assumptions and beliefs are informed by the researcher's world view, opinions, interests, preferences, experiences of research, and by their understanding and appreciation of the methodological options available in the field of research. To achieve the successful application of broader philosophical frameworks to a research design might, furthermore, involve a degree of creativity and skill. Finally, a measure of reflection and self-awareness regarding assumptions is advisable. Lather (2006) suggests that researchers recognize both the 'longing for and a wariness of an ontological and epistemological home' (Lather 2006: 40), given that the landscape of research methodologies is complex and shifting, and that the use of terminology and representations of research approaches can be inexact.

A related point is that, in the current social science research landscape, the frameworks identified by those such as Lincoln and Guba (2000) do not necessarily represent monolithic, rigid structures. As Loxley and Seery (2008) observe, 'we are confronted with a blurring of multiple boundaries which coalesce uneasily around issues such as power, epistemology, axiology and ontology' (Loxley & Seery 2008: 15). Denzin and Lincoln's (2000b) notion and metaphor of the researcher as 'bricoleur' is useful here, both in highlighting the existence of a range of options as being available to the researcher, as well as in suggesting the possibility that a researcher might adopt and adapt various approaches within one research project.

Lincoln and Guba (2000), furthermore, suggest that the 'incorporation of multiple perspectives', and the practice of 'borrowing or *bricolage*' in the adoption of perspectives from the various paradigms can be 'useful' and 'richness enhancing' (Lincoln & Guba 2000). In the following sections, I describe my research approach with reference to various perspectives. The following account includes reference to several paradigms associated with qualitative research approaches: critical realist, post-structuralist, ethnographic, constructivist, hermeneutic, and interpretivist. Following Lather (2006), from a personal viewpoint, in the process of planning my research project and in attempting to articulate my own philosophical positions, my views have altered and developed. This is partly due to a developing understanding of the complexity of the task of borrow identifying one's own position and of characterising research in terms of the research literature.

## **4.1.5 Epistemology and ontology**

### **4.1.5.1 Assumptions underpinning the research methodology**

Seidman (1998) advises researchers that when approaching research they should consider the:

underlying assumptions about the nature of reality, the relationship of the knower and the known, the possibility of objectivity, the possibility of generalization

Seidman 1998: 2.

A number of assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and the possibilities of understanding social phenomena underpin the research approach and design. One such set of assumptions relate to the belief that it is possible to collect accounts of educational practice (interview data) which reflect, to some extent, the ‘reality’ of the professional lives of teachers. The research design involved collecting accounts of TESOL practice by conducting interviews with eight - mostly experienced (mid-career) - ESOL teachers in a UK FE college, and asking them about the ideas and theories which they use in their lessons. The interviews were conducted by the researcher, who is also an ESOL teacher in the same FE college. The accounts of practice consist of teachers describing the role played by ideas and theories about ELT in their classroom teaching.

It is assumed that these accounts reflect aspects of the everyday ‘social reality’ of teaching ESOL known to the research subjects, the researcher and other current ESOL-ELT practitioners in the wider profession. This ‘social reality’ is evident in those aspects of social life that teachers encounter in their working environment, including daily contact with students, the process of planning lessons, using teaching materials, communicating with colleagues, conducting assessments, and so on. These events and experiences arise out the forms in which the practice of ESOL is structured and organised. This structuring and organising operates on a number of levels, local and global, and at a classroom or institutional level, and has developed over time to arrive at its particular current character, or ‘historical situatedness’, as discussed in terms of MacIntyre’s understanding of ‘social practices’ in 3.1.2. Chapter 2.1 outlined the policy context and the manner in which it describes and frames the practice of ESOL teachers in Scottish FE colleges, for example regarding SQA requirements and expectations of teaching approaches for the ESOL curriculum. Section 2.2 describes the

influences of (global) ELT and understandings of ‘best practice’ on the practice of ESOL teachers.

#### **4.1.5.2 A ‘critical realist’ perspective**

The understanding underpinning the analysis of ESOL in previous chapters is that there is an ‘objectively real’ (though transient, due to changes in circumstances) practice of teaching of ESOL, arising out of what Patomaki and Wight (2000) outline in ‘critical realist’ terms as ‘underlying structures, powers, and tendencies’ (Patomaki & Wight 2000: 223). There is ‘an underlying reality’, which ‘provides the possibility for actual events and perceived and/or experienced phenomena’ (Patomaki & Wight 2000: 223), such as the professional tasks, the physical environment and experiences listed above. Such a view reflects a fundamental principle of a realist ontological perspective, which asserts that there is an ‘independently existing reality that is the object of knowledge’ (Moore 2007: 38), which for this research project forms the basis and boundaries of what can be known about the professional practices of ESOL educators. ESOL practices are the object of the study, the ‘properties of which provide objective limits to how we can know it’ (Moore 2007: 38), in terms of a realist ontology. This practice represents a tangible and real basis for a focus of study and research. Lincoln and Guba (2000) categorise ‘Critical Realism’ (CR) as falling within the ‘postpositivism’ paradigm in their five-paradigm schema (the others being Positivism, Critical Theory, Constructivism and Participatory). There is, however, disagreement regarding the exact distinctions between positivist and ‘post-positivist’ paradigms (Hayes 1993), and regarding to what degree CR is post-positivist (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006). The notion of the existence of a ‘real’ concrete world and an associated belief in the possibility of ascertaining ‘objective’ facts about that world is more commonly associated with a positivist ontology and epistemology. The claims for research from a critical realist perspective are not so strong, and are qualified in several ways; notably, that there is an expectation of ‘probable’ approximations of reality and also there is an emphasis on context, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

Critical Realism, while not necessarily classified as a research paradigm might be described as a ‘position within the philosophy of science and social science’ (Patomaki & Wight 2000: 215). Its ontology, as outlined above, is one where there is a ‘real’ reality, but one which is ‘only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable’ (Lincoln & Guba 2000: 168). With regards to this research project, the analysis of the role of theory in practice and the

description of types and sources of teacher knowledge relevant to ESOL teachers (in Chapter 3) are believed to be reasonable and plausible, and will be recognisable to fellow practitioners to some degree. However, they are understandings which others with experience in ESOL will have differing perspectives on, for example regarding views about possible additions or perceived irrelevances. The analysis in Chapter 3 then is, in these respects, partial and formed through the critical perspective of the researcher, rather than an unconditional description of reality. The analysis is, furthermore, transient and closely aligned to the situatedness and ‘reality’ of the particular circumstances involved in this research project, and is, therefore, unlikely to be repeated completely or replicated exactly. Similar assumptions apply with regard to the empirical element of the research project. It is believed that the interview data includes reports of real events and experiences of ESOL teachers as they occur in the circumstances of this research project. However, again, the accounts of practice are communicated by ESOL teachers with all the filters of memory and challenges of expressing events and opinions in language to be expected from such interview situations (issues around the research interview are discussed 4.2 below). A further condition on claims of reality is that the interview data will be interpreted and critically analysed by the researcher, without any attempt at corroboration or verification of the analysis.

There may appear to be contradictions inherent in the idea of a ‘critical realist’ position characterised as part of a post-positivist paradigm, and which combines realist, post-positivist and critical perspectives. Cooper (1997) suggests that the critical and post-positivist paradigms ‘share some ontological and epistemological assumptions’, including ‘the emphasis on context-dependent generalizations’ (Cooper 1997: 558). However, ‘in contrast to post-positivism, the critical paradigm does not strive for context-dependent generalizations but rather for more informed, sophisticated, and historically dependent constructions’ (Cooper 1997: 558). This approach is reflected in the decision to include reference to the broader context of ELT-ESOL (in policy contexts 2.1 and recent ELT history 2.2), which illustrates features of (global) ELT relevant to and evident in ESOL in FE college practices.

In terms of producing understandings, critical realism is ‘a form of materialism’, as it views knowledge production as relating fundamentally to ‘structures of collective human organization’ (Moore 2007: 30). With regard to discussing and communicating aspects of ESOL practice, a further understanding is that this practice can be discussed and referred to with some degree of shared understanding by research subjects and the researcher. Meaning-



making between colleagues and discussions of practice are made more possible by their shared working environment and context, which can be referred to in discussions of practice. This is a reflection of the broader structure of ESOL-ELT, where similar practices exist in terms of teacher education, curriculum and methodology (as discussed in 2.2.2) across the profession. Arising out of this shared context, there are a number of generally understood terms/concepts, shared experiences and understandings related to the profession of ELT (and perhaps teaching in general), which have developed over some time through workplace associations and professional discourse. These circumstances are significant in terms of the research design as it means that these terms will be potentially useful in enhancing understandings amongst the teachers-research participants and myself as the researcher/interpreter. The shared terms, concepts and understandings represent 'usable concepts', for example, in the process of coding and data analysis. Furthermore, it affords the possibility for the researcher of gaining understandings that are closer to the reality of everyday ESOL practice than merely the research subjects' representations of their experience.

Given a number of factors, such as the 'insider researcher' (discussed in 4.1.8) knowledge of the research context, the conceptual work conducted *a priori*, a rigorous research design and the above description of the 'reality' of ESOL, claims about the researcher's meaning-making regarding the research focus move beyond the status of the transitive, contingent and subjective. It is, rather, possible for the researcher to 'obtain knowledge of a reality that is separate from our representations of it' (Cruickshank 2003b: 1). This is in contrast, for example, with a concern for 'experience, subjectivity and identity', concerns characteristic of constructivism (Moore 2007: 30).

Although researchers with a realist ontology might understand that 'observations are influenced by personal pre-dispositions and history', those observations are still regarded as valuable, as they are 'not so completely determined by individual bias that it is useless to discuss them with other people' (Hayes 1993: 310). The epistemology of critical realism might be termed as 'modified objectivist', following the critical tradition, where findings are regarded as 'probably true' (Lincoln & Guba 2000: 165), given the qualifications of context and particular circumstances.

To summarise, of interest to the research focus is an exploration of the social reality of practices of ESOL, and an examination of this issue from the reflexive-critical perspective (as discussed below) of an ESOL practitioner-researcher, with further perspectives provided through interviews with fellow practitioners. The focus is on what Corson (1997), writing from

critical realist perspective, refers to as ‘the real world of human social interaction’ (Corson 1997: 168).

#### **4.1.5.3 The interpretivist perspective**

The research project falls within the scope of the interpretivist paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (1998b) assert that ‘all research is interpretive’ as it is always based on a particular set of beliefs and understandings of ontology and epistemology. Hughes (1990) describes an interpretative approach as ‘grounded in the imaginative recreation of the experience of others’ (Hughes 1990: 90); that is, where the researcher is not able to discover an objective external reality, but is able to examine the social world around them, and to attempt to gain some degree of understanding using their own and others’ conceptual tools. In the case of this research design, it is a ‘person-centred’ approach, combining the researcher, research participants, and old and new knowledge, with the aim of shedding light on the research focus, and where the contributions from the research subjects jointly produce knowledge with the researcher.

Within the interpretivist tradition, or paradigm, there is a range of approaches. Schwandt (2000) distinguishes between a ‘classical’ form of interpretivism, where the interpreter is ‘external’ to the process of interpretation (Schwandt 2000), and ‘philosophical hermeneutics’, which has ‘a non-objectivist view of meaning’, and where ‘meaning is negotiated mutually in the act of interpretation’; it is not ‘simply discovered’ (Schwandt 2000: 195). This latter form of interpretivism operates in a similar manner to some constructivists, but meaning is ‘negotiated’ rather than ‘constructed’ or ‘created/assembled’ (Schwandt 2000). In some forms of interpretivism the interpreter is ‘external’ to the process of interpretation (Schwandt 2000). I view my approach as tending towards this latter approach.

#### **4.1.5.4 Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics has taken various forms along its history, including as a ‘theory of textual interpretation’, a methodology of finding meaning with an interest in making interpretation more ‘scientific’, and - under the influence of Gadamer - a ‘dialogic, practical, situated activity’ of understanding social phenomena’ (Malpas 2015: 2.2). Hermeneutic approaches have a ‘subjectivist ontology and epistemology’ (Smyth & Holian 2008: 35), which would align with the notion of ‘insider researchers’ (discussed below in 4.1.8) and their position to ‘offer a unique perspective because of their knowledge of the culture, history and actors

involved' (Smyth & Holian 2008: 36). With further regard to the research design of this project, hermeneutic approaches are closely associated with qualitative research approaches (discussed below in 4.1.6), although such associations and influences are not always made explicit (Kinsella 2006). This is possibly because the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutics and the qualitative research 'paradigm' are often closely aligned, for example in their interest and focus on interpretation, understanding and meaning, and rejection of the goal of discovering the objective (Kinsella 2006). Hermeneutics is, furthermore, relevant to the research project given its approach towards analysing and interpreting qualitative data, with a particular focus on meaning and on achieving a degree of coherence in meaning amongst many potentially confusing items (Kinsella 2006). This is a useful approach for this research design, for example, given the complex range of factors relating to the research focus set out in earlier chapters. A further characteristic of hermeneutics which is useful to the research design is its recognition of the importance of the experience of the subject, and of the historical and of context; all of which are factors which have been identified in previous chapters as important in this research project. With regard to the general tendency towards 'subjective prejudice' in research, which might appear inevitable given the manner in which experiences effect people differently, Malpas (2015) views Gadamer as attempting to 'retrieve a positive conception of prejudice' (Malpas 2015: 3.1), where Gadamer views 'prior involvement', 'partiality', and 'situatedness' as enabling in the aim of understanding rather than as a 'barrier' (Malpas 2015: 2.2). Gadamer aimed to show that prejudices not only 'need not distort but can actually be fruitful as well as being, in any case, simply unavoidable - in all understanding' (Dunne 1993: 109). Prejudice or 'fore-judgement', involves identifying or uncovering assumptions and the tacit beliefs behind claims, and is thus a 'neutral' rather than negative in meaning (Barthold 2012: 3b). With regard to the focus on the historical and contextual - recurring themes in the research project - hermeneutics recognises that understanding 'always occurs against the background of our prior involvement', our 'history' (Malpas 2015: 3.2). This relates again to Gadamer's concept of prejudice, where 'anticipated meanings' (Malpas 2015) - in the case of this research project, based on factors such as the knowledge and experience of the researcher - are regarded as useful rather than as a barrier to understanding and interpretation. The process of identifying what is significant and worthy of attention is influenced by the 'values and perspectives' of those involved in the researcher's field (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000), which might lead to such 'interpretational dynamics' as those involved in this research project, where the researcher interprets on a number of levels

involving professional and research experience, positioning, and reading of relevant literature. Indeed, the hermeneutical tradition ‘puts the politics of interpretation at centre stage’ (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000: 288), and requires the ‘social and historical situating of interpreter and text’ (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000: 288). Finally, in addition to interpretation, hermeneutics places importance on the communication of meaning. The ‘hermeneutic act of interpretation’ involves ‘making sense of what has been observed’ in a manner which ‘communicates understanding’ (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000: 285). Again, this relates to this whole research project, including the selection and prioritisation of concepts, interests, interpretations and conclusions.

The set of ontological and epistemological assumptions offered by interpretivism and hermeneutics provide some qualification to the above claims regarding the ‘social reality’ of the research focus; that is, regarding the analysis of ESOL teachers’ professional lives and the nature of the knowledge produced in the research project. These qualifications relate particularly to the nature of the empirical data from the interviews and the interpretation of this data, where a number of ‘realities’ are present. The accounts of practice provided during interviews include combinations of recollections of real events, articulations of long-held opinions, and ad-hoc formulations of ideas. The activity of teaching - as any complex social event - is difficult to capture and recreate in words, and the interpretive lens of the researcher further filters away many of the original and intended meanings of the research subject. Consequently, the ‘social reality’ - referred to above in 4.1.5.1 - which is finally captured by the researcher and presented to the reader is in this regard a shared, jointly-constructed, partial one, and achieved through the researcher’s interpretation.

In addition to allowing the researcher to develop meaning from research data, research underpinned by an interpretive framework allows understandings from research to be communicated to the wider profession or research community. It is assumed that the accounts of practice from the research interviews can be analysed and understood by the researcher and related to broader issues of practice. That is, in terms of generalisability, the issues and experiences in this project are believed to occur in other teaching contexts in the wider profession. Finally, in terms of professional discourse, it is only possible for issues around theory and practice in TESOL to be discussed and meanings understood because there is a community of people with shared understanding of the language used, which arises from their experience of the reality on which that language is based. The shared professional

understanding between the researcher and research subjects, due to the shared working environment, is discussed below in 4.1.6 in terms of it contributing an ‘ethnographic’ element to the research design.

#### **4.1.5.5 Phenomenology**

A further philosophical tradition, that of phenomenology, has also been influential in qualitative research in education (King & Horrocks 2010), and the use of phenomenological description has been prominent in qualitative research in general (Kvale 1996).

Phenomenology’s interest in the ‘direct exploration of the world of lived experience’ (King & Horrocks 2010: 179) aligns it with qualitative approaches and the ‘qualitative research interview’ as a research method (discussed below in 4.2.1.1). Regarding the research interview, there are a number of specific techniques, and especially means for analysing data, associated with phenomenological approaches, many of which have a focus on arriving at a detailed understanding of the experiences of the research subjects, often through examination of texts (King & Horrocks 2010). Fundamental to the phenomenological approach is the goal of ‘understanding social phenomena from the actors’ own perspectives, describing the world as experienced by the subjects, and with the assumption that reality is ‘what people perceive it to be’ (Kvale 1996: 52). My own approach diverges from a phenomenological one regarding the degree to which this research project aims to understand researcher subjects’ accounts, as my research approach is rather more centred on my own interpretation as the researcher.

#### **4.1.6 A qualitative research framework**

The research design - including the methods for data-collection and data-analysis - operates in a qualitative framework.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000b) state that qualitative researchers:

...study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them

Denzin & Lincoln 2000b: 3.

This statement captures central features of a qualitative research methodology. The term ‘natural settings’ contrasts with a more traditional context of research, ‘laboratory settings’, associated with paradigms from the natural sciences, a positivist approach and quantitative

methods. This research project is not concerned with ‘measuring’ phenomena in the positivist tradition. The setting for the data-collection is the ESOL department at the teaching institution where the research subjects and the researcher work. The research setting is ‘natural’ in the sense of it being the place where the activities researched take place, but not so in the ethnographic sense, where subjects or participants are studied as they conduct their everyday activities. The research design does share certain characteristics with an ethnographic research approach, for example in its attempt to understand social phenomena in the place it occurs; in the ethnographic tradition of conducting research in the habitual environment of research subjects (Eisenhart 1988). However, the aim is not an ethnographic one of providing descriptions for ‘discovering cultural meaning’ (Janesick 1998).

The main ethnographic element in this research design is that of the researcher’s knowledge of a particular context (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). I have worked in an FE college for nine years, teaching in the same ESOL department as the teaching colleagues who are the research subjects in this project. We teach the same courses to similar groups of students, under the same conditions and in the same classrooms. We have similar experiences of the ELT sector and what might be termed its ‘local-global’ professional culture (as discussed in 2.2.2). That is, many of the teachers interviewed and I taught in countries other than the UK, gaining experience in teaching EFL in private language schools abroad, before arriving in the FE sector, as mid-career ELT professionals.

A number of local conditions are shared by the interviewees and the researcher. We are all either part-time or full-time ESOL teachers at the same FE college, with one interviewee a manager who also teaches. Teachers who were interviewed teach a range of levels, from ‘beginners’ to ‘higher’, and also some teach ‘exam preparation’ classes and specialist courses (for example, *English for Tourism* or *Higher ESOL*). The classes take place at various sites of the college, in ESOL department classrooms, with numbers of a maximum of 20 adult students per class. The current student population accords with descriptions in 2.1.2, where there is a mix of nationalities, short and long-stay economic migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and ‘language tourists’. The broader professional perspective which teachers share is that of global ELT and the phenomena of English as a ‘world language’. Global ELT is a translingual, transcultural and transnational, and following differing views either an ‘educational enterprise’ or a ‘global business’.

One final aspect of the ‘ethnographic’ dimension of the research project relates to the particular research focus on ELT theories and practice. I share with the interviewees a similar initial and in-service teacher education and exposure to ideas about ELT-AL teaching and learning theories. These similarities relate to the types and levels of qualification, with most having the ‘entry-level’ CELTA or equivalent, and also the post-service DELTA (see table below). This means that we share a certain familiarity with the ELT knowledge-base as it is presented in training programmes. While this does not mean that we share the same opinions or positions on issues of methodology, it is useful during interview discussions to have shared understandings of ELT terminology and so on. Furthermore, we share reservations, uncertainties and recognise the unresolved dilemmas relating to the research issue of theory in practice, and the complications in making judgements about what might constitute ‘appropriate pedagogy’ (discussed in 2.1.3.4). We share an appreciation of the ‘ambiguities’ around theory and methodology in ELT, and the opaqueness of the role of theory in ELT practice. A further point regarding qualitative researchers is that they ‘accept the fact that research is ideologically driven. There is ‘no value-free or bias-free design’ (Janesick 2000: 385). The issue of ideological drivers in research context of UK TESOL is addressed in the following section.

#### **4.1.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is where:

investigators seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical and geographical situatedness, their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to the work

Gergen & Gergen 2000: 1027.

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) suggest that reflexive research involves ‘careful interpretation and reflection’. This reflection will, furthermore, be included as part of the account of the research process. Sikes and Potts (2008b) suggest that from the mid-1980s there has been an ‘auto/biographical turn’ within the social sciences, since which time researchers ‘almost routinely include a declaration of positionality in their research writings’ (Sikes & Potts 2008b: 3), because it is believed this will have some influence on chosen methods, methodologies and interpretations of data, and is therefore important. Many issues regarding my own ‘positionality’ in this research project relate to my role as ‘an insider researcher’, as discussed below.

#### **4.1.8 Insider research**

Sikes and Potts (2008b) suggest that the conducting ‘insider research’ can bring both benefits and drawbacks. Insider researchers can ‘offer a unique perspective because of their knowledge of the culture, history and actors involved’ (Smyth & Holian 2008: 36). The ‘insider researcher’ can bring a degree of expertise and an understanding of the field. In my case, I share with the research subjects a similar teacher education, professional experience, and a familiarity with the TESOL ‘knowledge base’. My understanding and knowledge is to some extent ‘generic’ to TESOL and similar to that of other practitioners, such as subject-knowledge or key concepts of the field, but this understanding is also in part idiosyncratic and personal, arising for example from particular career experiences, professional interests, as well as beliefs about the subject. My personal knowledge and experience of ESOL bears on the research process as a significant factor in terms of the research design and methodological approach. For example, in the data-collection process, during interviews, some advantage will be gained by my understanding of research subjects’ use of professional terminology. On the other hand, my own prejudices and opinions might influence my responses to subjects’ views, my choices of points of interest, and so on, for example, during interviews. The skills of a researcher interviewer (discussed below in 4.2.1.6) will be relevant in ensuring that the shared knowledge and understandings of the researcher and subjects are used advantageously. A further potential drawback associated with the role of insider researcher is the need to deal with the complexities and ethical dilemmas which arise from researching colleagues in the shared workplace context (Drake & Heath 2008). My role as an insider researcher is an integral feature in the qualitative-interpretative research framework, and in the empirical element of the research design. In the process of data-gathering, analysis and interpretation of data, the researcher’s own assumptions and perceptions will play a significant role (Sikes & Potts 2008b).

#### **4.1.9 Post-structuralist and critical perspectives**

Contextual factors - such as the historic social factors shaping the current ‘state of nature’ of TESOL - are a further consideration when describing the ‘social world’ in which the research issue is framed. Issues of power and influence count as further complicating factors in the ‘social reality’ of the sector of ELT, which have been discussed above, in previous chapters and below in 4.1.10. Post-structuralist perspectives can serve to add to the critical realist (4.1.5.2) and interpretivist (4.1.5.3) perspectives outlined above in providing a more complete



picture of the research context, and to add layers of complexity to the attempt to answer the research question.

Hughes (1990) summarises the contribution of post-structuralist theories. They decentre the subject to:

overcome subjectivity and individualism by rejecting any form of empiricist epistemology in favour of an analysis of the structural relations and realities underlying the surface appearances of social and cultural phenomena

Hughes 1990: 111.

Following the interpretive framework outlined above, the aim is not to reject the ‘subjective’, insider researcher aspect of the research design. However, especially given the influence on the research issue of the complex, political nature of the role of English in the world and the peculiar history of ELT (as discussed in 2.2), it is useful to analyse the ‘historically situated’ context of the research issue. Charmaz (2000), for example, states the ‘importance of situating qualitative research in historical and cultural context’ (Charmaz 2000: 528). As Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) note, the ‘social and historical situating of interpreter and text’ is necessary and difficult (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000: 288). In terms of the present discussion of the research design, these social, cultural, attitudinal and ‘political’ factors are important in contributing towards the development of collective understandings amongst ESOL practitioners. These shared experiences and understandings might be regarded as contributing towards a particular professional ‘culture’ within the ‘community of practice’ of TESOL. This TESOL professional culture includes shared understandings of various aspects of practice, such as classroom techniques, routines or approaches; aspects of practice which will likely arise during the research interviews. Attempts have been made throughout the dissertation to characterise the nature of current ESOL practice through the analysis of the policy context in 2.1, the context the recent history of ELT in 2.2 and discussions of teacher knowledge and the role of theory in ELT-ESOL in Chapter 3.

#### **4.1.10 Ideological drivers in TESOL**

The prime concern for ESOL teachers is what to teach and how. Considerations regarding this question include what is best for students (for example, in terms of life-goals, motivations or gaining qualifications), the requirements of a teacher’s employment (for example, the college’s policies and curriculum objectives), and what best aligns with a teacher’s own philosophy of education; including views of their responsibilities and beliefs about teaching

and learning (as discussed in 3.3.8). Some of the decisions about what and how to teach are taken through, for example, policy guidelines, institutions' management or assigned curricula, but in many contexts a number of decisions remain for the teacher. Major considerations for ESOL teachers include how second languages are best learned, what aspects of English should be focused on, and how learning should proceed, in terms of interactions, representations of the language, roles of student and teacher. These considerations are all influenced by the international, multilingual and multicultural nature of the TESOL sector, where classrooms incorporate a range of languages and nationalities (Singh & Doherty 2004). Consequently, teachers draw not only on theories about language learning pedagogy, but also socio-cultural theories and ideas about human interaction (Johnson 2006).

The notion of 'appropriate methodology' (Holliday 1994) in many respects encapsulates the dilemmas faced by the field (AL), profession (ELT-ESOL), and the individual teacher in addressing these overarching concerns of what to teach and how to teach it (issues addressed in 2.2). Holliday's book particularly addressed the intercultural dimension of ELT, describing incidents of 'clashes' between Western 'centre' teaching methods (such as 'CLT methodology') and the sometimes differing expectations of the non-English speaking student population. The notion of appropriate methodology also implies the need to address the issue of the varying requirements of the ELT student population and what is 'best' for them, whether in terms of learning goals or differing approaches to learning English. Finally, Holliday's book also prompted a questioning of the degree to which the issues he raised were appreciated by the ELT 'centre' in its production of methodology and materials.

In what might be seen as a number of moves away from what Phillipson (1992) characterised as 'Linguistic Imperialism', provoking much subsequent debate (Block 2012), there has been a certain 'decentring' of ELT away from the 'centre', 'native-speaker' model and the 'monolingual bias' (Mahboob 2010b) in TESOL and AL. This decentring process has included an increased recognition of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, a move towards multilingualism as an educational goal (Kirkpatrick 2008), and a re-evaluation of the 'standard English' model used by ELT (Jenkins 2007). On the other hand, some underlying factors continue to support the earlier, 'traditional', 'centre' model of ELT; not least the continuing strength of English as a global language for business, science and education, and the continuing influence of the centre in terms of economic and cultural power, with the continuing export of culture and values with the language (Block *et al.* 2012), evidenced for example, in the continued widespread export ELT coursebooks (Gray 2012).

Given this backdrop - as discussed in previous chapters - a teacher's ideological stance (Pennycook 2001), personal values, and the shared values of the profession at a particular time (Crookes 2009) all play a role in a teacher's practice. The social, cultural and political context in which teaching operates might further influence what a teacher views as constituting socially and culturally appropriate pedagogy for multi-language settings. For example, Gray (2012) sees a 'neoliberal' landscape in ELT resulting in a situation where 'for many teachers in a range of ELT contexts' teaching is an 'essentially apolitical activity in which the only goal is getting students motivated' (Gray 2012: 106). This hints at the strongly commercial element which exists in some sectors of ELT, where teachers are regarded as service providers, rather than educators.

As well as the importance of the current working environment, significant too, in terms of the ideological outlook and standpoint of ESOL teachers, is their own philosophical perspective on education. Relevant in this regard is the role played by the values and assumptions inherent in Western traditions of education, since many of the ESOL teachers in the UK - and in the research project - have experienced that educational tradition. This is of particular significance given the internationalised nature of TESOL, where all those involved in the educational process may not share the same assumptions and expectations of what education is, or should be. The recognition in the above discussion of the importance of ideological factors in understanding educational research is part of the interpretive, postmodern, 'critical' turn (Lincoln & Guba 2000), part of which includes the notion of reflexivity, discussed in the following section.

#### **4.1.11 Validity, reliability, quality, trustworthiness and generalizability**

The criteria for validity and reliability - concepts more often associated with quantitative research methodologies - in the case of qualitative research, relate to understandings of what is fit for purpose, and to what are regarded as 'characteristics of good research' (Arksey & Knight 1999). A prime aim is that of 'making the study credible' (Rubin & Rubin 1995), which can be achieved, suggest Rubin and Rubin (1995), by ensuring transparency, consistency-coherence, and communicability. One example of transparency is that of making issues of interpretation clear (Seidman 1998). Validity in qualitative research relates to 'description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description', and to the question, 'is the explanation credible?' (Janesick 2000: 393). To improve validity, Kvale

(1996) suggests ‘craftsmanship’, Guba and Lincoln (1998) ‘trustworthiness’, and for Seidman (1998) an ‘understanding’ and ‘respect’ for the terms in which the research is described.

As outlined above in 4.1.5.3, the interpretive research perspective in this study is non-objective. However, to produce credible insider research, there needs to be ‘an explicit awareness of the possible effects of perceived bias on data collection and analysis’ (Smyth & Holian 2008: 39). The task of capturing, describing, analysing and accounting for the realities of practice challenge, and perhaps compromise, the above claims regarding the commonplace existence of constructed, shared realities of teachers’ lives. The challenge posed by this requires some complexity of treatment. What Dunne (1993) calls ‘an intuitive sense of the nature and texture of practical engagement’ (Dunne 1993: 8) might contribute to this, especially in the interpretation of teachers’ accounts of practice. Regarding the applicability of applied research, Bridges (2003) points to the fact that there are ‘dimensions of the scale of applicability’, which include social scope, immediacy of take-up, duration, scale of influence and value (Bridges 2003). Bridges, furthermore, cautions that different experiences of research can leave us with varying amounts of work still to do to fully understand or interpret the ‘implications for practice’ (Bridges 2003).

#### **4.1.12 Ethics**

In some respects, the research design might appear relatively free of ethical dilemmas, involving simply the goodwill of a number of colleagues in finding a little time for a discussion about their practice and an honest evaluation of their interview data. Punch (1998) identifies a ‘pragmatic’ tradition in qualitative researchers, which might accord with this view. The qualitative perspective of the research aims and design (including the research setting) place me as my own research instrument in determining the ‘nature of the interaction’ with those researched (Punch 1998). Furthermore, given my role as the sole, self-funded researcher, in many respects, I am primarily accountable to myself for my own conduct and approach. However, conducting research – and the research context – is more complex than this initial characterisation, on a number of levels. For this research project, a number of ‘official gate-keeping’ processes have been followed to reach the position of conducting interviews: the approval of teacher managers at my college, the Ethics Committee approval process of the University of Glasgow (for example, the use of informed consent, see *Appendix 4: Consent Form*), and the dissertation supervision process. A final stage was to obtain the informed

consent of teacher-colleagues to participate in the research as research subjects. Seidman (1998) sets out issues related to informed consent: risks and vulnerability, the right to participate or not, rights of review and withdrawal from the process, and dissemination (Seidman 1998). There is also a need to ‘allow for the possibility of recurring ethical dilemmas and problems in the field’ (Janesick 2000: 385). Fundamental questions researchers should consider are summarised as follows, ‘research for whom, by whom, and to what end’ (Seidman 1998).

## **4.2 Research methods**

### **4.2.1 The data collection method: the interview**

The research methods for the empirical data-collection involved conducting eight interviews with ESOL teachers at a UK FE College, and asking them the same questions. The decision to add an ‘empirical’ element of data-collection using interviews to the research design arose from a combination of factors. Firstly, while consulting the literature and using my own experiences in ELT-ESOL could provide some answers to the research questions, the focus of research itself suggested that interviewing other ESOL teachers could also be productive. Their views and experiences could add to my experience and understandings about the issue, and potentially produce new knowledge and understandings which would contribute to the research project. Conducting interviews provided a means to gain new insights into the issue, to challenge my own understandings and to consider the question beyond my own attempts, as represented in Chapters 1-3. A further consideration was that conducting interviews was a practicable option, given my role as a teacher at the college, and given the willingness on the part of members of college staff to participate. I was aware that the decision to interview teachers on the role of theory in their practice, in addition to the potential gains, might also in some respects be a risk as it is a difficult topic to discuss directly, and it could be difficult to discuss theories at length or in detail. These problems were resolved through the approach to interviews and the development of the interview schedule, as discussed below.

#### 4.2.1.1 The ‘qualitative research interview’

The interview was chosen as the research method with which to elicit teachers’ experiences and views regarding the role of theories in their practice. The qualitative research interview (QRI) is a ‘prominent research method’ in the social sciences (King & Horrocks 2010), and has developed into a ‘site for the production of meaning’ for researchers (Gubrium & Holstein 2001b). Perakyla (2008) suggests that its popularity with researchers is based on the fact that it is unique in allowing access to ‘areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible’, namely ‘people’s subjective experiences and attitudes’ (Perakyla 2008: 351). The QRI takes the form of ‘a kind of guided conversation’ (Warren 2001), the general aims of which are summarised by Kvale (1996), it:

attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations

Kvale 1996: 1.

Doyle (2004) suggests that interviews are useful where what is required is ‘a rich, detailed picture of people’s experience and the meaning they attach to it’ (Doyle 2004: *When interviews are appropriate*). This situation applies to this research project’s aim to gather ESOL teachers’ accounts of their practice. Furthermore, Doyle (2004) advises that collecting data by means of interviews may be necessary where there is an absence of similar data which is published and available for analysis, which is the case for this research project. A final insight offered by Doyle is that due either to the particular nature of the research focus or to a high level of complexity, the researcher’s ‘physical presence’ might be needed ‘to guide people through the process of answering questions’ (Doyle 2004: *When interviews are appropriate*). This applies to this research where the topics for discussion are challenging, and where my position as a fellow ESOL teacher with a degree of ‘insider-knowledge’ - for example, regarding the aims of the study, the context, and the related literature - might be used advantageously during the interview process. The opposite is also true, since advantages might be gained by having an ‘outsider’ interviewer, as discussed in the ‘insider researcher’ section 4.1.8 above.

The qualitative interview - as a research method for the empirical data-collection and analysis element of the research design - meets with the aims and requirements of this research project; namely, to gain greater understanding of the issue of the role of theory in practice by

gathering, analysing and interpreting accounts of practice from ESOL teachers with reference to previous discussions of the role of theory in practice in TESOL and to the CF in Chapter 3. There are a number of philosophical approaches, types, techniques and skills associated with the QRI, which will be discussed in the following sections. The next section analyses the alignment of the QRI as a research method with the overall approach and methodology of the research project.

#### **4.2.1.2 The qualitative interview and the research methodology**

The use of the qualitative interview as a data-collection method aligns with the qualitative and interpretivist features of my research approach and methodology. The qualitative research framework encompasses an interpretive approach towards collecting and analysing the data provided by research subjects (Denzin & Lincoln 1998b). That is, for example, rather than attempting to achieve precise, objective meaning or quantification of empirical data in positivistic terms, the qualitative research interview places at the centre of the research process an interpretation, or a ‘reading’, by the researcher of research subjects’ ‘perspectives on their world’ (Kvale 1996), which will subsequently be used to contribute to a greater understanding of the research issue.

Related to this interpretive approach is the further understanding that this type of interview represents a ‘co-construction’ of research data by the researcher and interviewee, rather than a session of objective reporting by the research subject (Mann 2011). The qualitative interview is an event where the participants ‘*construct* versions of reality interactionally’ (Gubrium & Holstein 2001b: 14) (*italics in original*). That is, it is an ‘interpersonal situation’ between the interviewer and interviewee, who ‘act in relation to each other and reciprocally influence each other’ (Kvale 1996: 35) in the production of ideas, reports of experiences and negotiations of meanings. To this constructivist understanding of the interview can be added a ‘social’ element; interview data is ‘socially constituted’ during a ‘social encounter’ (Holstein & Gubrium 1995).

#### 4.2.1.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow for the option of intervention (in contrast to many forms of ‘structured’ interviews), while maintaining a focus on the researcher’s agenda. This should allow the researcher to intervene during interviews in order to focus on areas of most relevance to the research focus.

Drever (1995) outlines the key features of the ‘semi-structured’ research interview as follows:

- to identify topics, plan a general structure and write interview questions
- to encourage subjects to talk freely
- to use prompts, probes and follow-up questions

Drever 1995.

The semi-structured interview is not strictly structured, ‘but is focused on certain themes’ (Kvale 1996). The selection and sequencing of themes and questions is important. In order to do this in a manner that will make it easier for subjects to discuss the issues, one technique is to progress from easier to more difficult questioning, starting with broad themes (Rubin & Rubin 1995). This approach was used, furthermore, to establish examples of the accounts of theory and practice early in the interview, which were then returned to in later stages.

A further characteristic of the semi-structured interview is that the ‘general aim is to encourage people to talk at some length and in their own way’ (Drever 1995: 10). However, one danger in using such relatively unstructured interviews, which Woods (2006) identifies, is that subjects ‘talk too inconsequentially, or off the subject, or vaguely’ (Woods 2006). Woods recommends a number of questioning techniques (see Footnote) which can be used to obtain the best quality answers, and which ‘researchers can use in the natural course of the conversation to aid clarity, depth and validity’ (Woods 2006).

Drever (1995) goes on to describe how a research subject gives answers to the questions, and the interviewer ‘responds using prompts, probes and follow-up questions’ (Drever 1995: 1). These interventions might include ‘tools’ or prompts of some sort, designed to facilitate the exploration of issues more deeply and precisely, and to improve the quality of the data gathered in terms of its richness and relevance. Further options include follow-up interviews and other forms of interventions, sometimes referred to as ‘projective techniques’ (Boddy



2005). These specific techniques operate as prompts, signals or contexts to elicit thoughts otherwise difficult to express, for example with more structured interviews (Catterall & Ibbotson 2000), or when addressing ‘difficult’ or ‘sensitive’ topics (Will *et al.* 1996).

As suggested above, the topic of my research is difficult in some respects, and this difficulty potentially adds an element of sensitivity as it may be professionally challenging or threatening to be asked to account for one’s practice, possibly with reference to the research knowledge base. This might be experienced by research subjects as a form of ‘testing’ of their declarative knowledge of ESOL teaching theories. Here, the skills of the interviewer may be important, for example in building trust with between interviewer and interviewee (Janesick 1998). A further element which will be added to the data-collection process is to precede the interviews with a preparation stage, which will give participants thinking time. This involved sending the interview questions to the research participants several days before the interviews (*Appendix 7: Version of the Interview Schedule sent to RPs pre-interview*). Some teachers clearly reflected for some time on these questions, some looked only briefly, and others didn’t look at the questions at all. While such interventions carry some risk of altering the type of information gathered, this was done in order to afford subjects time in which to reflect on the complex issues involved if they so wished.

#### **4.2.1.4 ESOL teachers discussing language learning, ideas, theories, methods**

It was assumed that research subjects would be able to articulate their thoughts about the research question with reference to ‘identifiable’ theories; that is, identifiable either by the research participants or (with reference to the literature) by the researcher. The question of what might constitute or represent teacher knowledge on the issue of theory and practice in TESOL is addressed in previous chapters. As discussed in the 2.2, for a number of reasons - such as the nature of language learning and the proliferation of language learning ‘methods’ - is ‘ideas-rich’. From my experience in the sector, many teachers can refer fairly readily to a range of theories, ideas and ‘methods’ about second language learning, which they use in their teaching and constitute much of their thinking about teaching. ESOL pre-service and in-service teacher education (and the on-going evaluation of in-service teaching) is heavily-laden with both ‘established’ and more ‘faddish’ theories, often referred to as ‘methods’, about second language learning. These theories, or pseudo-theories, with their accompanying lexicon, along with other terms from the AL knowledge-base reach the teacher and constitute

the professional discourse, or everyday jargon, of ELT. Terms such as ‘task-based learning’, ‘communicative activities’, ‘noticing’, ‘learner strategies’, ‘register’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘lexical chunks’ would be familiar and used by most relatively experienced ESOL teachers. In different ways, these terms represent, or refer to, theories about second language learning, and make up part of the language which teachers use to discuss the role of theories in their practice. A further source of language research subjects might draw on in order to discuss the role of language learning theories in their practice originates from lay, non-language specialist opinions about how languages are learnt. Many non-ELT educators have ‘personal’ theories or opinions regarding how second (or first) languages are, or should be, acquired or learnt. These personal theories might be based on intuition, personal experience or anecdotal evidence. ELT teachers, including the research subjects, also have such views, possibly mediated or justified with reference to the terminology of AL-ELT. Closely related here are research subjects’ broader experiences of education (their ‘apprenticeship of learning’ as characterised in 3.3.8.1), which also informs their approach and methodology, for example with regard to teacher and learner roles. Further resources with which research subjects are able to respond to the interview questions arise from the cultural, political, ideological, policy and value-based aspects of their practice (for example, as discussed in 3.3.8.7). Decisions, principles and approaches in the classroom are informed and might be discussed in these terms during interviews.

#### **4.2.1.5 Planning the interviews and developing the schedule**

The following is a brief account of the development of the interview approach and the interview schedule.

The type of interview is ‘semi-structured’ where:

the interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground is to be covered and what questions are to be asked. This leaves the detailed structure to be worked out during the interview

Drever 1995: 1.

Having identified Drever’s (1995) ‘ground to be covered’ as it related to my research focus, I produced a list of questions to be used as a starting point for discussions, the ‘detailed structure’ of which would arise during the interviewing process. These questions were ‘tested’ in a pilot stage of initial interviewing (interviews 1-3) and further reflection, but did not alter

from the original plan (see *Appendix 6: Interview Schedule*). The type of questioning was aimed at eliciting the ways in which theory ‘informs’, ‘interacts’, ‘explains’, or ‘accounts for’ their practice.

#### **4.2.1.6 Using an interview schedule**

Drever (1995) suggests that the use of an interview schedule ‘guarantees consistency of treatment across a set of interviews’ (Drever 1995: 4), thus allowing for a degree of comparison across the sample. While the dissertation research design does not seek to use the interview data to quantify aspects of the research focus, Drever’s suggestion provides a means of making the coding of themes easier. The aim here is to add rigour to the data-collection process, by reducing the potential for inconsistencies in the general line of questioning across the interviews, and avoid an unhelpful lack of cohesion in the data. The exact wording of the interview questions is a further consideration when producing an interview schedule. The development of the interview schedule is described in detail in *Appendix 8 (‘An explanation of the interview schedule’)*.

#### **4.2.1.7 Interventions, tactics and prompts**

As discussed above, methods for data collection include forms of prompting or techniques which serve as means to overcome potential difficulties in eliciting comments on the issues involved. For example, video-recorded lessons can be used to question and prompt teachers, retrospectively, on decision-making and rationale for classroom practice (for example, Kennedy 2002, Farrell & Bennis 2013). Such methods recognise the value of reflective, or retrospective, examinations of ‘critical’ teaching incidents (Tripp 1993) in both prompting and supporting teachers to talk about their practice, and to express what may include aspects of (hitherto) unexplored or articulated tacit knowledge. ‘Higher-order’ demands on thinking and speaking - involving such mental functions as analysing, comparing or evaluating - can result in a lack of fluency of speech, such as hesitation or the need for reformulation (Farrell & Bennis 2013), and may furthermore lead to less accurate reporting, such as the use of overgeneralisations, which can be unproductive in eliciting useful data. These understandings informed aspects of my own research design, for example in the use of prompt cards (see question interview 2 *Appendix 6*) to facilitate teachers’ flow of thoughts. I was, additionally, prepared during the interviews to focus on ‘concrete’ incidents - for example, a particular

teaching experience, group of learners or lesson - which might prove to be more generally illustrative, or exemplify a particular theme.

#### **4.2.1.8 Research interview skills**

In terms of interview skills, several writers discuss the skills, craft and art of conducting the research interview. Interview research is ‘a craft that, if well carried out, can become an art’ (Kvale 1996: 13), where one should aim for ‘deliberate naivete’ (Kvale 1996), and a ‘presuppositionlessness’, being simultaneously ‘curious’ and ‘sensitive’ to what is and not said, and ‘critical of his of her own presuppositions or hypotheses during the interview’ (Kvale 1996: 33). Rubin and Rubin (1995) emphasize the importance of listening skills, suggesting that goals are to ‘achieve some empathy, but not so much involvement that you cannot see the negative things (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 13). Another goal is to aim for ‘balance rather than neutrality’, that is to ask about ‘multiple sides of the story’, questioning each interviewee with ‘intensity and empathy’ (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 13). Seidman (1998) rejects the idea of ‘probing’, preferring the notion of ‘exploring’. According to my experience conducting the research interviews these are all valid observations, and indicate the difficulty in achieving a high level of competence across all these skills.

#### **4.2.2 Recruiting the sample**

An invitation to participate in the research interviews was sent to all ESOL teaching staff (‘ESOL lecturers’) using the college staff email system. This message comprised an email (*Appendix 2: Invitation to take part in research*) and an attachment with the PLS (*Appendix 3: Plain Language Statement*). Although there is a range of experience, qualifications and status (full-time, part time, permanent or temporary contract), in order to be employed by the college, all staff must have an initial qualification and some relevant experience. Most college ESOL teaching staff are experienced and well-qualified, with the widely-accepted initial-entrance level qualification the CELTA. The majority either have, or are working towards, the DELTA/ Trinity Diploma or an equivalent-level qualification (this is a college requirement). This is not typical of the sector. Rice *et al.* (2005: iii) note that not all employers require ESOL teachers to have an ESOL teaching qualification, and furthermore that in their study they report that there was ‘a perception, amongst teachers that the ESOL workforce in Scotland needs to improve its professional status through more accessible training qualifications’ (Rice *et al.* 2005: iii).

I received prompt replies to my email. Most respondents were known to me and work in my department and/or office; two whom I did not know worked in other campuses. I had only met Teacher 3 briefly at a staff training day event. I had not met Teacher 8 as he is based at a different college site. Several colleagues who did not respond to the email mentioned informally that they would be prepared to be interviewed if I needed further research participants. The first three interviews took place in November-December 2013, lasted between 45 to 49 minutes, and were conducted in the participants' workplaces. I emailed a word document attachment with a slightly simplified interview schedule (*Appendix 7: Version of the Interview Schedule sent to RPs pre-interview*) 3-5 days prior to the interviews. The aim of sending this was to allow participants to reflect on the interview topics and form some initial thoughts if they so wished prior to the interview. The schedule was 'simplified' in that it did not include all of the prompts in my own schedule. After the interviews I sent the participants a word document of my transcription of their interview and a brief explanation of my approach to transcription (involving the 'tidying' out of what I regarded as repetitions and redundancies, such as 'you know' or 'sort of').

*Table 1: Qualifications and experience of research participants*

***This information is not available in the public version***

		CELTA (Or equivalent)	DELTA	Other teaching qualification	Teacher training experience	Years of teaching	Years at in FE college
RP 1							
RP 2							
RP 3							
RP 4							
RP 5							
RP 6							
RP 7							
RP 8							

For information regarding the teaching qualifications, see the following links:

- ACP: Alternative Certification Program <http://www.region4acp.net/>
- The ACP handbook <http://www.region4acp.net/users/0001/docs/acpHandbook.pdf>
- CELTA: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-qualifications/celta/>
- DELTA: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-qualifications/delta/>
- TQFE <http://www.pldfscotland.ac.uk/professional-development/tqfe>

## 4.3 Data Analysis

### 4.3.1 Qualitative data analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) list a number of strengths of ‘qualitative’ data as raw material for research. Such data has ‘richness’ in its ‘vivid’ descriptions, and a ‘ring of truth’, which can have an impact on the reader due to its origin in lived experience, with meanings drawn from the social world (Miles & Huberman 1994). It has a ‘local groundedness’ as it takes into account the local context from which the data is gathered. Finally, such data is good for developing new hypotheses, discovery and exploring new areas (Miles & Huberman 1994).

The researcher is faced with a number of choices of what to do with their data. An initial primary task - required in order to achieve the meaning-making aim - is to bring some ‘insightful order’ to the often messy or chaotic data, and to conduct some ‘data reduction’ to make the content more manageable and to facilitate the process of interpretation (Dornyei 2007). This process is explained in detail below with regard to the coding process using *NVivo*, where sections of transcribed interview data are assigned by the researcher into categories or codes, for example ‘*Apprenticeship of learning*’ or ‘*FE Context*’. This represents an early stage of interpretation by the researcher in the process of data analysis, involving choices based on professional judgement regarding the relationship between content in the interview transcriptions and the codes, or categories, representing aspects of teacher knowledge and the role of theory in practice.

Interpretations are ‘made’ not ‘found’ (Ezzy 2002), and a range of options are available to achieve this. Dornyei (2007) characterises such options as ranging from ‘imaginative and artful speculation’ to ‘well-defined analytical moves’, with a general requirement to maintain a ‘fluid and creative analytical position’, which allows for both rigour and flexibility (Dornyei 2007). These are useful characterisations of the skills required by the researcher. A significant role is also played by the iterative process of returning and checking previous decisions about coding, accompanied by periods of reflection on the codes and categories themselves.

### **4.3.2 The objectives of the data analysis**

The interviews produced a great deal of data in the form of text. The first objective of the data analysis was to identify comments from the interviewees which most closely related to the research focus. These relevant topics were on one hand represented in the ‘pre-codes’ - which were based on ideas set out in Chapter 2 and 3, including the CF - but new topics of interest were also expected to emerge, producing new codes. This process is described below, with the tables of codes to illustrate this in *Appendix 11*.

The approach to data analysis in this research project was informed by the methodologies and approaches discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. The approach required a means by which earlier conceptual and literature-based work (as set out in Chapters 1-3) could be incorporated and used advantageously, while simultaneously affording a degree of flexibility in dealing with the new perspectives reported by the teachers interviewed. To facilitate this, elements of ‘grounded theory’ methods of data analysis were adopted, while acknowledging and valorising the subjective, reflexive, insider-researcher role, especially in terms of the interpretation of the data.

### **4.3.3 Interpretation of the data**

#### **4.3.3.1 Data analysis - ‘Grounded Theory’**

Data analysis methods for this research project drew on elements of ‘Grounded Theory’ (Glaser & Strauss 1967) primarily to allow for a dynamic, iteratively-shaped element to the data-analysis, which would compliment the use of pre-selected codes developed from the conceptual work as summarised in the CF (3.3). Grounded theory was developed in the 1960s in response to, and as a challenge to, existing deductive models of theory-building (Ezzy 2002, Bryant & Charmaz 2011). Rather, grounded theory methods provide ‘a set of inductive steps’, which ‘lead the researcher from studying concrete realities’ to a ‘conceptual understanding of them’ (Charmaz 2001: 675). Such an approach appeared useful for this research project, where the aim is to examine accounts of teachers’ practice gathered during interviews, as they relate to the broader issues of the research focus.

The strongly inductive approach, originally outlined by Glaser and Strauss, can be summarised as follows: data gathering ‘should not be influenced by preconceived theories. Rather, systematic data gathering and analysis should lead into theory’ (Ezzy 2002: 7). Such an

approach is not completely consistent with my research design, where *a priori* theorising (in previous chapters) informs the approach to data-gathering and interpretation. Similarly, the understandings and views of the researcher are recognised in the research design - as discussed in terms of the interpretive approach (4.1.5.3) of an 'insider researcher' (4.1.8) - informing and influencing the approach to data-collection (for example, the choice of interview questions) and sampling (interviewing fellow ESOL teachers). These aspects contrast with Glaser's advocacy of what Ezzy (2002) calls the 'naïve form of inductive theorising' (Ezzy 2002: 10) of early grounded theorists, where researchers should enter the research uninfluenced by previous knowledge of the research topic. Rather, my own approach would be better characterised as an 'ongoing simultaneous process of deduction and induction' (Ezzy 2002: 10), where issues are examined and revisited in the light of the interview data and existing or previous understandings, which together result in a synthesis of more developed, complex or nuanced understandings. This process is reflected in the development of different codes ('nodes' in the *Nvivo* terminology) as both my understanding of concepts develops and new understandings arise either based on my own insights or as a result of comments from interviewees.

One example of this developing understanding or the emergence of new codes from the data found during the data analysis process - as prescribed in GT - is where new codes were added during the process of transcription and coding. While 'learner-centred approaches' as an important dimension of teacher methodology were discussed in the policy section 2.1.3.3.1, the category of 'the learner/student' was not initially included as a category to code. However, while working on transcripts 3-6, it became apparent that this aspect of teaching methodology was an important consideration in the approach of the teachers' interviewed. The new category of 'the learner/student' was added, and previous transcripts were 're-coded' for this category. This episode in the process of data analysis illustrates how the approach to data-analysis involved elements of GT - the identification of emergent themes through close analysis of the data - while also being based on the use of *a priori* codes, an approach not associated with GT. An example of my 'researcher memo' (discussed below) regarding this addition of the category the learner is included in *Appendix 9*. This sample memo illustrates an element of difference between my own approach to data analysis and the original GT approach discussed above. However, in contrast to those early grounded theorists, current applications of GT do 'make use of pre-existing theories', for example, for the purpose of sensitizing the researcher to aspects of the research issue (Ezzy 2002: 9). Again, my use of pre-existing theories and



codes is more fundamental to the research design than simply to sensitize to the research issue. The literature-based research set out in Chapters 1-3 represents to a significant degree the 'findings' from my own literature-based research in answer to the research question.

With regards to identifying and naming research designs and methods, Dornyei (2007) notes, in the field of qualitative research, 'the boundaries' of the term grounded theory are 'rather fluid, particularly when it comes to applications' (Dornyei 2007: 258). Dornyei (2007), furthermore, points out that grounded theory is a qualitative research method, not a theory. It is a contested 'package of ideas' (Atkinson & Delamont 2008). Dornyei (2007) suggests that the term 'grounded theory' is so common it is almost a synonym for qualitative research. The term itself is not always applied accurately, as proposed by its originators Glaser and Strauss (1967) in its 'strong' original form, and specific elements (such as 'theoretical sampling') are not always evident in research described as 'grounded theory research' (Ezzy 2002). Indeed, this signals one attraction of grounded theory; its flexibility. As Charmaz (2000) notes, it offers a 'set of flexible strategies, not rigid prescriptions' (Charmaz 2000: 513). As a result of the lack of a 'unified' grounded theory, there is room for either more or less 'subjective intuition or formalisation', reflecting a rift which existed between the originators of grounded theory - Glaser and Strauss - in their differing beliefs about grounded theory (Dornyei 2007).

In terms of characterising what is, or is not, GT, Dornyei (2007) identifies two key criteria. Firstly, the data analysis should follow a certain sequential coding process (outlined below) and, secondly, some theory should be produced at the end; that is, an 'abstract explanation' based on the data should be provided. This explanation should not only describe, but provide an understanding of principles or relationships. Following Dornyei's two criteria, this research design would meet the criterion of GT. The 'sequential coding process' is largely represented in the use of the elements and stages of data analysis involved in using *NVivo* – explained below – including the transcription, coding, re-coding and the use of memos. Dornyei's (2007) second key criteria for characterising GT - abstract explanations - are set out in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. As the first criterion implies, the GT methods are often referred to particularly in terms of the data analysis component of the research process; GT methods 'specify analytical strategies, not data collection methods' (Charmaz 2000: 514). It is these 'general principles of analysis' or 'heuristic strategies' (Atkinson & Delamont 2008) which are particularly useful for my data analysis, and are outlined in the following.

#### 4.3.3.2 GT coding and early analysis

A further aspect of GT, but also recommended more generally in research, is the approach of coding data early (Ezzy 2002). Data should be collected and analyzed ‘simultaneously from the initial stages of the research’ (Charmaz 2001: 675). Although not unusual in research currently, this approach was innovative at the time it was proposed in the form of GT (Bryant & Charmaz 2011). Coding in grounded theory - as in ‘thematic analysis’ - involves a ‘process of identifying themes or concepts that are in the data’ in order to ‘build a systematic account of what has been observed and recorded’ (Ezzy 2002: 86).

GT coding comprises three stages: open, theoretical or ‘axial’, and selective coding. Firstly, open coding is used to ‘break up data into chunks’, and to ‘assign conceptual categories’ or a ‘category label’ (Dornyei 2007). These labels are not descriptive, but abstract and conceptual, indicating the theory-building nature of the data-analysis process in grounded theory. As discussed above much of this process took place through chapters 1-3 and in the CF (3.3), where a conceptual understanding of the research issue was constructed. The second stage is theoretical or ‘axial’ coding, which aims to ‘identify the interrelationships’ between the categories (Dornyei 2007), and moves from first-order to higher order concepts, grouping, integrating the subcategories. Again, this process began at the literature review stage, but continued during the coding and recoding stages. The third, final stage, ‘selective’ coding, aims to explain the relationships ‘at a higher level of abstraction’, selecting ‘core categories’ (Dornyei 2007: 261). This final stage involved the researcher selecting and interpreting from the data which elements of the data appeared to be of most interest or value in answering the research questions.

The process of coding ‘generates new ideas and gathers material by topic’ (Richards 2009: 93) in a process of reading and reflecting on the transcripts. As Richards observes, the process of coding provides a stimulus to the analysis and interpretation of interview data. One approach is where researcher should ‘start with areas of interest to them’ (Charmaz 2001: 676). In this research project, the early data analysis started with using the interview questions and the CF, which distil the research interests into focus to produce a first version of ‘pre-codes’ (*Appendix 11a* and *11b*). Interviews were transcribed then a coding process was conducted. The general focus, too, was on the ‘pursuit of emergent themes’ and ‘inductive construction of abstract categories’ (Charmaz 2001: 677), where the pre-codes were tested and improved upon. This process is illustrated in *Appendix 11*, which includes four stages of the development of the coding starting with the operationalisation of the CF categories into

categories or ‘nodes’ for coding – as represented by the *Appendix 11a: An initial list of codes based on the CF* and *Appendix 11b: An early version of coding including the number of coded references and notes*. *Appendix 11c: The second version of coding including the number of coded references (and notes)* illustrates a stage in the coding process, where new nodes were added, or prioritised, and others were omitted. *Appendix 11d: All nodes and number of coded references* shows the final coding results. This approach seeks to facilitate a fundamental aim of GT; namely, the attempt to ‘allow the data to speak’ and to allow the researcher ‘to engage with what the data have to say’ (Ezzy 2002: 9). However, ‘general issues’ might still be decided beforehand, with greater attention to specifics occurring later during analysis (Ezzy 2002). This latter point is illustrated in the development of a series of tables of nodes (as illustrated in *Appendix 11*), where initial coding was altered and ‘child nodes’ were added providing more detail to earlier general categories.

Bryant and Charmaz (2011) highlight two further features of GT which made it different at the time. Firstly, the method ‘originated from insights gained from the researchers’ personal experiences and biographies’, in contrast with the objective and uninvolved. Secondly, it was ‘practice-oriented’ from the outset, which was somewhat unusual for researchers at the time (Bryant & Charmaz 2011). Again, these are two features of this research project, with the interpretivist, ‘insider researcher’ approach, and the focus on the practice of ESOL teachers.

#### **4.3.3.3 Further considerations for data-analysis**

The clear, structured outline of the GT approach does not necessarily overcome all the difficulties involved in all qualitative data analysis. For example, the task of theme identification is ‘fundamental’ but ‘mysterious’, as themes can be ‘abstract’ and ‘often fuzzy’ constructs identified by researchers (Ryan & Bernard 2003). The conceptual work in Chapters 2 and 3 aimed to overcome these potential problems. The CF (3.3) aimed to set out types and sources of teacher knowledge which could be used as categories for data analysis coding, while the ‘interpretivist research paradigm’ (4.1.5.3) provides a framework within which the researcher can resolve issues around decision-making between what is significant or not, or what in the data might be representative of a particular category.

Researchers dealing with spoken data are advised to pay attention to both ‘explicit descriptions’ and meaning that exists ‘between the lines’ (Kvale 1996: 32). As part of the coding procedures outlined from GT in the above, data analysis might for the researcher follow a process of ‘recognising concepts’ then ‘hearing stories’, then ‘hearing themes’ (Rubin

& Rubin 1995). This implies a greater role for a researcher's intuition than some descriptions of GT outline, where a researcher, having identified categories, then searches for 'connecting threads and patterns', and connects categories and 'themes' (Seidman 1998) in an iterative manner, with a 'gradual focusing' on themes (Holliday 2010: 99). This very much characterised my own approach and experience of coding, and is again illustrated in the example memo (*Appendix 9*) and the development of coding categories as illustrated in *Appendix 11*.

Seidman (1998) warns of how tempting it can be to simply use data that supports the researcher's opinions and to ignore any contradictions in the data. Rather, during data analysis, the researcher should ask 'what is surprising, what confirmations of previous instincts are there, how consistent with literature are the findings, how have they gone beyond?' (Seidman 1998: 110-111). These are useful suggestions, which I attempted to consider while coding and analysing the data.

#### **4.3.3.4 Data analysis - NVivo**

*NVivo* 10 is a recent example of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) software. It can be used as an 'organising tool' with which to 'carry out administrative tasks of organising the data more efficiently' (Welsh 2002), and to keep a record of the process of my data collection and analysis. *NVivo* 10 has a number of useful functions which allow the researcher to import audio files containing interview recordings, to make transcriptions of the interviews, and to code the interview data. It also allows for the creation of memos (linked to the data) and various means to annotate, search, (cross-) reference the results of coding and options to use colour coding, or to create (visual) models of data. The range of strategies included in *Nvivo*, 'reading, reflecting, coding, annotating, memoing, discussing, linking, visualising' (Bazeley 2007: 59), mirrors established paper-based or computer-based methods of qualitative data analysis, with the additional benefit for the researcher that *NVivo* offers a ready-made framework, which integrates these various aspects of the data analysis process. In the sections below and in Findings Chapter 5 (and accompanying appendices 11), the process of using *NVivo* is illustrated.

#### 4.3.4 The Coding Process

##### 4.3.4.1 'Pre-codes'

Before the process of coding began, a number of initial or 'pre' codes were established. These 'a priori codes' (Bazeley 2007) were based on the key concepts identified in prior literature and conceptual work, and upon which the interview questions were based. The pre-codes, furthermore, reflected my intuition and understanding of the research issue. As discussed above, the approach of using a large number of pre-codes differs in some respects with the original version of Grounded Theory, where codes would emerge from the coding process.

The 'pre' codes are listed in *Appendix 11(b-d)* under the headings 'parent' and 'child' 'nodes', which are *NVivo* terminology for main and sub-codes. The codes (or 'nodes' in *NVivo*) operate as 'labels' for topics or themes in the analysis of text. In my case, the final choice of codes listed in *Appendix 11d* represents a combination of pre- and while-coding categories. Though initially identified as significant to the data analysis, many of the names of the pre-codes represent complex constructs or concepts, which were subsequently 'unpacked' in some sense by the examples and insights offered by RPs and through the researcher's process of identifying RP comments as relating to the particular construct. This approach and understanding of the relationship of the codes to the interview data, and the subsequent analysis and interpretation is in line with the research design, whereby RP comments should elaborate on existing understandings of the researcher.

The 'free' (independent of each other) codes, termed parent and child 'nodes' in *NVivo* terminology, are listed in *Appendix 11 (b-d)*. After an initial coding of interview 1, the original list of nodes was altered through two subsequent versions. I decided to re-code the initial interview using the newer, improved nodes. As the list of nodes passed through various versions during the process of transcribing and coding the interviews, codes were added, removed, merged, and 'promoted' from a sub-code (a 'child' node) to a code (a 'parent' node). This process represents the testing and refining of both the research methods and my conceptual understanding of those issues which might be most useful and relevant in addressing the research questions.

Having transcribed interviews and listed initial codes, the first stage was 'topic coding' (Richards 2009), where the main task is to allocate and classifying passages or sections of the transcription to either pre-assigned or emerging categories. This initial coding process also

addresses the more ‘practical’ task of ‘reducing’ the (transcription) data and of ‘breaking it down into more manageable chunks’ (Welsh 2002). The process of selecting segments or extracts from the transcripts and placing them in the nodes necessitated choices and clarifications regarding (conceptual) understandings of the pre-selected codes. The overlapping of concepts meant that the boundaries where one concept ends and another starts proved problematic at times. Judgements were made based on prior reading and understanding, and in some cases the attribution of RPs comments to several corresponding codes resolved a problem. The topic coding also includes an aspect of ‘analytical coding’, that is, coding which ‘comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning’ (Richards 2009: 100) – which, in my case, was captured in memoing and alterations to the list of nodes.

#### **4.3.4.2 Memos**

Important in the coding process is the use of memos. Memoing is used widely in qualitative research, and not exclusively grounded theory (Ezzy 2002). Memos are the ‘foundation of the emergent coding system’ (Ezzy 2002: 72), as memo-writing links coding to an initial draft of analysis, and is a ‘crucial intermediate step’ from data to write-up. As the process of memo-writing unfolds, initial codes may move ‘up’ to analytical-conceptual categories. The activity of memo-writing as an integral part of the data-collection and analysis process can, additionally, help the researcher to ‘stop and think’ and ‘make connections’ (Charmaz 2001). This latter conflation of ‘data collection’ and ‘data analysis’ into the ‘data-collection and analysis’ process is central to grounded theory in that data collection and analysis are regarded as ‘interrelated processes’ (Ezzy 2002). This approach, again, is shared by other methodologies such as ethnography, hermeneutics and to some degree postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches (Ezzy 2002). Initial thinking was noted in memos while transcribing and coding as parallel tasks. *Appendix 9* has an example of a memo from my data analysis process, involving a new category being added as a result of interpreting the data hermeneutically, coding and recoding, looking for connections and so on. It illustrates the iterative nature of the data analysis process as suggested by GT, where the researcher analyses data and returns to rediscover new aspects of the data.

#### 4.3.4.3 Considerations of language

The interpretation of the interview data, as well as following procedures from grounded theory, recognises the importance of language. Seidman (1998) highlights this point; that of the ‘significance of language to inquiry with human beings’ (Seidman 1998: 2). In terms of the role of language in the broader research perspective, Bochner (2005) asserts that interpretive perspectives recognise that ‘all attempts to represent reality are mediated by language’ (Bochner 2005: 65). Language is particularly important when the QRI is used, where the focus is on language, communication and interpretation. Fairclough (1993) outlines his ‘social theory of discourse’, in which discourse (Fairclough defines discourse as generally ‘spoken or written language use’) ‘is socially-shaped, but it is also socially shaping, or *constitutive*’ (Fairclough 1993: 134) (*italics in original*). Included in its ‘constitutive’ aspect are references to social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief. These three inherent features of ‘discourse language use as social practice’ (Fairclough 1993) can be identified in relation to the QRI as (respectively) teacher and researcher identities, the social relations of teacher colleagues (participants and researcher) and, the primary interest of the data-collection, ESOL teachers’ perceptions of their practice. Important, too, is the cultural and social context of the data collection, added to which is the issue of non-verbal data (Lemke 1998). Related to issues regarding language is the approach to transcription of interview data.

#### 4.3.4.4 Transcription

The transcription of interview data was conducted ‘on screen’, that is using the audio-recording and transcribing facility on *NVivo*. This was done partly because *NVivo* has a number of functions which assist the transcriber, such as a speed control and various play and rewind functions. Oliver *et al.* (2005) observe that transcription processes are often ‘superficially examined’ and remain ‘behind-the-scenes’ in accounts of research. As I began the transcription process, I was faced with a number of decisions regarding the exact manner in which I should transcribe the speech of the RPs. In considering such questions, Nisbet (2006) asks whether it is, in fact, possible ‘for words actually to record an interview fully?’ (Nisbet 2006: 13), even in cases where many techniques, such as those suggest by Brown and Rodgers (2002) of ‘rhythm, speed, pitch, intonation, timbre, and hesitation’ (Brown & Rodgers 2002: 62), are used to attempt to capture the meaning carried in speech. Poland (2001) also problematizes the notion of the ‘verbatim’ transcript; for example, where a ‘faithful reproduction of the oral record’ might in fact not consider adequately the

‘interpersonal and nonverbal communication’ and emotional as being sufficiently important (Poland 2001: 635). As a solution to this dilemma, Bazeley (2007) suggests that the ‘goal of transcribing’ is to be ‘as true to the conversation as possible, yet pragmatic in dealing with the data’ (Bazeley 2007: 45). Such pragmatism might involve the ‘cleaning up’ of the linguistic performance of interviewees, by addressing and removing such performance errors as slips, repetition or redundancies (Brown & Rodgers 2002).

With regards to the broader research perspective of my project, Poland (2001) identifies a ‘critical realist perspective’ relating to transcription, where ‘knowable phenomena can be known only in cultural, social, politically situated ways’, suggesting that researchers should consider ‘the relationships among substance, observer, interpretation, audience and style’ (Poland 2001: 636). While Poland does not elaborate on this view, my interpretation of an approach to transcription that would align with a broadly critical realist research perspective includes a focus on the transcription as ‘informational content’ (Oliver *et al.* 2005); that is, verbal, then written representations of ideas, concepts and experiences which are recognisable and broadly understood, especially amongst those with some background knowledge of the issues discussed. The qualification of ‘broadly understood’ here acknowledges the many features (discussed above) such as tone, expression, and context which are not communicated in transcripts as well as the layer of individual interpretation which make a transcription a partial representation.



## **CHAPTER 5 A BRIEF REPORT OF THE INTERVIEW FINDINGS**

Overview of Chapter 5	132
5.1 An evaluation of the interview process and the data collected	132
5.1.1 The interview process and questioning	132
5.1.2 The type of data collected	133
5.2 An overview of findings interview data	133
5.2.1 Teacher 1 Key influences on practice	134
5.3 Results from the coding of the interviews	135

### **Overview**

This short chapter reports on the interview data. Firstly, there is a short reflection on the interview process and the data collected, where it is recognised that the varied nature of the questioning across the eight interviews resulted in a wide range and uneven coverage of the topics set out in the interview schedule. This meant that the data - when analysed and collated - produced an impressionistic snapshot of various aspects of the research questions, rather than a rigorous standardised even set of data. This is followed by an overview of the data, including a table of the final coding results. The following chapter - Chapter 6 - which answers research question one regarding the role of theory in practice - makes use of several illustrative quotes from the interview data, and summaries of the different combinations of influences on the eight interviewees' practice are in *Appendix 10*.

### **5.1 An evaluation of the interview process and the data collected**

#### **5.1.1 The interview process and questioning**

The interview schedule (*Appendix 6*) was successful in eliciting useful data, though was not followed as closely, nor as rigorously, as planned. For example, the order of the questioning was more 'organic' than originally envisaged insofar as where a topic arose out of sequence it was pursued, and some questions were omitted. Additionally, interview questions which were relatively short on the schedule, in practice became quite long, with the inclusion of explanations, background, or my own examples. This was partly done to allow the teachers thinking time, and to direct them towards the kind of information I was asking them about. As a result, rather than a question-and-answer session, the interviews were much more of a dialogue and a sharing of understandings. A final point is that the prompt cards (see Interview question 2, *Appendix 6*) were often used, and proved useful as starting points and to structure

discussions. The type of questioning and the manner of the use of the interview schedule had an influence on the kind of data collected. This is discussed in the following section.

### **5.1.2 The type of data collected**

The varied nature of the questioning across the eight interviews - as explained above - resulted in a wide range of data from the RPs and also an uneven coverage of the topics as they were originally set out in the interview schedule. The uneven coverage of the topics meant that the data - when analysed and collated as a whole - produced an impressionistic snapshot of various aspects of the research questions, rather than a rigorous standardised, 'even' set of data.

However, the interviews included a satisfactory amount of discussion which was relevant to the research focus. Reference was made to methods, theories, methodologies and educational approaches, as well as to other less 'theoretically-informed' influences on practice such as those types and sources of teacher knowledge outlined in the CF (for example 'the apprenticeship of observation'). The terms in which the eight teachers discussed the influences and drivers on their practice reflected their experience, interests and qualifications. Generally, it appeared that those with more experience and qualifications were more 'literate' and frequent in their referencing to theories, methods and so on, and in some respects more critical in their analysis of their practice within the frames of reference of the research project.

'Literacy' here equates to where teachers either referred directly to methodology/theory or alluded to less ELT-specialist terms; for example, concepts such as 'identification with the culture', 'motivation', or 'engaging learners', which are useful signifiers of theories which influence a teaching approach, although are also terms which non-ELT specialists could recognise.

## **5.2 An overview of findings interview data**

A number of notable similarities and differences appeared across the eight interviews in terms of the role theory appears to play, and has played in the teachers' practice. Bazeley (2007) suggests that comparing and contrasting detailed sections of data can prove a useful technique in developing the analysis beyond description towards a more sensitive analysis of concepts. This approach seems equally applicable to a more general-global level reading of the interview data. The most notable difference in the accounts was in the overall 'mix', or 'cocktail', of the influences on the RPs' teaching approach. That is, the particular combination

of influences on the teaching approach reported by the eight teachers differed both in the combination of different influences on their practice and the weighting towards one or other factor. These differences were noticeable when transcribing and while reading the interview transcript globally, but particularly in the analysis of the various responses to Interview Question 2 regarding the ‘Sources of ideas for teaching approach’ (*Appendix 6*), which was included partly to initiate a discussion of the types of theories teachers use. The RPs’ descriptions of their teaching approach and the methodologies include reference to many of the types and sources of teacher knowledge discussed in 3.3, and reflect aspects of the discussion of the role of theory in 3.2. Teachers’ accounts of their practice represent snapshots of their personal practical pedagogy, and also of how these were developed over time through a process of drawing on theories from formal teacher education and other sources of knowledge such as previous (language) learning, and of experimentation (‘trial and error’), private reflection on practice and increasing expertise. Summaries of the different combinations of influences on RPs’ practice are in *Appendix 10*. The summary for Teacher 1 is included below in order to exemplify these summaries.

### **5.2.1 Teacher 1 Key influences on practice**

*ELT Methods - Systematic Knowledge - Changing context – Teacher training -Observation – Websites – Second language learning- Humanism - Task-Based Learning – Experience in EFL abroad.*

Teacher 1 described his own methodology or approach, referring to a number of different methodologies and approaches (such as ‘Task-Based Learning’ and a ‘Humanistic’ approach), which seemed to have combined with other ideas to inform his approach. His experience in different contexts (EFL abroad and ESOL in Scotland) was recounted in terms of the impact these experiences had on his approach; for example, in concluding that addressing issues of identity, culture and motivation are key tenets of his approach. As a teacher trainer as well as teacher, he mentioned observing trainees as being useful, and also reading a website/blog which he finds stimulating in terms of reflecting on his practice. Commenting directly on the issue of the role of theory in practice, he suggested that some current ELT approaches were under-examined.

### 5.3 Results from the coding of the interviews

The table below (also in *Appendix 11d*) *All nodes and number of coded references* shows the final coding results. ‘Parent’ nodes and the sub-categories of ‘child’ or ‘free’ nodes are the *NVivo* terms for main and sub-categories in the coding process. The two numbers in brackets – for example [42-8] shows that the category was ‘coded’ 42 times by the researcher; that is, 42 comments across all the eight interviews which the researcher judged to relate to that category. This approach to data analysis is discussed in section 4.3. The second number, ‘8’ - in the example above – indicates the number of RPs who made a comment which was assigned to this category. In theory the total of child nodes should tally exactly to the numbers in the parent nodes. This is not always the case in the table below. This is due to the repeated process of coding and recoding of the data, which occurred several times. The disparities were not regarded as sufficiently significant to the data analysis to be aligned through a process of further coding. The decisions regarding the themes and topics arising from the data to be discussed are not based on frequency or totals from the coding, but are based on what is perceived as being of most value to the research in terms of the interpretation of data as set out in Chapter 4. The categories in bold are those which had been added since the initial coding process.

Table 2: *All nodes and number of coded references*

<b>'Parent' nodes</b>	<b>Related 'Child' or 'free' nodes</b>
Apprenticeship of Observation/Learning [42-8]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E [4-2]</li> <li>• School [12-5]</li> <li>• Second language learning [17-8]</li> </ul>
Characterising-describing own practice [56-8]	
Context [15-6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of context [5-2]</li> <li>• ESOL FE [23-4]</li> </ul>
Craft knowledge [14-6]	
ELT-specific methodology [17-6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate pedagogy [8-5]</li> <li>• Method [18-6]</li> <li>• 'Post method' environment [12-5]</li> </ul>
Formal teacher education (programmes) [16-6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CELTA-Cert [22-6]</li> <li>• DELTA –Dip [24-6]</li> <li>• Other teacher education [17-7]</li> </ul>
Sources of ideas for teaching approach [7-5] (Interview Question 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trial and error (from classroom experiences) [15-8]</li> <li>• The approach of colleagues[14-7]</li> <li>• Coursebook &amp; other published teaching materials [16-8]</li> <li>• Methodology publications, journals, websites etc [17-6]</li> <li>• Peer Observations [15-7]</li> <li>• <b>College teaching policy [10-5]</b></li> </ul>
Knowledge utilization [17-4]	
Less-informal teacher education/sharing best practice [17-7]	
Prescriptive knowledge (policy) [11-6]	
Tacit knowledge [2-1]	
The student/learner [9-3]	
Teacher identity: ideology, network of beliefs & values [11-2]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ideology [0]</b></li> <li>• <b>Network of beliefs [4-1]</b></li> <li>• <b>Values [3-2]</b></li> </ul>
Teachers' self-generated knowledge [14-5]	
<b>Views on the role of theory in practice [42-8]</b>	
The role of theory [49-7]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to inform practice for practitioners [12-5]</li> <li>• to make sense of practice for practitioners [10-4]</li> <li>• to motivate practice for practitioners [3-2]</li> <li>• to provide a sense of plausibility for practitioners [15-4]</li> <li>• to provide coherence to practice for practitioners [7-3]</li> <li>• <b>to introduce change [2-1]</b></li> </ul>
Theories discussed or referred to [56-7]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Named theory [23-6]</b></li> <li>• <b>Systematic knowledge (academic research) [13-6]</b></li> </ul>

## CHAPTER 6 WHAT ROLE DOES THEORY PLAY IN ESOL TEACHERS' PRACTICE?

Introduction to Chapter 6	138
Overview of Chapter 6	138
<b>6.1 The role of theory in the ESOL knowledge-base, in teacher education and in developing practice</b>	<b>139</b>
Introduction	139
6.1.1 The role of theory in 'informing' practice	140
6.1.2 The role of theory in providing key concepts, principles and language; in illuminating, 'naming', 'making sense' of practice and giving 'coherence' to practice; and in 'making the implicit explicit'	141
6.1.3 The role of theory in providing a 'sense of plausibility' to a teacher's practice	143
6.1.4 The role of theory in the socialisation of teachers into ESOL practices, into the profession, and 'social practices'	144
6.1.5 The role of theory in developing a teacher's practice	144
6.1.6 The role of theory in developing 'situated knowledge'	145
6.1.7 The role of theory in the form of ELT methods in ESOL teachers' practice	146
<b>6.2 Influences on the role of theory in practice</b>	<b>147</b>
Introduction	147
6.2.1 Contextual factors – policy	147
6.2.2 The policy context providing teacher freedom to choose theories/ methodology	148
6.2.3 A personalised pedagogical approach within a policy context	149
6.2.4 Contextual constraints on the role of theory in ESOL teachers' practice	149
6.2.5 The influence of the 'policy culture' on the role of theory in practice	149
<b>6.3 The role of theory in practice 'in combination with' other sources and types of knowledge: Systematic + Craft + Prescriptive knowledge</b>	<b>150</b>
Introduction	150
6.3.1 The role of theory in combining to create 'new' teacher (personal practical) knowledge	151
6.3.2 Craft knowledge as 'working theories', personal theories' or 'theories-in-use', and the role of theory in practice	152
6.3.3. Pedagogical content knowledge and theory and practice	153
6.3.4 Tacit knowledge and theory	153
<b>6.4 The 'filter' of personal factors on the role of theory in practice</b>	<b>155</b>
Introduction	155
6.4.1 Teachers' beliefs	155
6.4.2 Prior teaching and learning experiences	156
<b>6.5 Summary of Chapter 6</b>	<b>156</b>

## **Introduction**

Section 3.3 answered research question 2: What types and sources of teacher knowledge do ESOL teachers draw on? In this chapter, the main research question ‘What role does theory play in ESOL teachers’ practice?’ will be directly addressed. Preliminary responses to this question have been made in chapters 2 and 3 (particularly 3.2), which furthermore established terms, boundaries and understanding of the scope of the main research question. This chapter sets out many of the conclusions of the dissertation. In the Chapter 7 further conclusions are drawn regarding reflections on the study, implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

## **Overview**

Section 6.1 examines the role of theory in the ESOL knowledge-base, in teacher education and in developing practice; it focuses on the role of theory in the following aspects: in ‘informing’ practice; in providing key concepts, principles and language; in illuminating, ‘naming’, ‘making sense’ of practice and giving ‘coherence’ to practice; and in ‘making the implicit explicit’; in providing a ‘sense of plausibility’ to a teacher’s practice; in the socialisation of teachers into ESOL practices, into the profession, and ‘social practices’; in developing a teacher’s practice and ‘situated knowledge’; and the role of theory in the form of ELT methods in ESOL teachers’ practice.

Section 6.2 analyses various influences on the role of theory in practice, including contextual factors such as the influence of the policy context in providing teachers a degree of freedom to choose between theories/methodology and their development of a personalised pedagogical approach within a policy context. The contextual constraints on the role of theory in ESOL teachers’ practice and the influence of the ‘policy culture’ on the role of theory in practice are also explained.

Section 6.3 analyses the role of theory in practice ‘in combination with’ other sources and types of knowledge such as those in the CF (3.3) for example as it combines to create ‘new’ teacher (personal practical) knowledge. Other aspects of theory as it relates to elements in the CF are the following: craft knowledge as ‘working theories’, personal theories’ or ‘theories-in-use’, and the role of theory in practice, pedagogical content knowledge, and tacit knowledge.

Section 6.4 examines the role of the ‘filter’ of personal factors on the role of theory in practice with particular reference to teachers’ beliefs, and teachers’ prior teaching and learning experiences.

A number of illustrative quotes from the interview data will be used in this chapter.

## **6.1 The role of theory in the ESOL knowledge-base, in teacher education, and in developing practice**

### **Introduction**

Theory, or ‘systematic knowledge’ (3.3.5), plays an important role in teachers’ practice in several ways.

Theory contributes greatly towards - and represents much of - the knowledge-base of the ELT-ESOL profession; for example, as it appears in professional literature and teacher training materials. In TESOL - as in other fields - this form of knowledge is codified in research journals, other publications, and particularly is ‘summarized’ in the syllabuses of teacher education courses. Sources of systematic knowledge, such as university research, provide the basis for the core materials of many teacher education programmes, although many - including TESOL training courses - include a ‘practical’ skills focus, which might contain a ‘craft knowledge’ dimension, for example in the form of input, advice and the perspectives of teacher trainers. While theory plays a role in ESOL teachers’ practice in ‘teacher education’ or ‘teacher development’ through the medium of teacher education programmes such as the DELTA, it is also accessed by teachers by means of several other sources such as those identified in the Conceptual Framework (*Figure 3*): such as CPD events, INSETTs, conferences, publications, journals, or web-sites.

In terms of the role of theory in educational programmes, for ELT/ESOL teachers - including those interviewed in this study - the DELTA course (mentioned in section 2.1.3.4.2) represents an intensive and significant input of language learning and teaching theories, in contrast with the more gradual - and possibly sporadic - process of input through other means such as those identified in the CF. The DELTA is a relatively short, intensive course, usually taken after several years’ working in ELT, after which teachers then return to practice, and may not receive any such comparable input of theory again in their career. The role of theory as it



relates to the ESOL knowledge-base, in teacher education and in developing practice is discussed in the following sections.

### **6.1.1 The role of theory in ‘informing’ practice**

One teacher-education related role for theory is to ‘inform practice’ (Canagarajah 2008). This understanding of the role of theory aligns with a traditional view of theory and reflects one particular reading of the theory-practice debate. This is where formalised, ‘systematic knowledge’ (Kennedy 2002) informs or ‘guides’ teachers’ thinking, echoing a technical-rationalist or ‘theory-applied’ model of teacher learning, education and practice (as discussed in 3.2.2.3). It has been argued throughout the dissertation that this view does not appear to reflect the full complexity of teacher knowledge and the range of sources of knowledge outlined in the CF, nor the manner in which various sources and types of knowledge combine and interact in teachers’ practice. However, systematic knowledge remains important and influential component of teacher education and teacher development.

One example of theory ‘informing’ practice is where theory plays a role in providing guidance for practice where teachers have little or no knowledge of how to proceed with an aspect of teaching. This might occur because pre-service experiences and notions of how languages are learnt do not include relevant knowledge, or do not provide a ‘working theory’ which advises what teachers should do in particular teaching situations. Such situations reflect the limitations in other types and sources of teacher knowledge (such as the apprenticeship of observation or ‘craft solutions’) in fully preparing teachers for practice. The following illustrative example is provided from the interview data. Regarding (second language) ‘error correction’, Teacher 4 suggests that - contrary to the notion of the ‘natural teacher’ (mentioned in 3.2.4.3) - useful information can be obtained from research and previous practice, and indeed an input of theory is necessary in order to proceed effectively in practice.

Approaches to error correction are:

*‘... definitely informed by theory because that’s something you have to be taught to do. And the way that you correct errors has to be effective. So I think if I was a completely untrained teacher, for example, I would just correct someone all the time.’ (Teacher 4)*

This extract, furthermore, illustrates a current of belief that practice ought to be prefaced by theory-informed training of some type. It should be noted that the issue of how, when and what the value is of correcting learners’ language errors remains a contested area in ELT-AL (see, for example Lee 2009; Ryan 2015). In fact, another teacher interviewed expressed a view

contrary to Teacher 4's; namely, that SLA research has not provided conclusive evidence that any form of error correction benefits language acquisition. This indicates the significance of the factor of a 'sense of plausibility' (discussed in 3.3.8.6 and 6.1.3) in teachers' adoption of certain theories and their rejection of others. The example of the issue of error correction in ELT/ESOL also illustrates a role for theory in informing teachers of different approaches, and the usefulness in providing teachers with a 'familiarity with educational theory' (Entwistle 2008), which can inform a process of adopting, adapting or rejecting different ideas, techniques, methods, and so on. It, furthermore, implies the importance of the role of teacher judgement (as noted in 3.2.2.4) and the use of theories with 'discrimination' given the 'practical situation' (Entwistle 2013: 9), in an 'active, thoughtful, creative sense' (Entwistle 2013: 10).

**6.1.2 The role of theory in providing key concepts, principles and language; in illuminating, 'naming', 'making sense' of practice and giving 'coherence' to practice; and in 'making the implicit explicit'**

Further teacher-education related roles for theory are to provide key concepts, principles and language related to ELT/ESOL, to help 'make sense' of practice, to give 'coherence' to practice and to 'make the implicit explicit', as explained in the following.

It is often through the experience of teacher education programmes that systematic knowledge plays the important role of providing an understanding of key concepts, principles and in providing an accompanying language with which to refer to aspects of language teaching and language learning. In TESOL, the knowledge learned on Diploma (DELTA) courses, for example, can fulfil this role for many of those early-career teachers who may have several years' experience of teaching, but who enter the profession of EL teaching with the minimal of training; for example, those 'survival skills' provided by an entry-level qualification such as the Certificate (CELTA). Theoretical input from the more advance DELTA can aid teachers in recognising, naming and reorganising their experiential knowledge.

The value of what Brookfield (1995) termed the 'lens of theory' in illuminating, 'naming' and 'making sense' (Larsen-Freeman 2008) of practice is a further role for theory in teachers' practice. Encounters with theory can prompt the making of connections between - or the 'mapping together' of - previous experience, current practice and systematic knowledge. Theoretical input can aid teachers in reorganising experiential knowledge and can provide a

‘sense of coherence’ to their practice (McNamara 2008). As Larsen-Freeman (2008) notes, conscious awareness on the part of teachers regarding why they do what they do allows them to choose either to continue, or to change, their approach. This role of theory in teacher education - of raising awareness regarding theoretical underpinnings of aspects of practice - might especially apply where teachers have taught for several years without any exposure or access to ELT theory or reading. In this regard, theory can play a role in ‘making the implicit explicit’ in a manner identified by Aristotle’s practical philosophy, where theory ‘contributes to a heightened awareness on the part of the practical moral agent of what is already implicit in his way of life’ (Dunne 1993: 160). This can involve teachers in making connections between previous research and their own classroom experiences through the prism of their existing belief system and values. This process can result in the development - or improvement - of a teacher’s conceptual map of the field and the activity of language teaching, of which expert teachers appear to have a well-developed version (Kennedy 2002). Many teachers develop a ‘richly detailed body of both propositional knowledge and experiences’ (Kennedy 2004: 38), which they can draw on to inform their practice. This propositional or systematic knowledge can provide teachers with ‘a way of interpreting and understanding’ new situations, which can enable them - through ‘pattern recognition’ - to recognise one situation as being similar to other situations, and can inform response options (Kennedy 2004: 38). Theory plays a role in making connections or conceptual mapping; it ‘supplies language from which to construct particular descriptions and themes from which to develop particular interpretations’ (Schön 1983: 273). This interplay in the process of making connections between elements of theory and elements of practice has been described as ‘theorizing practical knowledge and practicalizing theoretical knowledge’ (Tsui 2009: 429), where the former involves ‘making explicit the tacit knowledge that is gained from experience’, and the latter involves ‘being able to make personal interpretations of formal knowledge, through teachers’ own practice in their specific contexts of work’ (Tsui 2009: 429). These, Tsui argues, are ‘capabilities’, which are enacted and developed in a process of reflection. This suggests a means to deepen professional learning through making connections between academic material and personal experience might be facilitated through some form of reflection, as suggested by Moon (1999a/b). The ‘academic material’ to be used in this process might be research data or others’ ideas (Borg 1998).

### 6.1.3 The role of theory in providing a ‘sense of plausibility’ to a teacher’s practice

Certain theories - for example, those embodied in ELT methods or approaches (discussed in 2.2) - have a greater resonance than others for different members of the profession. This reflects the situation in TESOL (discussed in 2.2 and elsewhere) where a variety of teaching approaches coexist and where - while most teachers are expected to follow a broadly ‘communicative’ approach - there is a degree of variation in teachers’ interpretations and versions of what is ‘communicative’ (Littlewood 2014) and in what ‘best practice’ consists of. This, furthermore, illustrates the situation in TESOL where (at least some) teachers - in policy terms - have the ‘professional’ space or freedom to select, adapt and mix approaches in the manner suggested by Littlewood’s (2014) ‘fourth strategy’ for responding to the freedom to interpret versions of communicative approaches – discussed in 2.1.3.4.1. This results in a further role for theory in ESOL teachers’ practice, where the theories teachers choose to adopt or ‘use’ can ‘validate’ or provide a rationale for their teaching approach, or aspects of their approach. The following extract from the interview data illustrates the role which theory can play in providing a ‘sense of plausibility’ (Prabhu 1990) about a teacher’s chosen, or preferred, teaching approach. The following comment was made while reflecting on the usefulness of the ‘input’ of theory offered by the DELTA course:

*‘If I think of Michael Lewis and the ‘chunking’ of vocabulary, the collocations and things, I take that absolutely to heart. Or if I think about pronunciation, when I read about pronunciation, it absolutely is a chord that - it strikes a chord with...’* (Teacher 6)

The expression ‘strikes a chord’ describes the alignment which teachers might experience between their own personal understandings and beliefs about second language learning - identified as being highly influential on practice by Pajares (1992) and others - with particular ideas or theories from published research, or ‘systematic knowledge’; in this case, the ELT ‘method’, the Lexical Approach (Lewis 1993). This alignment or resonance regarding theories and teachers’ perspectives is important because - as noted by Prabhu (1990) in his notion of a teacher’s ‘sense of plausibility’ - teachers need to feel that their approach is credible in professional terms and in terms of self-efficacy. For Teacher 6 and others, theories about language learning and teaching play a role in helping them to rationalise and validate their preferred practices and approaches. That is, through contact with and an understanding of theory teachers might feel a sense of validation for what they had already suspected intuitively, or were generally disposed towards in terms of their teaching style, approach or their sense of priorities in language learning.

The degree of personal resonance certain ideas and theories about practice have for teachers suggests that encounters with theories can have a long-lasting and profound influence on teachers' practice. This allegiance to particular teaching theories and approaches also echoes the degree of commitment involved in certain practices identified by MacIntyre (discussed in 3.1), where the practitioner's ongoing engagement with their practice involves continual attempts to develop and find means to further their practice and benefit their students. Similarly, it recalls the descriptions of *praxis* as action that is 'morally-committed, and oriented' and 'informed by traditions in a field' (Kemmis & Smith 2008b).

#### **6.1.4 The role of theory in the socialisation of teachers into ESOL practices, into the profession, and 'social practices'**

ESOL teachers' introduction or 'induction' into the systematic knowledge-base of ELT whether through formal education programmes or through other means (see the types and sources of Systematic knowledge in the CF), furthermore, provides teachers with an awareness of the history of the ideas and traditions of the profession, in the manner discussed with reference to MacIntyre in 3.1, and can also be regarded as contributing to a teacher's socialisation into the practices of the profession (discussed in 3.3.8.2). That is, a familiarity with the ELT theory (as discussed in 2.2 and elsewhere, this might be in the form of ELT methods) constitutes part of a teacher's socialisation into the existing practices, beliefs and theories established through the history of the profession, again as illustrated in 2.2 in the genealogy.

#### **6.1.5 The role of theory in developing a teacher's practice**

As argued throughout the dissertation, theory is one element or dimension of the knowledge which teachers use in their practice. Regarding the relationship and interplay of ideas and theories with classroom practice, and how elements of theories find their way into practice, this appears to be a process of 'assimilation' or embedding of ideas over time. This view was expressed by Teacher 4, again, referring to theories acquired from the DELTA course:

*'I think they're assimilated and I think that they're reinforced each time we have - maybe through a CPD event - or something like that, or a conversation with a peer or something that happens in the classroom, something that you see.'* (Teacher 4)

The process of 'assimilation' of theory into teachers' practice appears to be prompted and reinforced through various experiences, both in and out of the classroom, with students and

fellow teachers, and post-teacher training. It is a common path for many pre-service teachers to complete degree-level training, which ‘front-loads’ theory (along with teaching practicum), and only subsequently, after entering service, do teachers make those connections between theory and practice suggested by Kennedy (2004) and Tsui (2009). That is, ‘propositional knowledge’ - from training course textbooks, lectures, and so on - ‘becomes situated’ through initial experiences in first teaching posts (and in the course practicum), and is subsequently ‘embellished through experience’, resulting in a ‘much more detailed and elaborated understanding’ of general phenomena (Kennedy 2004: 40). This process is reversed somewhat for many UK-based, or UK-origin ESOL teachers since novice teachers often accumulate several years’ experience working in non-English speaking countries (often employed on the basis of their ‘native-speaker’ status), either with no formal training or having completed a four-week CELTA course. Only after several years’ teaching experience, during which they have ‘acquired’ rather than ‘learnt’ skills (Eraut 1994), are they then introduced to the ELT ‘systematic knowledge base’ - as represented in the DELTA or equivalents - and do they start to make connections between practice and theory.

#### **6.1.6 The role of theory in developing ‘situated knowledge’**

Important too to the role of theory in practice are teachers’ experiences of practice and their responses to their teaching contexts (Tsui 2009), a dimension of the role of theory in practice which was discussed in Chapter 2 with reference to the policy context, ELT methods and appropriate pedagogy, and discussed further below in 6.2. The factor of the teaching context is important since it is where - as noted above in 6.1.5 - systematic knowledge ‘becomes situated’, is ‘embellished’, and develops in practice (Kennedy 2004: 40). In this respect, the skilled or successful use of theory incorporates and requires ‘a great deal of craft’ (Kennedy 2004: 38). That is, craft knowledge is a primary factor in the role of theory in practice, and is itself a form of expert knowledge (discussed further below in 6.3.1), which alongside formalised theory helps their theoretical framework to be ‘grounded’ in ‘principled’ knowledge (Kennedy 2004: 39). This combination of systematic and craft knowledge, and the role of context in developing expertise and situated knowledge, further illustrates the position taken in the dissertation regarding the role of theory in practice.

### **6.1.7 The role of theory in the form of ELT methods in ESOL teachers' practice**

As argued in 2.2, for many ELT teachers, theories about language learning and teaching have often been experienced in the form of ELT methods. These methods appear to continue to play a significant part in the thinking and discourse of TESOL teachers, as found by Bell (2007), despite some claims of a 'post-method' environment in ELT. This situation was illustrated in the general discussions of theory, methodology and sources of ideas for practice during the research interviews in this study, where teachers referred to particular ELT methods (for example, Task-based Learning, the Lexical Approach, and Grammar-Translation) to describe and characterise their methodology, and to identify their preference regarding theories of language teaching and learning. This illustrates the manner in which - at least for some ESOL teachers - (the names of) ELT methods operate at one level as useful professional shorthand for bundles of techniques, activities, theories and approaches to teaching languages. The references to ELT methods by teachers in the interviews reflect one 'use of theory'; that is, to 'name' practice (Larsen-Freeman 2008), as discussed in 6.1.2.

Despite the general 'communicative'/ CLT paradigm of global ELT (discussed in 2.2), a range of ELT methods old and new, appear to operate in the form of a 'post-method', 'pick and mix' or 'eclectic' approach (as discussed in 2.2.4.3). The role of particular teaching and language learning theories in the form of ELT methods appear to exert considerable influence on teachers' practice. Teachers (such as those in this study) appear to have strongly-held preferences with regard to ELT methods and methodology, and also to have their individual interpretation of what 'best practice' is for FE ESOL. This is illustrated as Teacher 2 states:

*'I would never teach grammar-translation. I would never do lock-step. I just wouldn't do that. Even if I had to, I just wouldn't work in somewhere that made you do that ...You have to 'own' what you're teaching, you know? (Teacher 2).*

Here she expresses her professional independence in choosing her own methodology and in rejecting certain ELT methods/ approaches (which, incidentally, other teachers in the sample do use), again indicating the role of a sense of plausibility as being important to teachers use of theories and the degree of commitment to certain beliefs about teaching and learning.

## **6.2 Influences on the role of theory in practice**

### **Introduction**

The specifics of and the degree to which theory plays a role in teachers' practice is influenced by what has been described in this dissertation as 'contextual factors', such as the policy context (chapter 2), the knowledge context (for example, as discussed in 2.2 and 3.3.8.3), as well as the 'personal factors' (as discussed in 3.3.8) which filter the role of various forms of teacher knowledge including theory (see 3.3). These factors, which influence on the role of theory, are discussed further below.

### **6.2.1 Contextual factors - policy**

The role theory (and other forms or sources of teacher knowledge) plays in teachers' practice might depend on the policy context (discussed in 2.1); for example, in the extent or manner in which aspects of systematic knowledge are viewed as being relevant, or otherwise to policy goals for the particular teaching context. Contextual factors were discussed in Chapter 2, in terms of 'external factors' which were generally beyond the control or influence of teachers, but which might influence or inform in some manner the role theory plays in their practice. It was argued in 2.1 that FE ESOL teachers' methodology is shaped to some degree by contextual factors such as FE ESOL policy, ESOL course guidelines, the ESOL curriculum, the nature of the student population, prevalent views regarding appropriate pedagogy, what is currently perceived as 'best practice', trends in the broader context of (global) ELT, and the degree of freedom of action teachers enjoy within the teaching institution. Aspects of context appear to be influential in both the knowledge teachers might be required to draw on, given particular contextual factors (such as, the needs of their students), and also the expertise, or 'personal practical knowledge' which they acquire. As argued in Chapter 2.1, 'informal regulatory frameworks' - such as the aim of providing generally 'communicative' ESOL lessons based on current best practice, including a student-centred, needs-based approach - are embedded in teachers' practice to a significant degree and influence the theories which teachers use. Furthermore, it has been argued (in 2.1 and elsewhere) that policy itself - for example, in the form of documents or approaches to the curriculum - can be understood as reflecting, representing or embodying elements of theory, as suggested by Kennedy's (2002) notion of 'prescriptive knowledge'. Policy, consequently, can itself represent one aspect of the role of theory in ESOL teachers' practice.



### **6.2.2 The policy context providing teacher freedom to choose theories/methodology**

Contextual factors are a significant influence on teachers' thinking and can represent a starting point in drawing on theories/ideas about teaching and in forming a context-appropriate ESOL methodology. A notable dimension of this situation is the element of freedom which some teachers might have in selecting which theories and methodology to use. As noted in 2.1.3.3, the nature of the 'third level' of policy and the ESOL curriculum - consisting of the course book-based ELT syllabus, plus supplementary materials, plus SQA assessment - appears to afford some teachers a degree of freedom in aspects of methodology in the delivery of the ESOL curriculum. Whilst degrees of freedom might vary - for example, across different ESOL courses and departments - the benefits of experiencing a level of freedom to make decisions regarding teaching methodology are illustrated in the following extract from the research interviews:

*'And we have a pretty free syllabus. We have a pretty free hand inside the classroom, so we're able to experiment. I think if you were a teacher in a secondary school, you're absolutely blocked, you know?'* (Teacher 6).

The degree of freedom to make decisions about approach and elements of course content was felt by this teacher to be unique to TESOL, and in contrast to the situation of teachers in mainstream education and on other college courses (as she elaborated in the interview).

This relative freedom - from the perspective of the teacher - to interpret current best practice can be accounted for by a number of factors. At the level of policy, the policy framework outlined in 2.1 allows FE ESOL teachers to decide their teaching approach at a classroom level, constrained only by general statements regarding the curriculum. Certain characteristics of the ESOL curriculum, for example, the nature of the relatively flexible ELT 'communicative' syllabus also affords teachers a similar level of flexibility in their own approach. This syllabus commonly consists of an ELT coursebook, plus supplementary materials, plus some form of assessment, plus the teacher's own input; which together allows the individual teacher to decide much of the teaching approach and which theories they choose to value.

### **6.2.3 A personalised pedagogical approach within a policy context**

Where the freedom to make decisions about their practice exists, it appears that teachers adopt a highly personalised pedagogical approach which reflects their own priorities and preferences, which might differ across a faculty. The ‘Summaries of key influences on practice’ (*Appendix 10*) from the research interviews for this study illustrate some of these differences. One result of this relative freedom to enact one’s own personal practical pedagogy - that is, the individual teacher’s approach arising from the combination of sources and types of teacher knowledge set out in the CF in 3.3 - is in the differing emphasis in approach of teachers in terms, for example, of prioritising certain aspects of language teaching over others in their classes.

### **6.2.4 Contextual constraints on the role of theory in ESOL teachers’ practice**

Despite the suggestion of relative freedom for ESOL teachers to use theories and determine a personal methodology suggested in 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 above, constraints do exist. It should be noted that the freedom which some ESOL teachers enjoy in forming their practice - referred to at several points in the dissertation - might not be generally or equally present across all ESOL contexts. As noted by Forde *et al.* (2006), the general trend in UK education in recent decades has been towards greater levels of accountability, regulation and assessment, all of which would imply a possible reduction in levels of freedoms for teachers. This trend has also been noted in the ESOL sector; for example, Cooke and Simpson (2008), discussing UK ESOL, claim that there is a ‘bureaucratisation’ of ESOL, which is resulting in ‘tensions between ESOL practitioners on the one hand and government agencies, particularly inspectorates on the other’ (Cooke & Simpson 2008: 8). One source of these tensions within the ESOL sector is a perceived lack of recognition for the sector, due to its status as a non-mainstream, ‘auxiliary’ subject area. In some respects ESOL is regarded as sitting slightly apart from what are often termed ‘mainstream’ FE college courses. This perception has been expressed by researchers, teachers and students (and was mentioned briefly in one of the research interviews).

### **6.2.5 The influence of the ‘policy culture’ on the role of theory in practice**

As has been argued throughout the dissertation, the nature of the role of theory in practice is influenced by many aspects of context and the various sources and types of teacher knowledge. ESOL teachers’ knowledge and thinking - including the consideration which ideas and theories should be part of their practice - interacts with and is informed by many different

factors. In the CF (3.3) the factor of the personal/individual characteristics and beliefs of the teacher as being an important filter on the role of theory in practice was noted. These personal/individual factors operate within the context of the values and ‘culture’ of the profession and institution a teacher works in. ESOL teachers’ thinking about their pedagogy involves an ‘ongoing dialogue between one’s personal history, present conditions, beliefs, values, and the social, cultural, historical, and political forces that surround groups of individuals in a given time and place’ (Marsh 2002: 333). The notion of a ‘policy culture’ indicates the importance of social and political contexts, and the way these factors might influence teachers’ decisions/views regarding ethics, values and ideology which forms part of teachers’ work (Crookes 2009), including the theories their practice is based on or embodies. It is particularly relevant to the AL/ELT context, where although policy is not always as visibly apparent (or codified) as in other educational contexts (see 2.1), the influence of ‘methods’ (Richards & Rogers 2001) has played a highly influential role as a policy-type of framework, which has guided and perhaps constrained teacher thinking about theory in practice (Kumaravadivelu 2001; Akbari 2008), in the way that new methods or teaching ‘fads’ often do (Kennedy 1997). Considerations regarding the policy of culture in UK TESOL include the students’ life-situations; for example, in ‘immigration contexts’, where there is likely an ‘assymetry’ in aspects of students and teacher’s lives, and in the teaching-learning situation (Simpson 2009). Such considerations inform the teacher in a mediation of finding an appropriate approach, for example in integrating ‘within classroom practice ways of addressing the social challenges faced by such students’ (Simpson 2009: 429).

### **6.3 The role of theory in practice ‘in combination with’ other sources and types of knowledge: Systematic + Craft + Prescriptive knowledge**

#### **Introduction**

This section examines the role of theory as it combines with other elements in the CF. The term ‘theory’ is defined and discussed in 3.2.1, where it is understood to primarily refer to ‘academic’ theory or systematic knowledge. However, it is also understood to be an influence or to be evident in other types and sources of teacher knowledge in the CF; possibly in the form policy or prescriptive knowledge, ‘working theories’, personal theories’ or ‘theories-in-use’.

The inclusion of the range of forms and sources of teacher knowledge in the CF and in the dissertation arises from the view that theory is not separate from practice or from other aspects of teacher knowledge, and that furthermore theory may in some instances arise directly from practice, or more often be a combination of both. These issues and arguments are discussed below and elsewhere in the dissertation.

### **6.3.1 The role of theory in combining to create ‘new’ teacher (personal practical) knowledge**

The term ‘Teacher Knowledge’ has been used in the dissertation to refer to all the forms of knowledge teachers might possess and use in their practice, including their ‘theoretical and practical knowledge as well as their dispositions, beliefs and values’ (Kumaravadivelu 2012: 21-22). Set out in the Conceptual Framework (3.3 and *Figure 3*) are the various types and sources of teacher knowledge which appear relevant to ESOL teachers’ work. These types and sources of knowledge might be understood as being either ‘used’ or ‘generated’ by teachers, following Hargreaves’ (1996) distinction. However, as discussed in 3.2 and elsewhere, such clear-cut distinctions regarding aspects of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ are largely rejected (as did Hargreaves regarding his distinction) in favour of a recognition of a more complex situation, characterised by the interaction and interplay between various forms of knowledge, such as those in the CF. As indicated in the interview data - for example, in the ‘*Key influences on practice: Appendix 10*’ - ESOL teachers draw on, incorporate and combine various forms of knowledge and theories, and in some regards teachers can be understood to create ‘new’ knowledge from these combinations.

One assumption in the dissertation regarding the practice of TESOL - and teaching more generally - is that it is a ‘non-natural’ activity which requires education and understanding from an existing knowledge-base. This knowledge-base includes both systematic knowledge (as discussed in 6.1) and also the collective, accumulated craft knowledge of the profession, including that relating to the particular ‘professional knowledge context’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1996). Whilst the principal focus of the dissertation has been on the role of theory, what has been categorised as craft knowledge (discussed in 3.3.7) has a key role in interacting with theory and as a form and source of knowledge for ESOL teachers. That is, the role of theory in practice is mediated and relies on the craft, tacit and ‘personal practical’ knowledge of teachers.

In addition to understanding theory in terms of ‘systematic knowledge’ (Kennedy 2002), other forms of teacher knowledge - such as those set out the CF (3.3) - might either reflect or be based upon theory (such as ‘prescriptive knowledge’), or be the result of a combination, interplay or interaction between theory and practice. Furthermore, theory might be understood to not only be ‘abstract’ or ‘esoteric’, but also might be categorised in other terms such as ‘theories-in-use’, ‘pseudo-theories’ or personal theories drawing on craft knowledge, as discussed in the following section.

### **6.3.2 Craft knowledge as ‘working theories’, personal theories’ or ‘theories-in-use’, and the role of theory in practice**

In terms of the theory-practice perspective, earlier definitions of theory and what counts as theory in teaching in Chapter 2, craft knowledge (CK) appears not to be ‘theory’ as it is ‘characterized more by its concreteness and contextual richness than its generalizability and context independence’ (Hiebert *et al.* 2002: 3). However, elements of CK might be understood to be a types of ‘working theory’, which - for the teacher - seem to represent wise or practicable generalised rules, as evidenced by their experiences of what action achieves desired outcomes, either derived individually or from colleagues. These might be personal theories, perhaps intuitive, based mostly on experience, and specifically based on those experiences which provide plausible explanations about everyday teaching dilemmas. Kennedy (2002) draws on Huberman (1983) to suggest that CK is ‘largely idiosyncratic and, in fact, ‘non-theoretical’. It is ‘reflected in the “core professionalism” of teachers and their “theories in use” rather than their “extended professionalism” and “espoused theories” (Brown & MacIntyre 1986: 37).

As with the other forms and sources of knowledge relating to teachers’ personal practical knowledge and expertise, CK does not exist independently from other factors, but rather mixes and combines with others, sometimes arising, for example, out of ‘prior education, the teachers’ personal backgrounds, the teaching contexts’, as well as ‘through experience in the doing of teaching’ (Bond-Robinson 2005: 83-4). The manner in which CK combines with other forms of knowledge can be characterised as it being ‘integrated knowing, thinking and action’ (Brown & MacIntyre 1986: 37).

### 6.3.3. Pedagogical content knowledge and theory and practice

This combination of theory and practice can be further understood with reference to a concept related to craft knowledge; that of ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ (PCK), which is the ‘special amalgam’ of the subject ‘content knowledge’, and the pedagogy that is ‘uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding’ (Shulman 1987: 8). PCK is important because it becomes the ‘framework for constructing other forms of declarative and procedural knowledge that are important for teaching’ (Mullock 2003: 10). It is the ‘distinctive kind of knowledge which teachers need in order to transform content knowledge to make it interesting and comprehensible’ to their students (Mullock 2003: 12). It is, furthermore, different from content knowledge as it involves the ‘communication between teacher and student’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 449). Understood in these terms PCK is a combination of systematic knowledge and subject or content knowledge, plus teaching methodology and experience and contextual knowledge. One example from ESOL/ELT is the knowledge ‘underlying the grammar explanations’ of EL teachers (Sanchez & Borg 2014: 46). Here, subject-matter knowledge might comprise content knowledge (‘grammar’), ELT methodology (a suggested teaching approach) along with teachers’ previous (‘practical’) experiences of teaching such content in similar situations.

In summary, teachers have ‘theoretical, as well as practical, knowledge of the subject matter that informs and is informed by their teaching’ (Wilson *et al.* 1987: 108, cited in Borg 2006: 19). This quotation indicates the range of types and forms of teacher knowledge which combine to form a teacher’s practice and also the type of interaction, the dialectic, two-way relationship between theory and practice, introduced in Chapter 1 and discussed elsewhere.

### 6.3.4 Tacit knowledge and theory

One further factor influencing the role of theory and how it finds its way into practice is the concept of tacit knowledge (discussed in 3.3.7.2). Like craft knowledge, it is significant to the research questions as it might equally appear to imply that theory is not involved in practice and also that it might help to explain how theory can find a role in teachers’ practice. The important role of tacit knowledge in allowing complex actions to be carried out in ‘real-time’ is summarized by Polanyi as follows:

tacit powers can integrate a much larger number of variables at a far greater speed than any explicit procedure, registering each of these variables in turn, could possibly carry out  
Polanyi 1964: 3.

Polanyi stresses the intuitive nature of tacit knowledge, with those involved tending to act ‘in ignorance of the steps employed’ (Polanyi 1964: 25), which might suggest little role for theory. Tacit knowing is developed through experience, and arises as ‘we convert bits of experience –which may be either subliminal or sensible’ (Polanyi 1964: 3-4). This reference to the role of ‘subliminal or sensible’ experiences in producing tacit knowledge again points to the complexity and difficulty in assessing the exact processes involved in the development of practical knowledge; that is, to the nature of the cognitive processes involved in developing experiential knowledge, and the extent to which, for example, systematic knowledge contributes to experiences transforming into habits, routines and settled features of practice. Eraut (2000) suggests that the process of using previous experiences and applying them to later situations appears to involve a ‘semi-conscious patterning of previous experience’ (Eraut 1994: 44). This involves hidden, complex, cognitive processes, which makes fully understanding the process difficult – and more particularly with regard to teacher learning – makes it difficult to identify sources of knowledge and to articulate them (Eraut 1994). Craft knowledge and tacit knowledge might represent a ‘glimpse’, ‘insight’, ‘perspective’, or ‘partial description’ (Eraut 2000: 118), rather than the type of clearly-constructed theories characteristic of propositional, or systematic knowledge. Further regarding to what extent it might regarded as theory, Urr (1992) argues that tacit knowledge is ‘organized into theories’ (Urr 1992: 58), which might be either ‘espoused theory’ – the ‘rationale which we claim to believe in and are able to describe’, or ‘theory-in-use’ – the ‘actual beliefs which we hold and which betray themselves in our behaviour in practice’ (Urr 1992: 58).

It appears - though difficult to confirm as Eraut and Urr indicate - that theory may have a partial or oblique role in even the most apparently intuitive of teacher behaviours. Eraut (1994) notes that teachers develop (efficient) routines partly because it is impossible to decide on every different thing that happens in the classroom since there are so many variables involved (Eraut 1994). This question of teachers’ ‘efficient routines’, or habitual approaches, and how they might transform from ideas or experiences to crystallize into settled features of a teacher’s practice is significant to the question of the role of theory in practice as it highlights the complexity in evaluating the process by which ‘theories’ are/ can be operationalised in the activity of teaching. Urr’s (1992) point that teachers can provide a rationale for their actions suggests a role for theory in practice in such routine actions.

## **6.4 The ‘filter’ of personal factors on the role of theory in practice**

### **Introduction**

For individual teachers the nature of the role of theory in their practice is largely determined by the quantity and quality of access to systematic knowledge they have. This might equate to the amount and level of their formal qualifications and degree and quality of ongoing professional development or training. It will also depend on further ‘personal/individual factors’ such as a teacher’s personal interest in reading attending seminars or conferences or disposition towards an interest or valorisation of systematic knowledge. The significance of the role of ‘personal/individual factors’ was discussed in 3.3.4.4 and 3.3.8.

### **6.4.1 Teachers’ beliefs**

In terms of the question of the role of theory in practice, the significance of teacher beliefs to teacher thinking (discussed in 3.3.8.4 and 3.3.8.5) suggests that it is an important factor in understanding the theories teachers use. The choices teachers make about theory is made through the prism of their own (and possibly others’) beliefs about teaching and learning, notwithstanding policy and other contextual constraints on the formation of their personal pedagogy. Beliefs are often discussed as being individual or personal, but are more likely to be influenced to some extent by views of others; colleagues, the profession in general and general beliefs about good practice, and what seems to be a ‘plausible’ option in the profession; factors discussed in the section 3.3.8.2 on ‘Socialisation into the profession’ and in 3.3.8.3 ‘The professional knowledge context’. In some respects, the general acceptance of a ‘communicative’ approach in CLT may be a reflection of such circumstances.

With regards to teachers beliefs about theory, it appears that - depending on the individual - their opinions might be provisional, central or marginal to their practice, and amongst the mix of theory, practice and beliefs, it can be difficult to distinguish between beliefs and certain forms of propositional knowledge (Borg 2006: 28). Teachers can articulate a favoured approach, whose source is published research, or their version of this, but it may well be mixed with more general, non-specialist beliefs about how languages are learnt. Further factors related to the construct of teachers’ beliefs such as teacher identity, values and ideology (discussed in 3.3.8.7) are useful in understanding the role of the ideas/theories that inform their practice. As Pajares (1992) notes there are a number of elements which fall within the broad scope of the concept of teacher beliefs which might contribute to a teacher’s



approach, and which teachers bring to the profession, contributing to a broad network of belief systems and professional identities (Kennedy 1997; Gu & Benson 2015).

#### **6.4.2 Prior teaching and learning experiences**

Certain aspects of ESOL teachers' approaches in the classroom may have their origins in their pre-service experiences of education and language learning (see section 3.3.8.1), as well as their general disposition and life skills. ESOL teachers come to the profession with beliefs, experience and knowledge of the learning-teaching process, student and teacher roles, and views regarding the aims of education. Their approach to teaching ESOL might be based particularly on their experiences of and beliefs about foreign language learning. These experiences and views about how languages are learnt mean teachers might come to language teaching with a 'working vision' - or quite a clear vision of what should happen in the classroom; including includes a view on which theories and the degree to which theory should play an important role in their practice.

#### **6.5 Summary of Chapter 6**

This chapter has directly addressed the research question 'What role does theory play in ESOL teachers' practice?' and set out conclusions regarding the question. It has drawn on concepts from previous chapters. Further understandings have been developed thanks to the insights from the 'voices from the classroom' of the interview research participants.

## CHAPTER 7 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of Chapter 7	157
7.1 Reflection on the research aims	157
7.2 Implications for practice and recommendations	158
7.2.1 Critical reflection, the ‘lens’ of theory	158
7.2.2 The role of craft knowledge	159
7.2.3 The role of theory and context	160
7.2.4 Exploring theory and practice	161
7.2.5 Types and sources of knowledge in the CF	162
7.3 Final comments	162

### Overview

This chapter begins with a reflection on the research aims. It goes on to outlines several implications for practice and recommendations, with reference to critical reflection, the ‘lens’ of theory, the role of craft knowledge, the role of theory and context, exploring theory and practice, and the types and sources of knowledge in the CF, ending with several final comments.

### 7.1 Reflection on the research aims

Doctorate in Education programmes afford the opportunity for mid-career professionals to have what Ang (1999) describes as ‘a space for the clarification of their own paradigms and procedures’ (Ang 1999). It was in this spirit that I chose to consider the research question ‘What role does theory play in ESOL teachers’ practice?’, as this reflected a fundamental question relating to my own current professional situation.

The research project set out to explore the role which theory plays in FE ESOL teachers’ practice, and to identify the types and sources of knowledge which ESOL teachers draw on in their practice. In addressing these issues, the aims, approach and design of the research project reflect a wider move in research on teacher knowledge and practice in recent decades away from the aim of exploring teacher thinking in order to provide ‘normative guidance for other teachers’ (Borg 2006) towards efforts to understand the ‘complex totality of cognitions, the ways this develops, and the way this interacts with teacher behaviour in the classroom’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001: 446). To reach a clear understanding of this is challenging, but

important; as Eraut (2000) notes, the ‘domain of explicit and implicit theories of action is complex and little understood but also highly significant’ (Eraut 2000: 123). While much research has been conducted in the area of teacher knowledge and practice, as Borg (2006) notes ‘Whole areas of language education, such as adult ESOL in the UK, remain unexplored from a teacher cognition perspective’ (Borg 2006: 273). This research project has aimed to contribute towards filling this gap.

## **7.2 Implications for practice and recommendations**

The dissertation has presented the case for the relevance and importance to ESOL practice of the various types and sources of teacher knowledge, including the theories which ESOL teachers use. The main implication for practice of this is that a greater consideration of these features is recommended for teachers, teacher educators and policy-writers. Underlying this recommendation is an understanding that it is possible to improve the manner in which, and the degree to which, ESOL teachers’ ideas and theoretical frameworks are examined and challenged.

### **7.2.1 Critical reflection, the ‘lens’ of theory**

In recent years the term ‘critical reflection’ (discussed in 3.2.4.1.3) has been used to describe the process of examining teachers’ practice. While teachers - including those interviewed in the research project - appear to already engage in periods of private and sometimes collegial critical reflection, a more thorough examination of what constitutes teachers’ understanding of theories and their interpretation of appropriate pedagogy could be worthwhile for improving ESOL practice. In Chapter 6 (6.1.2) it is suggested that the notion of the ‘lens of theory’ (Brookfield 1995) can contribute to such a process of analysing of practice. An examination of the theories which teachers use (and do not use), their theoretical approach or theoretical framework could be beneficial to teachers’ practice in several ways; for example, in helping to investigate teachers’ existing ideas and beliefs, in suggesting different possibilities for practice and in order to discover new ways ‘to see ourselves’ and our practice (Brookfield 1995). Kennedy (2004), too, argues for a greater role for theory in combination with craft knowledge because ‘even if craft knowledge is important, it might also benefit from “expert” knowledge’ (Kennedy 2004: 37). While craft knowledge is valuable as ‘situated, strategic, narrative knowledge’, also important is ‘public, justified, propositional “expert” knowledge’ (Kennedy 2004: 37). Practitioners need to ‘extend the conceptual apparatus which they bring to

experience’ (Bridges 2003: 62) (*italics in original*). This would require ‘encounters with theory of a different kind than that tacit system of beliefs which we carry with us on a day to day basis and which, on the pragmatic model, evolves through its confrontation with experience and practice’ (Bridges 2003: 63).

In terms of approaches towards critical reflection for teachers, theory could confront or challenge what can sometimes be a ‘very narrowly defined “problematizing” of everyday practice’ (Bridges 2003: 63). This is particularly the case where teachers - such as those interviewed - appear to enjoy a degree of freedom in formulating their methodology and adapting their courses; and where teachers have some flexibility to interpret what constitutes the informal regulatory framework of current best practice. The significance of such circumstances (in those teaching situations where they exist) to the issue of the role of theory in practice in terms of implications of the sector is that this would further suggest that teachers’ own views regarding theories and ESOL methodology would have a significant influence on practice and on what occurs in the classroom. As argued in 2.2, in ELT a lack of agency and authority on the part of teachers in examining and making decisions regarding the role of theory in practice is one legacy of AL-ELT’s historic preoccupation with methods.

Greater attention to the role of theory in practice by AL, EL teachers and the ELT profession might contribute to a re-balancing or readjustments regarding the manner in which the theory-practice issue is addressed - as recommended by Brookfield (1995), Bridges (2003) and Kennedy (2004) above.

### **7.2.2 The role of craft knowledge**

Notwithstanding the dissertation’s focus on the role of theory, it appears that a greater consideration of craft knowledge should also be incorporated into teacher education. Teacher educators have made the point that the acquisition of craft knowledge - often equated to the tacit knowledge of the profession - is an important issue for teacher training and teacher education (Freeman 1991; Urr 1992). In this regard, teachers’ ‘personal, unshared knowledge’ should be made public to a greater degree to contribute towards a ‘professional knowledge base for teaching’ (Hiebert *et al.* 2002: 4). Craft knowledge remains ‘largely hidden’ in many respects, but should be shared and combined with ‘research knowledge’ to a much greater extent Burney (2004).

Eraut (1994) raises the issue of to what extent forms of professional knowledge - such as craft knowledge - can be codified, are able to be explained and taught, and how much is implicit and as such too difficult to codify and communicate. Given the nature of CK as 'situated, learner-focused, procedural and content-related pedagogical knowledge', which is 'neither technical skill, the application of theory or general principles to practice, nor critical analysis' (Kennedy 1987, cited in Grimmet & MacKinnon 1992: 393), it might follow that it is difficult to codify, communicate or publish; for example, for the purposes of teacher education or development. Some suggest, however, that a generalising (or 'knowledge- building') process - a 'systematization of practical knowledge' (Eraut 1994: 44) - is possible and would be useful for the teaching profession. Although CK can be difficult to 'articulate and categorize' for teachers - novice and expert - and for researchers (Day 2005), it is already codified in some forms, for example, appearing in 'dos and don'ts checklists' and 'how-to-teach'/'survive' in classroom publications. It has been to some extent 'collected, codified, legitimated, and shared by professional bodies' (Burney 2004: 527), finding its way into training courses. One final consideration regarding the sharing of CK is its sometimes conservative character - that is, it is existing knowledge which is passed on rather than representing innovation. As such, any codifications of it should also be 'continually verified and improved' (Hiebert *et al.* 2002: 4).

### **7.2.3 The role of theory and context**

One further recommendation is that teachers could benefit from a critical engagement with theory with a consideration of context, with the aim of teachers becoming 'situationally attentive' (Brookfield 1995: 209) to a greater extent in their consideration of theory and context. This view of a contextual situating, and the interplay of craft and systematic knowledge, further illustrates the nature of the role of theory in practice, and the nature of a teacher's *praxis*. As discussed with reference to Dunne and MacIntyre (in 3.1), the concept of *praxis* is central to understanding the role of theory in practice. This includes a teacher's particular orientation towards their practice and their own conceptualisation of their fundamental beliefs and understandings on the nature and purpose of their practice.

One possible practical component in a process of examining teachers' assumptions - most directly arising out of the research project - would involve an analysis of the types and sources of teacher knowledge and teachers' own theory and practice in the manner of the research interviews. This might be useful - regardless of the stage of a teacher's career - in re-

evaluating and possibly ‘rebalancing’ the ‘theory-craft’ make-up of a teacher’s knowledge and practice. Given the nature of teachers’ careers, the accumulation of experience usually overtakes any input of systematic knowledge. This might lead to a deficit or imbalance in terms of an ‘input of theory’, which teachers might attempt to resolve through seeking sources of knowledge identified in the CF, such as reading or attending conferences, CPD and so on.

#### **7.2.4 Exploring theory and practice**

A further task would be to explore to a greater extent the way teacher knowledge ‘interacts with teacher behaviour in the classroom’ (Verloop *et al.* 2001). Teacher knowledge is complex in that its relationship to teachers’ actions in the classroom is often indirect. At times, ideas from systematic knowledge may appear to be relatively ‘directly’ applied, such as where a new teaching approach or procedure is read about in a book or introduced at a training event, and then subsequently used in class. However, it appears that more often ideas, theories, knowledge and experiences are mediated through various stages of thought and action - such as ‘trial and error’ or stages of interpretation - before they appear in a teacher’s practice in some form.

One fundamental problem underpinning the issue of the ‘application’ or ‘use’ of theories in teachers’ practice relates to the question of freedom and free will, and to what extent autonomous desires are formulated independently of influences (Burbules 1977, Phillips 1977, Christman 1989b). Teachers are socialised into their profession through a variety of experiences and operate within an environment full of ideas, conventions and constraints; all of which might influence their decision-making and actions. Addressing this question, Christman (1989b) places importance on the ‘historical’ factor, or the individual’s ‘past’, as this relates intimately to the formation of desires and values. For ESOL teachers, this might be found in a teacher’s development of beliefs about adult language teaching and the factors which affect their ‘sense of plausibility’ (Prabhu 1990) about certain theories. This includes the mix of ‘types and sources of knowledge’ set out in the CF (3.3), such as their previous teaching/learning experiences, teacher education, and teacher identity (Forde *et al.* 2006) and, for the FE ESOL teachers in this research project, their language learning experiences. The range of elements involved in teachers’ decision-making, the question of influences on their practice mentioned above and the factor of ESOL teachers’ relative freedom to shape aspects of their practice together further suggests that a greater examination of teachers’ use of ideas

would appear useful to develop the ESOL profession's practice. Such examinations would include a particular focus on teachers' beliefs about second language learning.

### **7.2.5 Types and sources of knowledge in the CF**

Examinations of the ideas and theories which inform and comprise a teachers' practice could be incorporated into existing approaches to teacher education and development.

Understandings and findings from this dissertation – such as those set out in the CF – might be used to better understand ESOL teachers' practice, and to form a framework or foundation to address issues of teacher development, education and policy concerns, such as curriculum implementation. A further task would be to identify to a greater extent and in more detail than is achieved in this dissertation what a 'conceptual framework for teacher knowledge' might consist of. This might involve further research and might inform approaches to teacher development and education. The exact details of how this might be achieved would require further consideration and research. However, this dissertation could be used as preliminary work.

### **7.3 Final comments**

Theories about teaching and learning appear to be fundamental to educators seeking to improve practice. Cumming (2008) highlights the importance of the need for teachers to make 'informed choices' about their practice. He paraphrases Stern (1983) to assert that, 'All acts of teaching languages necessarily make assumptions about language, learning, society, and education', which can be 'naïve' or 'erudite', and be informed by varying theories (Cumming 2008: 286). Cumming concludes that it is the responsibility of teachers to make informed choices. That is, apart from the role of the decisions of policy-makers, learners, or institutions, teachers themselves have a duty to make the best choices possible about their practice, based on available knowledge.

Word count: 58,914 (excluding Chapter contents information)

## FOOTNOTE

- check on apparent contradictions, *non sequiturs*, imbalance, implausibility, exaggerations, or inconsistencies ('Yes, but didn't you say a moment ago...?' 'How can that be so if...?' 'Is it *really*?' 'Does it necessarily follow that...?' 'Why?' 'Why not?' 'What was the point of that?');
- search for opinions ('What do you think of that?' 'Do you believe that?');
- ask for clarification ('What do you mean by...?' 'Can you say a little more about...?' 'In what way?' 'Can you give me some examples?');
- ask for explanations, pose alternatives ('Couldn't one also say...?');
- seek comparisons ('How does that relate to...?' 'Some others have said that...');
- pursue the logic of an argument ('Does it follow, then, that...?' 'Presumably,...?');
- ask for further information ('What about...?' 'Does that apply to...?');
- aim for comprehensiveness ('Have you any other...?' 'Do you all feel like that?' 'Have you anything more to say on that?');
- put things in a different way ('Would it be fair to say that...?' 'Do you mean...?' 'In other words...?');
- express incredulity or astonishment ('In the *fourth* year?' 'I don't believe it!' 'Really??');
- summarise occasionally and ask for corroboration ('So...?' 'What you're saying is...?' 'Would it be correct to say...?');
- ask hypothetical questions ('Yes, but what if...?' 'Supposing...?');
- play devil's advocate ('An opposing argument might run...' 'What would you say to the criticism that...?').

(Woods 2006)



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

‘Ten principles of effective teaching and learning’ in *What's next for learning and teaching in Scotland's colleges* (Scottish Further Education Unit 2008: 60-61)

#### **Ten principles of effective teaching and learning**

1. Equips learners for life, in its broadest sense, *(implies a broad view of learning outcomes)*;
2. Engages with valued forms of knowledge, *(wider benefits of learning going beyond the acquisition of skills)*;
3. Recognises the importance of prior experience and learning, *(build on prior experience as well as taking into account different personal and cultural experiences of different groups of learners)*;
4. Requires the teacher to ‘scaffold’ learning, *(support learners as they move forward)*;
5. Makes assessment congruent with learning, *(provide feedback for future learning rather than being driven by targets and outcomes)*;
6. Promotes the active engagement of the learner;
7. Fosters both individual and social processes and outcomes, *(learning is a social activity and learners should be encouraged to work with others, share ideas and build knowledge together)*;
8. Recognises the significance of informal learning,
9. Depends on teacher learning and development; *(continuing formal and informal professional learning)*;
10. Demands consistent policy frameworks, with support for teaching and learning as their main focus

## APPENDIX 2

Invitation to take part in research

Dear Colleague

I'm writing to let you about some research I'm doing and to ask if you'd be prepared to be interviewed (by me) as part of it.

I've been doing a part-time Doctorate in Education (for 4 years) with the University of Glasgow

(<http://www.gla.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/doctorateineducationresearch/background/>)

and now it's time for me to produce a thesis. As part of the thesis I'm aiming to interview 8-10 ESOL teachers – hopefully all from the college – over the next few weeks.

If you agree to be interviewed it would involve one 30-40 minute interview, with a possible second (follow-up) 10-15 minute about a week later. I would ask you questions and record the interview. Everything is conducted in the strictest confidence, following UoG's research ethics policy. The topic is the ideas/approaches/principles teachers use in their lessons.

If you think you might be prepared to do this, but want to ask any questions about this, you can reply to this email or phone me (see below for my number) with no obligation to go ahead with the interview.

In the case that more than 10 people replied, I'd take names out of a hat.

Regards

Ken

## APPENDIX 3

### Plain Language Statement



## Plain Language Statement

### 1. Study title and Researcher Details

**Research Project:** EdD Dissertation: 'The role of theory in the practice of teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages'.

**Principle Investigator:** Ken Shirley

**Supervisor:** Professor Robert Davis (contact: [Eleanor.Macleod@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Eleanor.Macleod@glasgow.ac.uk)), Julie McAdam (contact: [Julie.McAdam@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Julie.McAdam@glasgow.ac.uk)), School of Education, University of Glasgow.

**Degree:** Doctorate in Education

### 2. Invitation paragraph

I write to invite you to take part in a research study. In order for you to decide whether you would like to take part or not, please read the following information about the study carefully. Please feel free to talk to others about the information here, and also feel free to contact me if you would like any other information or would like discuss anything further.

Thank you for reading this.

### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

As you may know, there has been a long-running debate in education about the relationship between theory and practice. There is disagreement too about what counts as 'theory', with different ideas about 'craft' knowledge, the importance of 'methods' in English Language Teaching, the influence of schools' policies, what we learn from training courses and any training or reading teachers may do. It is not clear which theories about language learning and teaching teachers in fact use, nor what types of theories, if any, might be most useful for teachers to use. Furthermore, some question whether teachers need to, should or are able to 'apply' other people's theories to their own teaching. For my Doctorate in Education dissertation I would like to explore these issues as they relate to the teaching of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

Much of my dissertation will involve reading and writing about these issues, but it will also be very useful for me to talk to ESOL teachers to find out what role, if any, theories play in their everyday teaching. It is clearly a complex issue and answers might not be easy to find, but I think it is an important issue. I hope to conduct ten interviews and also conduct 'follow up' interviews, where necessary, to check my understandings of comments from the first interviews. By doing this, I hope to hear ideas about the role of theories in ESOL teachers' practice.

### 4. Why have I been chosen?

As I explained above, I would like to hear teachers' views about my research topic. I would like to interview ESOL teachers here at xxxxxx College to form part of a 'case study' of one particular teaching context.

### 5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

## **6. What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, you would be involved in 1 or 2 interviews, which will last for a maximum of one hour each.

The interviews will be arranged at times which are convenient for you. I hope that the interviews will be in November 2013-January 2014.

Interviews might be done face-to-face or via Skype (depending which is most convenient for you), and would be recorded electronically.

I would like to interview each participant twice for a maximum of one hour each time, with a space of 1-2 weeks between each interview. During those 1-2 weeks, I transcribe the interview as it was recorded and send you a copy. The second interview will be to discuss points from the first interview, including anything you yourself might want to explain or clarify.

The purpose of the interviews is for me to collect data about teachers' use of and views about theories and ideas about teaching and learning. In the interviews I will ask you about aspects of theories or ideas about teaching, your own thinking about teaching and what ideas guide you in your teaching. I will send you some questions 1-2 weeks before the interview to give you some time to reflect on the interview topics.

## **7. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All the information I collect from you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and in secure conditions. All written, recorded and electronic data will be destroyed at the end of the research project. I will delete electronic data and shred any paper data within a year after the end of the research project.

If you decide to take part in the research, you will be identified by a pseudonym. I will be very careful in the writing of the dissertation and any publication of the data which might take place so that the individuals in the study are not able to be identified. Comments will be used in the dissertation in a way that will not allow readers to identify those individuals who made them. I will show you drafts of the writing using your comments to ensure you are comfortable with them. As mentioned above, you may withdraw from the project at any time if you wish to.

I am aware that there are reasons why confidentiality is important and I wish to deal with any issues sensitively. If there is anything that you are concerned about, please discuss this with me if you wish to.

## **8. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the study will be presented in my thesis for the Doctorate of Education with University of Glasgow. This will be made available to you after it is completed. Articles for educational journals based on the research project may be written.

## **9. Who has reviewed the study?**

The research project has been reviewed and accepted by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee

## **10. Contact for Further Information**

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project you can contact the College Ethics Officer by contacting Dr Valentina Bold at [Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk).

## APPENDIX 4

### Consent Form



University  
of Glasgow | College of  
Social Sciences

### Consent Form

#### Title of Project:

'The role of theory in the practice of teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages'  
(This is a research project for an EdD Dissertation)

**Name of Researcher:** Ken Shirley

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the *Plain Language Statement* for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time or to withdraw any data previously supplied, without giving any reason.
3. I consent to the interviews being audio-taped.
4. I understand that my identity will be anonymised in the dissertation to prevent it being identifiable.
5. I understand that I will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.
6. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

**Name of Participant:**

**Date:**

**Signature:**

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**Researcher:**

**Date:**

**Signature:**

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## APPENDIX 5

### Follow-up message to RPs after interviews

Hi xxxxxx

Thanks again for doing the interview. I've attached the transcript - you'll notice that I've 'tidied it up' the words we actually used a little (e.g. by taking out our 'you know's and some repetitions). This is because I aim to analyse the ideas rather than the 'spoken discourse'. I'd be grateful if you could read it and check that you are happy that it's a fair representation of our conversation. You could also make any amendments to what you said if you wish, or if there's anything else that occurs to you about anything we spoke about you'd like to add.

Thanks again

Ken

## APPENDIX 6

### Interview Schedule

#### Interview Schedule

Thanks for agreeing to do this interview. It will take a maximum of one hour.

Question 1: What ESOL classes have you been teaching recently?

[LINK-INTRODUCTION TO QUESTION 2:

I'm interested in **where** you got, or get, your ideas about how best to teach and learn ESOL; i.e. where you get your ideas about possible ways or approaches to teach English]

Question 2: Where do your ideas about how best to teach ESOL come from?  
(Can you give me some example/s?)

*How important are the following as sources to help you know how to teach well?*  
GIVE THE FOLLOWING ON 'PROMPT CARDS':

- *Course books & other published teaching materials*
- *Initial and in-service teaching qualifications*
- *Methodology publications, journals, websites etc*
- *Peer observations*

- *The approach of colleagues*
- *The college teaching policy*
- *Trial and error (from classroom experiences)*
- *Your own experience of language learning.*

*Where do you **most** of your ideas come from? Why do you think that is?  
Is that the best way for teachers to discover how to teach well/better?*

[LINK-INTRODUCTION TO QUESTION 3:

I'd be interested to hear about the ideas you use in your teaching – i.e. your ideas about good methodology or approaches to teaching and learning English]

Question 3: Which ideas about teaching-learning do you use?

Discuss the above ideas in turn:

*Is there a name for the theory you are referring to?*

*What do you know about it? Could you explain your understanding of it?*

*Where did you hear about it?*

*Why do you use it?*

*Does this idea reflect your theory/understanding of how second language acquisition occurs?*

Question 4: Do you use these ideas (from Question 3) regularly? In every class?

Discuss some answers to Question 3:

*Do you think about this before lessons (i.e. when planning/thinking about how you will teach a lesson)?*

*Do you think about this during lessons?*

Question 5: Do you feel you use theories, or ideas, about second language learning consciously in your teaching? (or is the way you teach mostly -maybe good- habits?)

Final questions:

- *Would you like to be able to use more ideas, more often?*
- *How do you think this might happen?*
- *What is your opinion about the usefulness of theories in language teaching?*
- *Do you think your lessons improve post-Diploma? Why?*
- *What you know about 'current best practice'*

## APPENDIX 7

Version of the Interview Schedule sent to RPs pre-interview

Question 1: *What ESOL classes have you been teaching recently?*

Question 2: *Where do your ideas about teaching-learning ESOL come from?*  
(*Can you give me some example/s?*)

*Would you include any of the following?*

- Initial and in-service teaching courses/qualifications
- INSETT
- Course books/ published teaching materials
- Peer observations
- Methodology publications
- Own experience of language learning
- Trial and error

*Where do you most of your ideas come from?*  
*Why is this?*

Question 3: *Which ideas about teaching-learning do you use most?*

*What is the name of theory you are referring to?*  
*What do you know about it? Explain what is your understanding of it?*  
*Where did you hear about it?*

Question 4: *Do you use these ideas regularly? In every class?*

*Do you think about this before lessons?*  
*Do you think about this during lessons?*

Question 5: *Do you feel you use ideas, or theories, about second language learning enough in your teaching?*

*Do you think your lessons improve post-Diploma? Why?*

*How do you remember all the ideas you use/like/find useful?*  
*Would you like to be able to use more ideas, more often?*  
*How do you think this might happen?*  
*What is your opinion about the usefulness of theories in language teaching?*



## APPENDIX 8

An explanation of the interview schedule

### 1/ The opening question

#### **Question 1: *What ESOL classes have you been teaching recently?***

Drever (1995) suggests that the opening interview question should not be ‘threatening’, nor ‘too important for the rest of the interview’ (Drever 1995: 26). Its function is also one of ‘breaking the ice’ (Fontana & Frey 1994). This question asks for factual, descriptive and ‘non-analytical’ information, which is easy for the subject to ‘access’ and articulate. Furthermore, given that the researcher is a colleague who knows the systems in the subjects’ teaching institution, there is a pre-established common language regarding the possible answers to the question; in this case, the ‘names’ of the classes. ESOL student populations are invariably organized into groups of learners with a similar level of English-language proficiency, and are consequently named as ‘beginner’, ‘intermediate’ or ‘upper-intermediate’ class, and so on. Within those ‘levels’ there are various types of courses, such as ‘English for Business’, ‘English for Work and Training’, or courses to prepare students for English language qualifications, such as IELTS (the International English Language Testing System).

While the question asks for apparently mundane information, it also elicits potentially useful information about the teaching-learning context within which discussions of the role of theory will likely take place later in the interview. Elements of the context here include information about the learners, the probable content (syllabus) of the course, and course aims. In subsequent discussions of theory and practice in the interview reference may be made to teaching approaches or practices which would be especially suitable or relevant to certain ‘levels’ or types of courses. For example, a teacher might adopt a certain pedagogical approach to teaching a particular ‘level’ of learner; perhaps, by taking into consideration ideas about the ways in which early or later stages of language acquisition occur. As such, this opening question should prove to be a non-threatening means to establish a degree of context, which might prove to be useful later in the interview.

## 2/ Where do theories come from?

**Question 2: *Where do your ideas about teaching-learning ESOL come from?***  
***(Can you give me some example/s?)***

This question aims to be a non-threatening way to introduce the topic of ‘theory’, and to elicit some of the subjects’ own examples of theories, which can be followed up and discussed in more depth. That is, having identified sources of theory the discussion can move on towards the more challenging task of describing the process of using ideas (theory) during, or in, practice. Such a discussion aims to elicit accounts of how theories are used in practice, and to explore the interplay between the two.

As discussed above, the term ‘ideas’ should be a less potentially problematic term than ‘theory’. The initial question demands greater thinking than question one, but is still generally descriptive rather than analytical in nature. Some effort on the part of the subject might be required to access this information. The researcher then guides the discussion as far as possible onto issues more directly related to the research issue.

The following prompts were used:

***Would you include any of the following?***

- Initial and in-service teaching courses/qualifications
- INSETT
- Course books/ published teaching materials
- Peer observations
- Methodology publications
- Own experience of language learning
- Trial and error

***Where do you most of your ideas come from?***  
***Why is this?***

## 3/ How are these ideas used?

**Question 3: *Which ideas about teaching-learning do you use most?***

This question aims to prompt further discussion of the process of using ideas (theory) in practice. Asking about ideas which are *most* used by subjects is a different approach to eliciting further comments relevant to the research focus.

Follow-up questions to explore the extent to which this use of theory is a conscious process amongst teachers are the following (and in question 4):

***What is the name of theory you are referring to?***

***What do you know about it? Explain what is your understanding of it?***

***Where did you hear about it?***

4/ Are the theories used systematically or consistently?

**Question 4: *Do you use these ideas regularly? In every class?***

***Do you think about this before lessons?***

***Do you think about this during lessons?***

These questions aim to challenge subjects more directly to account for the degree to which they use theory (consciously, or otherwise). The questions aim to elicit accounts of the connection or interplay, as subjects see it, between ideas and their practice and the extent of the role of ideas in their practice.

5/ Connecting theory and practice, and the role of theory

**Question 5: *Do you feel you use ideas, or theories, about second language learning enough in your teaching?***

This line of questioning gives research participants an opportunity – if they have not already done so previously in the interview – to reflect more directly on the role of theory in their practice.

***Do you think your lessons improve post-Diploma? Why?***

The ‘Diploma’ (*RSA/Cambridge Diploma in ELT*) is the post-initial training qualification, which many of the subjects will have completed. It is often viewed as a significant input of theory relating to ELT.

***How do you remember all the ideas you use/like/find useful?***

***Would you like to be able to use more ideas, more often?***

***How do you think this might happen?***

***What is your opinion about the usefulness of theories in language teaching?***

These questions aim to explore more directly subjects’ thoughts on the role that theory might play in their practice.

In the eight interviews questions 1 and 2 were usually used, except where the discussion started based on the interviewees' reaction and initial comments on the questions which I had sent to them several days earlier. Questions 3-5 were generally covered to varying degrees. What in fact occurred was a much more 'organic' discussion of the role of theory in their practice, based largely on the discussion of sources of ideas about teaching on the prompt cards relating to question 2. To some extent, this might be regarded as a flaw in the data-collection process as the interview schedule was not used uniformly in a standardised manner across the eight interviews. However, I feel the aim of eliciting information about the role of theory in the research participants' practice from the interviews was met, as a large amount of relevant data was collected, which was a greater priority than a standardised data collection procedure.

## APPENDIX 9

### Example of memo

Here is an extract from a memo written while coding after interview 3

ADD 'THE LEARNERS (needs)' as another node??? NEEDS/MOTIVATION ETC

One recurring theme not identified/included as a pre-coding category was 'the learner' or a 'group of learner' and specifically the needs of learner/s as perceived by the teacher or interpreted as what is necessary in terms of learning materials and procedures. But also reference to their lives outside the classroom and how they might impact

In many ways, it was the starting point or touchstone for discussion of appropriate method

Some quite analytical on learners (e.g. RP4 and RP6) and consciously use them as a resource to develop craft knowledge/in trial and error reflections on students' problems –difficulties

RP4 and RP6 both focus on the difficult ones as a challenge and as a goal/responsibility

*RP6 Because, I mean, your strong students are probably going to learn almost no matter which method you try. To catch the difficult ones, the dyslexic ones, and the ones who don't ever write anything down but only listen with their ears. The ones who come from certain cultural or educational backgrounds that's going to make study skills really difficult for them and that sort of thing. ('catch' = like 'Catcher in the Rye'!)*

Needs analysis (needs based learning) and differentiated learning (individualised learning), the difference between ESOL and EFL in expectations respite and language support from everyday problems/challenges vs 'entertainment' respectively.

## APPENDIX 10

Summaries of 'key influences on practice'

**Not available in public copy**









## APPENDIX 11

### Nodes and coding

11a: An initial list of codes based on the Conceptual Framework

11b: An early version of coding including the number of coded references and notes

11c: The second version of coding including the number of coded references (and notes)

11d: All nodes and number of coded references

### 11a: An initial list of codes based on the Conceptual Framework

#### Theory & 'Named theory'

- Systematic knowledge ('academic' research) (Knowledge utilization)
- Teachers' self-generated knowledge

#### Apprenticeship of Learning

#### Tacit knowledge

#### Formal teacher education programmes (C/DELTA)

#### Less/informal teacher education and sharing of best-practice

#### Teacher identity: ideology, values & network of beliefs

#### Context (ESOL)

#### Change of context as 'critical incident'

#### Craft knowledge

#### Prescriptive knowledge (policy)

### ELT-specific

- appropriate pedagogy
- 'Post method' environment
- Method

### Sources of ideas for teaching approach (Interview Question 2)

- Trial and error (from classroom experiences)
- The approach of colleagues
- Coursebook & other published teaching materials
- Methodology publications, journals, websites etc { This is in Systematic knowledge }
- Peer Observations
- The college teaching policy { This is in Prescriptive knowledge }
- Initial and in-service teaching qualifications { This is in Formal teacher education programmes }
- Your own experiences of language learning { This is in Apprenticeship of Learning }

### The role of theory

- to inform practice for practitioners
- to make sense of practice for practitioners
- to motivate practice for practitioners
- to provide a sense of plausibility for practitioners
- to provide coherence to practice for practitioner

### 11b: An early version of coding including the number of coded references and notes

<b>'Parent' nodes</b>	<b>Related 'Child' or 'free' nodes</b>
Anecdotes –key incidents/events (critical incidents') <b>[uncoded]</b>	
Apprenticeship of Observation/Learning []	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E [3]</li> <li>• School [6]</li> <li>• Second language learning [7]</li> </ul>
Characterising-describing own practice []	Views on the role of theory in their practice (( <b>NEW – To code 1-3</b> ))
Context []	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of context [3]</li> <li>• ESOL FE [2] (<b>NEW – To code 1-3</b>)</li> </ul>
Craft knowledge [] <b>REMOVE IMPOSS??</b>	
ELT-specific methodology [7]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate pedagogy [3]</li> <li>• 'Post method' environment [9]</li> <li>• Method [6]</li> </ul>
Formal teacher education (programmes) [13]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CELTA-Cert (&amp; pre-CELTA) [12]</li> <li>• DELTA –Dip [11]</li> <li>• Other teacher education [4]</li> </ul>
Sources of ideas for teaching approach [2] (Interview Question 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trial and error (from classroom experiences) [3]</li> <li>• The approach of colleagues[4]</li> <li>• Coursebook &amp; other published teaching materials [5]</li> <li>• Methodology publications, journals, websites etc [6]</li> <li>• Peer Observations [6]</li> </ul>
Knowledge utilization [12]	
Less-informal teacher education/sharing best practice [8]	
Prescriptive knowledge (policy) [3]	
Tacit knowledge [2] ??	
Teacher identity: ideology, network of beliefs & values [13]	
Teachers' self-generated knowledge [9]	
The role of theory <b>[uncoded]</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to inform practice for practitioners</li> <li>• to make sense of practice for practitioners</li> <li>• to motivate practice for practitioners</li> <li>• to provide a sense of plausibility for practitioners</li> <li>• to provide coherence to practice for practitioners</li> </ul>
Theories discussed or referred to [17]	Named Theory Systematic knowledge ('academic' research)

11c: The second version of coding including the number of coded references (and notes)

<b>‘Parent’ nodes</b>	<b>Related ‘Child’ or ‘free’ nodes</b>
Anecdotes –key incidents/events (critical incidents’) [uncoded]	
Apprenticeship of Observation/Learning [24]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E [3]</li> <li>• School [6]</li> <li>• Second language learning [7]</li> </ul>
Characterising-describing own practice [29]	
Context [9]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of context [3]</li> <li>• ESOL FE [2]</li> </ul>
Craft knowledge [3]	
ELT-specific methodology [7]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate pedagogy [3]</li> <li>• Method [6]</li> <li>• ‘Post method’ environment [9]</li> </ul>
Formal teacher education (programmes) [13]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CELTA-Cert [12]</li> <li>• DELTA –Dip [11]</li> <li>• Other teacher education [4]</li> </ul>
Sources of ideas for teaching approach [2] (Interview Question 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trial and error (from classroom experiences) [3]</li> <li>• The approach of colleagues[4]</li> <li>• Coursebook &amp; other published teaching materials [5]</li> <li>• Methodology publications, journals, websites etc [6]</li> <li>• Peer Observations [6]</li> </ul>
Knowledge utilization [12]	
Less-informal teacher education/sharing best practice [8]	
Prescriptive knowledge (policy) [3]	
Tacit knowledge [2]	
Teacher identity: ideology, network of beliefs & values [13]	
Teachers’ self-generated knowledge [9]	
The role of theory [uncoded]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to inform practice for practitioners</li> <li>• to make sense of practice for practitioners</li> <li>• to motivate practice for practitioners</li> <li>• to provide a sense of plausibility for practitioners</li> <li>• to provide coherence to practice for practitioners</li> </ul>
Theories discussed or referred to [17]	

11d: All nodes and number of coded references

<b>'Parent' nodes</b>	<b>Related 'Child' or 'free' nodes</b>
Apprenticeship of Observation/Learning [42-8]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E [4-2]</li> <li>• School [12-5]</li> <li>• Second language learning [17-8]</li> </ul>
Characterising-describing own practice [56-8]	
Context [15-6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of context [5-2]</li> <li>• ESOL FE [23-4]</li> </ul>
Craft knowledge [14-6]	
ELT-specific methodology [17-6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate pedagogy [8-5]</li> <li>• Method [18-6]</li> <li>• 'Post method' environment [12-5]</li> </ul>
Formal teacher education (programmes) [16-6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CELTA-Cert [22-6]</li> <li>• DELTA –Dip [24-6]</li> <li>• Other teacher education [17-7]</li> </ul>
Sources of ideas for teaching approach [7-5] (Interview Question 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trial and error (from classroom experiences) [15-8]</li> <li>• The approach of colleagues[14-7]</li> <li>• Coursebook &amp; other published teaching materials [16-8]</li> <li>• Methodology publications, journals, websites etc [17-6]</li> <li>• Peer Observations [15-7]</li> <li>• <b>College teaching policy [10-5]</b></li> </ul>
Knowledge utilization [17-4]	
Less-informal teacher education/sharing best practice [17-7]	
Prescriptive knowledge (policy) [11-6]	
Tacit knowledge [2-1]	
The student/learner [9-3]	
Teacher identity: ideology, network of beliefs & values [11-2]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ideology [0]</b></li> <li>• <b>Network of beliefs [4-1]</b></li> <li>• <b>Values [3-2]</b></li> </ul>
Teachers' self-generated knowledge [14-5]	
<b>Views on the role of theory in practice [42-8]</b>	
The role of theory [49-7]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to inform practice for practitioners [12-5]</li> <li>• to make sense of practice for practitioners [10-4]</li> <li>• to motivate practice for practitioners [3-2]</li> <li>• to provide a sense of plausibility for practitioners [15-4]</li> <li>• to provide coherence to practice for practitioners [7-3]</li> <li>• <b>to introduce change [2-1]</b></li> </ul>
Theories discussed or referred to [56-7]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Named theory [23-6]</b></li> <li>• <b>Systematic knowledge (academic research) [13-6]</b></li> </ul>

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