Article:
Webster, S (2019) Understanding Lack of Development in Early Career ESOL Teachers' Practical Knowledge. System, 80. pp. 154-164. ISSN 0346-251X

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.10.010

Understanding Lack of Development in Early Career ESOL Teachers' Practical Knowledge

Teacher learning is vital for academic institutions engaged in raising the educational quality of their programme (Borg, 2018). Despite this, however, longitudinal research exploring when and how language teacher learning actually takes place is relatively limited (Richards, 2017) with research mostly limited to the effectiveness of formal teacher education programmes (Borg, 2015). This study investigates the practical knowledge development of four early career language teachers outside formal, structured professional development programmes as they teach speaking skills to adult migrants. The extensive data, generated over a full academic year, indicate that practical knowledge development was very limited during this period. Furthermore, the findings suggest a strong relationship between this absence of growth and the atheoretical nature of the teachers' practical knowledge. Such findings strongly suggest the need for educational institutions to purposefully create effective learning environments which engage teachers with public theory in order to facilitate the development of teaching expertise.

1. Introduction

Teacher development has been a major research focus since at least the 1970s (Borg, 2003). In this time, significant progress has been made in better understanding how and when learning takes place; however, much of the research has been conducted in the context of large-scale, formal professional development interventions, whether pre-service or in-service (Borg, 2015). Far less attention has been paid to those language practitioners 'taking charge of their own learning' (Wyatt & Ončevska Ager, 2017, p. 176), where developmental activity

is primarily selected or initiated by teachers themselves and teachers' own development strategies play a central role (see, for example, Tabatabaee-Yazdi, Motallebzadeh, Ashraf, & Baghaei, 2018). This paper aims to provide insights into teacher learning in such contexts through a longitudinal study exploring practical knowledge growth in English language practitioners' teaching of speaking skills to migrants.

2. Literature review

This section reviews the literature on pedagogical knowledge, the development of language teachers' pedagogical knowledge and the teaching of speaking skills.

2.1 Pedagogical knowledge

The study of teachers' cognitions regarding the teaching of specific curricular domains is well-established in language teacher cognition research (Borg, 2015). This body of research includes studies of teachers' cognitions about the teaching of grammar (e.g. Borg & Burns, 2008; Phipps & Borg, 2009), reading (e.g. Meijer, Verloop & Beijard, 1999; Verloop, Driel & Meijer, 2001), vocabulary (e.g. Gerami, 2013) and writing (e.g. Yigitoglu & Belcher, 2014). Studies of teachers' cognitions regarding the teaching of speaking are more limited and have principally focused on the sub-skill of pronunciation (see, for example, Baker, 2014; Burri, Chen & Baker, 2017). However, Baleghizadeh & Nasrollahi Shahri's (2014) research highlights the uniqueness of individual teacher pedagogical orientations towards the teaching of speaking, identifying a higher level of sophistication in the pedagogical knowledge of more expert teachers. Later research by Farrell and Vos (2018), involving a single case-study of a teacher of speaking skills identifies pedagogical learning resulting from a cyclical process of interaction between the teacher's practices and beliefs. Such findings are consistent with Tsui's (2003) findings on the process of experimentation required for teacher

learning. Unfortunately, however, details of the personal and contextual factors which facilitate teacher learning are limited.

The desirability of maintaining a focus on teachers' actual pedagogical practices in teacher cognition research has been emphasized by a number of authors (e.g. Borg, 2003; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). This 'performative dimension' of teachers' pedagogical knowledge (Wyatt and Borg, 2011) and its intrinsic relationship with teachers' pedagogical beliefs lies at the heart of the concept of practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1981, 1983), which has made a significant contribution to the teacher cognition literature (Borg, 2015). Practical knowledge emphasizes that what teachers know informs and is in turn informed by their practices. As Fenstermacher (1994) argues, it differentiates between knowledge for practitioners and the knowledge of practitioners. A number of researchers have adopted this concept (see, for example, the study by Meijer et al., 1999, which arrives at a typology for teachers' practical knowledge of teaching reading skills) but despite calls for teacher cognition research to maintain a strong pedagogical focus to enhance student learning (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015), and the suitability of practical knowledge research to investigate teachers' actual practices, such studies have largely been restricted to the teaching of grammar and literacy (Borg, 2015).

2.2 Language teacher development

Language teacher cognition research features a well-established teacher development literature dating back several decades (Borg, 2015). These studies have endeavoured to explore how professional development interventions and the wider educational and sociocultural context facilitate language teachers' ability to create meaningful learning environments (Roberts, 2016) and have included models indicating stages of development (e.g. Bullough & Baughman, 1993; Furlong & Maynard, 1995). Such language teacher

cognition research into teacher learning has a strong contribution to make given that 'enhancing teaching quality is key to improving the quality of an education system more generally' (Borg, 2018, p. 195). However, a great deal of the research which has been conducted into when and how language teacher learning takes place has been conducted in structured, formal, professional development intervention settings, focusing on the effectiveness of teacher education programmes (Borg, 2018). Wyatt's (2009) research, for example, highlights the value of an in-service training programme to scaffold practical knowledge development in using communicative tasks in the classroom. Wyatt and Borg's (2011) paper then identified a range of variables (contextual, relational, attitudinal, cognitive and pedagogical factors) which appeared to be significant in this practical knowledge development.

Non-teacher education contexts have, for example, formed the basis of research into the socialisation of language teachers into the practices and values of the institutional context (Wedell & Malderez, 2013; Zeichner & Gore, 1990) and explored '[how]social settings support or constrain practices' (Kang & Cheng, 2014, p. 71). The continuing professional development (CPD) offered in some of these contexts has been the focus of studies exploring the trend towards transformational rather than transmissive approaches to teacher learning with in-house continuing professional development programmes (Mann, 2005; Wyatt & Ončevska Ager, 2017). Additional studies (e.g. Tabatabaee-Yazdi et al., 2018) have shown a significant correlation between teachers' personal continuing professional development strategies adopted by teachers and the development of teaching expertise. Research into personal developmental activity undertaken by practitioners (at times with degrees of institutional involvement as noted by Borg, 2018) have included mentoring (e.g. Karimi & Norouzi, 2017; Mann & Tang, 2012), action research (e.g. Edwards & Burns, 2015;

Sunderland, 2008), reflective practices (e.g. Clark & Yinger, 1987; Wilson, 2017) and collaborative learning (Clarke, Triggs & Nielsen, 2014; Kiely & Davis, 2010).

2.3 The teaching of speaking skills

In a post-method era (Hall, 2017) there is no single reducible set of teacher knowledge for expertise in teaching speaking skills; however, dominant theories relevant to the development of second language speaking include cognitive theory highlighting the need for language proceduralisation (Johnson, 1996); socio-cultural theory emphasizing the mediation of learning through social and cultural activity (Block, 2003); and humanistic theory, which focuses on the learner's affective domain (Williams & Burden, 1997). Knowledge of language and discourse is clearly central to the development of speaking skills but there are also strong implications of the face-to-face and real time nature of spoken interaction (McCarthy, 1998). Skilled teachers therefore need to support second language learners in developing effective core speaking skills (phonological skills, speech function skills, interaction management skills and extended discourse organisation skills) together with psycholinguistic and interactional communication strategies (Goh & Burns, 2012).

This research was conducted in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) sector, which is responsible for the teaching of English to adult migrants in England. Research in this sector additionally highlights the value of teacher responsiveness to students' cultural backgrounds (Cooke & Simpson, 2008; Rosenberg, 2007) and the language needs associated with functioning in an English-dominant context (Ward, 2007). A major study of effective teaching to adult migrants in the UK underlines the value of principled use of both direct and indirect approaches to the teaching of speaking (see, for example, Hall, 2017; Thornbury, 2016) whilst classrooms in this sector have also been sites for the introduction of critical

pedagogies which explore and challenge existing wider societal power structures in recognition of the migrant experience (Cooke & Simpson, 2008). Despite this body of research into the teaching of speaking, however, Goh (2017) notes the limited degree to which research on the teaching of speaking is being translated into English language teaching practices generally. This research aims to explore the conditions which are conducive to teacher growth in the teaching of speaking by investigating the following research questions:

1. What, if any, development took place in the four teachers' practical knowledge of teaching speaking?
2. What factors appeared to promote (or hinder) the development of the four teachers' practical knowledge of teaching speaking?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and research settings

Potential research participants teaching English to adult migrants in the Further Education (FE) sector in England were contacted through national and regional professional networks. The call for participants explained that the study aimed to explore practitioners' teaching of speaking skills and that it would focus on those teachers with a maximum of two years' teaching experience in the sector. Of the 16 respondents, a sample of four was finally selected on the basis of geographical proximity to the researcher and institutional permission for classroom observation to take place. None of the participants were known to the researcher prior to the commencement of the study and their engagement with the research over the academic year could be attributed principally to their commitment to the profession and its research activity. In order to reduce 'reactivity' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), however, and in accordance with ethical protocols, the informed consent documentation provided to

participants clearly stated that the researcher would not be acting in the capacity of either mentor or trainer throughout the research period.

Details of the four participants, identified by pseudonyms, are provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Participant information

Pseudonyms	**Nationality**	**Teaching qualifications**	**ESOL Teaching experience**	**Experience in current institution**	**Main FE site or in community**
Alan	British	DT(E)LLS*	2 years	1 year	Main site
Diane	British	DT(E)LLS	2 years	1 year	Main site
Susan	British	DT(E)LLS	2 years	1 year	Main site
Rachel	Indian	DT(E)LLS	2 years	6 months	Community

*Note that this refers to the Diploma in Teaching English in the UK Lifelong Learning Sector

It can be seen that each of the teachers had obtained the Diploma in Teaching English in the UK Lifelong Learning Sector; this was formerly a requirement for qualified status in this sector and can be considered an approximate equivalent of the DELTA qualification for the teaching of adult migrants. The teachers all taught part-time on temporary contracts and had previously taught in their respective institutions for between six months and one year. Three of the teachers, as indicated in Table 1 above, taught in the FE colleges' main sites, where the classes took place alongside other, mainstream, educational provision, whereas Rachel taught in community centres, which are typically much smaller buildings in locations that are accessible to sizeable local migrant populations (Rosenberg, 2007). Whereas most of the teachers classified themselves as being British, Rachel self-identified as being of Indian nationality.

3.2 Data collection

A collective qualitative case study approach (Yin, 1994) was adopted for this research as it facilitates the detailed investigation of the complexity and uniqueness of the knowledge underlying teachers' practices which is required for practical knowledge research (Verloop et

al., 2001). The longitudinal dimension necessary to track teacher development (Richards, 2017) was introduced through the inclusion of data generation points over the course of an academic year, allowing any changes in the teachers' practical knowledge to be identified (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Six audio-recorded and semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately one hour, were conducted with each of the participants at regular intervals throughout the academic year. Interviews were adopted in order to facilitate the teachers' own expression of their cognitions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The relatively open nature of semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2007) allowed modification of the sequence of questions to maintain a more natural flow to the interview process and the use of probing and clarification in order to produce detailed accounts of the teachers' beliefs and practices within initial and emergent categories (Lewis, 2003). In order to avoid reactivity, however, I consciously avoided explicit questions regarding teachers' development (or lack of it) in the teaching of speaking skills.

In order to capture the performative dimension of practical knowledge, interviews were conducted as early as possible after each classroom observation so that the researcher could refer to and guide the participant to reflect on his or her classroom practices with shared points of reference (Gass & Mackey, 2000). The observation data also allowed me to look directly at what was taking place in situ rather than relying on second-hand accounts of the teachers' practices (Cohen et al., 2007). Six classroom observations were conducted for each of the four teachers, with each lasting for approximately three hours. The interviews took place at regular intervals through the academic year and data was generated through the use of a semi-structured observation schedule, which allowed the researcher flexibility whilst following chosen categories and emerging themes.

3.3 Data analysis and presentation

A cyclical process was adopted for the thematic data analysis (Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2014). Transcribed interview data were first reviewed multiple times and analysed according to a priori coding categories: the teachers' knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of lesson planning, knowledge of teaching materials, knowledge of students, knowledge of pedagogy, knowledge of the teaching context and knowledge of themselves. At the same time, fresh themes were allowed to emerge within these macro-categories (Simpson & Tuson, 2003). Thus, for example, teaching mixed-level classes was a theme which featured strongly in early interview data for Diane, and for which I created a separate category. I then returned to this theme in successive interviews and created a corresponding sub-category for the observation schedules.

The data analysis for the classroom observations was coded following a similar procedure with initial categories becoming refined as the field work progressed and each stage of data analysis informed the following data generation session. An example of an emergent theme in the observation data was classroom use of languages other than English by Rachel. Having observed this in the first observation, I then generated data with this focus during further classroom observations and in the corresponding interviews. Data sets were then compared across the data generation points in order to establish where, if at all, growth had taken place. Areas which teachers identified in interviews as requiring or representing development were awarded particular significance in this process.

In order to increase the trustworthiness of the research (Rallis & Rossman, 2009), two of the interview transcripts for one of the cases were coded by an additional researcher. There was a very high degree of similarity in the results. My interpretations of the data were also checked by this third party and the limited differences in interpretation were resolved by consensus.

Owing to the longitudinal nature of the research, I was also able to explore any emerging hypotheses with the participants themselves. Whilst I decided against involving participants in systematic reviewing of written analyses of each stage of data collection (see Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016 for problematisation of this measure), I was able to establish participants' views on my interpretations by introducing them into the interviews and inviting confirmation or rejection of these understandings.

4. Findings

The findings are presented here for the two research questions from 2.3 in turn.

4.1 The teachers' practical knowledge development

The first criterion I introduced for whether practical knowledge development had taken place was whether there was evidence of greater use of public theory; that is, recognised theory within the profession. The longitudinal data indicated very limited change in this aspect of the teachers' practical knowledge. Indeed, throughout the study, the teachers very rarely referred to public theory to explain their practices. For example, not only was there no reference to approaches to speaking development (e.g. communicative language teaching or task-based learning) in relation to teachers' practices but there was a marked absence overall in the interview data of public theory related to areas of pedagogical significance such as students' migrant experiences and their individual language needs. One of the teachers, Rachel, however, did consciously explore changes to her practices in response to public theory as presented through managerial post-classroom observation recommendations. I present the findings for this teacher learning below.

<u>Rachel: The use of students' dominant languages in the classroom</u>

When I first began observing Rachel's classes, I was struck by the degree of non-English oral communication which took place. I asked Rachel about this language use and she pointed out that the learners all spoke either Urdu or Bengali and that she wanted to establish clear communication:

> Yes, sometimes I think maybe I'm using too much of the first language and maybe I shouldn't but then I also worry whether they've understood, even after using so much of it, sometimes they're lost. (RI1)

Rachel explained that she also used these additional languages as a response to the students' lack of confidence in speaking, which she viewed as being a primary consideration given that the students were recent arrivals in the country and many had a limited formal education:

> You have to bear in mind that some of the students have only been here for a couple of weeks […] There's also the fact that many of them haven't studied in their own countries so they are faced with a new country, a new language and they need to get to become familiar with me and with each other too. (RD1)

It can be seen that Rachel both allowed and initiated a considerable degree of interaction in languages other than English as a means of creating a familiar and supportive environment for the students. However, these practices were revisited by Rachel as another manager had indicated in feedback for an annual formal classroom observation that he did not agree with them. Although Rachel informed me that there were no employment implications of such comments, Rachel appeared to have felt a degree of obligation to conform to the recommendations. I consequently observed a noticeable decline in Rachel's use of students' dominant languages over the course of the observation period and greater use of strategies to encourage increased English language use. I returned to the question of the use of students'

dominant languages during our final interview and Rachel provided the following commentary:

> I'm pleased that there is less Urdu and Bengal in the classroom. I've been stricter with them and it's had a good result as they were getting too dependent on me. I don't believe in doing it on day one, though, because I have a very needy group here. (RI6)

It can be seen that Rachel accepted the desirability of reducing the use of students' dominant languages in the classroom. Such a position is consistent with literature emphasising the positive pedagogical and classroom management role that L1 can play in the language classroom whilst maintaining a maximum degree of exposure to and use of the target language (see, for example, Cook, 2001). However, for this to fit with her existing experience of teaching such students, she introduced a staged reduction of classroom use of these languages which, as she viewed the results positively, she incorporated into her routinised behaviours.

This contrasts with a situation that Rachel had reported regarding the degree of learner-centredness in her teaching. Rachel's classes were mostly teacher-fronted and, following a formal college observation, she had been informed that her classes should be less teacher-centred. Rachel was unhappy with this evaluation of her teaching, however, and explained her reasons as follows:

> I'm happy to have learner-centred classes when they're ready for it. To expect an entry one class and a pre-entry class with no formal schooling even in L1 to know what to do, I think it's a bit much to expect. (RI6)

She also explained her belief that students with experience of schooling in India and Pakistan have certain expectations of teacher-student roles as a result of the teacher-centred

educational systems in those countries. Consequently, Rachel's practices did not change to incorporate this received knowledge since it was inconsistent with her existing practical knowledge of the students' affective needs. Such a position seems sensible but what is perhaps most relevant here is that the teacher had yet to be persuaded of the virtues of working towards a weakening of teacher control (see Benson & Voller, 2013) as she had worked towards a reduction in use of L1.

Alan's Chain Drilling Activity

This second instance of teacher experimentation is one for which practical knowledge development was less evident and in which the teacher did not draw on public theory. It involves Alan's incorporation of a chain drill speaking activity at the end of a class in which he had been teaching the past simple tense:

> Episode 2 (from AO1)
>
> Teacher writes 'Where were they last night?' on the board.
>
> Teacher nominates a student for each word of the sentence.
>
> S1: Where
>
> S2: were
>
> S3: they
>
> S4: last
>
> S5: night
>
> Teacher nominates different students to produce the sentence (repeated).

This episode was significant because it was an isolated example of explicit experimentation and reflection by Alan, who explained his use of the activity as follows:

> That was taught to me by [tutor's name] on the level 5 course but in the session he taught it, I wasn't entirely sure what the purpose actually was. (AI1)

It can be seen that the principles underlying the activity were not initially clear to Alan, who (some time later) introduced the activity in the classroom in order to observe the results. Thus, rather than an engagement with public theory (e.g. Richards and Rodgers, 2014, on the role of classroom activities focusing on language structure), this instance represents a case of experimentation with a largely decontextualized activity to inductively arrive at an understanding of its possible value. Although Alan seemed satisfied that the activity had been successful, questions remain surrounding the principled basis of its use.

Diane's Management of Speaking Activities

This third example of practical knowledge development also took place without public theory playing a role in the process. Here, I describe how Diane's practical knowledge of classroom management in teaching speaking skills to 16-18 year old students changed. An innovation that she introduced very early in the research period was to first model speaking activities for the students and then ask them to repeat the instructions. In the excerpt below, for example, she modelled a 'find someone who' activity with one of the students and then checked student understanding of the task in the following way:

Episode 3 (DO1)

T: So what do you have to do?

S1: We have to ask these questions to find the right person.

D: Who do you need to ask?

S1: Different people.

S2: And we write the name of the person who says yes.

S: Yes, and we write their name.

T: That's right. Okay, you have 3 minutes to complete as many as you can starting… now!

This emphasis on ensuring that the students fully understood the speaking tasks, Diane explained, was the result of earlier experiences in which the activities had not run smoothly:

> With this group I do the checking thing very consciously now because of the number of times in the first couple of weeks of having them when I said, 'Right, let's be getting on with it!' and maybe two would get on with it and then five would go ... two people over here would go, 'Miss, I don't understand' and then I'd go over and then three people over here would go, 'Miss, I don't understand'. (DI1)

Overall, Diane had to develop her practical knowledge of classroom management of speaking activities to teach this new age group of students. The establishing and reinforcement of required classroom rules are supported by public theory (e.g. Manning & Bucher, 2013) but Diane describes the developments in her classroom instructions as 'practical ideas that just came to me naturally' (DI3) and quickly routinized the practices as a result of the perceived positive results without recourse to public theory. This practical knowledge development, together with that for the other teachers over the academic year in which the research took place, is summarised in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Teachers' practical knowledge development

Rachel	Introduced a staged reduction in the use of students' dominant languages.
Diane	Introduced classroom management strategies for use with 16-18-year-old students.
Alan	Very limited change – Introduced an isolated drilling activity.
Susan	None recorded.

In this section I have presented three instances from the data of the limited practical knowledge development which took place. In the following section, I examine the factors which appeared to be significant in promoting or hindering practical knowledge development.

4.2 Factors affecting teachers' practical knowledge development

The findings for the factors affecting the development of teachers' practical knowledge are presented here for each of the teachers in turn with key factors italicised for emphasis as they emerge in individual cases. I begin with the case of Alan, who, although at times expressed a desire to develop his teaching of speaking skills, appeared to lack the motivation required to change. In explanation of his heavy reliance on (EFL) course books, which heavily reduced planning time but which meant that materials were not tailored to his specific students, for example, he simply stated, 'I'm lazy' (AI5). Alan did not problematize his teaching on the whole and, in common with the other teachers, did not refer to public theory in explanations of his teaching. This absence of real engagement with pedagogical thinking seemed to be highly significant in the fact that his explicit classroom experimentation with new ideas was limited to the single, chain drill activity described in the previous section. Whilst Alan's experimentation with the technique, introduced two years earlier on a formal teacher training course, could itself be viewed positively (Alan was not opposed to introducing variety in his classes), the lack of understanding of the rationale for its use as presented on the programme

meant that Alan's practical knowledge was not meaningfully enriched by public theory in this process. Alan's grammar-focused orientation also meant that declarative knowledge was central to his understanding of his own professional development and was therefore the focus of his attention. In the interview extract below, he explains the significance of grammar for his E2 (elementary level) and E3 (lower-intermediate level) classes:

> I think I've got to being a robust E2 teacher about now as I'm now teaching and learning E3 grammar. And what I mean by that is that in an E2 class I could probably in most situations respond very dynamically to students with questions like 'What type of word is this?' (AI2)

Alan at times enjoyed explaining hypothetical use of, for example, task-based learning or authentic materials but there was no example of these in his actual classroom practices and ideas remained unenacted. He stated a belief that the pressure to include specific syllabus content and exam practice in a relatively short period of time had a certain washback effect on the potential for experimentation. When asked about organised continuing professional development (CPD) events, Alan regarded these as serving institutional interests, citing the example of a CPD event dedicated to correct completion of student records (ILP forms) for college auditing purposes.

Rachel, as with the other teachers, had very established teaching routines and her comment 'I'm set in my ways' (RI1) revealed that she may have lacked the openness required for self-directed development. Her own experience reaffirmed the effectiveness of her practices because she brought her own understanding of the backgrounds and lived experiences of the students, an understanding which she regarded at times as being incompatible with ideas expounded in the sector that 'might work in other classrooms but not with my students' (RI4). Where there was sufficient external exigency in the form of manager recommendations from

classroom observations, Rachel was willing to re-assess her practices but needed to test the principles in the real conditions of her own classroom and to establish a fit in order to be persuaded of their viability. Thus, she introduced a staged reduction in the use of languages other than English as I described in 6.1 but was not willing to exclude such language use from the classroom. When she viewed a more learner-centred approach as unworkable with low level students, however, she exercised her agency and resisted any change. Rachel's focus on the practicality of suggested changes to her classroom teaching was also apparent in her criticism of a 'typical' CPD event in which the speaker, a senior manager, 'knew nothing of the reality of ESOL classrooms' (RI4).

Diane, together with Susan, identified herself as being very motivated to develop professionally as a teacher. Her interest in learning about and experimenting with teaching, together with her interest in IT, had led her to follow blogs and tweets by some of those in the sector. As she conceded, however, these tended to operate at a superficial level with 'novelty activities' such as a challenge for teachers to limit themselves to using no more than 50 words in total in one class. As a result, there was no strong understanding reached of principles underpinning dimensions of the teaching of speaking skills. The development of Diane's practical knowledge of classroom management for 16-18-year-olds described earlier was not instigated by the same abstract idea of self-development but by the internal exigency of struggling to maintain an ordered classroom environment. Moreover, despite her efforts to access new ideas, Diane, in common with the other early career teachers, stated that she experienced certain isolation from the professional community, largely but not exclusively as a result of her part-time status. She also noted the closed door culture of the college and the fact that she had not observed other teachers in the classroom. Her desire to benchmark her practices against those of other teachers in the profession, for example, became most apparent

when a CPD event confirmed for her that her practices were in line with those of other practitioners:

> I didn't learn a thing. I mean, it was great… I arrived there worrying that everyone was doing really wonderful and novel things but it was all very familiar to me so I'm relieved! (DI6)

I noted earlier that there was no identified practical knowledge development in the case of the final teacher, Susan. Thus, whilst data were unavailable to describe practical knowledge development, in this section I discuss the factors which appeared significant in this plateau. In common with Diane, Susan expressed a strong motivation to develop as a teacher, describing herself as 'a creative person' (SI3). Although demonstrating a significant degree of self-efficacy in many areas, however, Susan also appeared to require more direction by others for the development of her practical knowledge of teaching skills. Thus, whilst she repeatedly expressed concern about the lack of pronunciation skills development in her teaching, the associated issues of applicability and pedagogy remained unresolved over the research period. The fact that the teacher also repeatedly asked me personally how she could improve her teaching of speaking skills also strongly suggested that a mentor figure that could scaffold the development of this early career teacher was absent. (As a researcher, I maintained the integrity of the research by not assuming a mentor role, as per the informed consent form but did engage in discussion of alternative practices post-data generation in the spirit of collegiality). This inertia appeared to be exacerbated by the fact that it was apparent that neither the CPD arrangements nor the institutional interactional culture were creating the conditions for her to be more exposed to public theory and to engage with discussion regarding the application of this theory to her own practices.

Overall, the findings for the individual case studies indicate the unique personal characteristics of each teacher's practical knowledge development. Certain patterns do emerge across the cases in the findings, however. The most distinctive of these was that the common atheoretical nature of the teachers' practical knowledge of teaching speaking appeared to be a contributing factor to the lack of development. The four teachers all felt divorced from the institutional CPD and reported a lack of engagement in teaching-related dialogue in their colleges, a situation which was perceived as being exacerbated by their part-time employment status.

5. Discussion

The discussion of the findings that follows is divided into two sections: in the first, I explore the significance of the lack of practical knowledge development identified. I then proceed to discuss the principal factors which were identified as influencing the degree of practical knowledge development which took place.

5.1 Significance of lack of development

The individual teachers' practices and underpinning stated beliefs were remarkably consistent over the academic year. This early career practical knowledge plateau sits in contrast to research suggesting that it can take several years for a language teacher's practical knowledge to stabilise (Beijaard & Verloop, 1996). Black and Halliwell (2000) note, for example that, as a result of a lack of experience and reflection on that experience 'competing personal, professional and practical demands ma[k]e it particularly difficult for [novice teachers] to determine the most appropriate action' (Ibid, p. 4). Early consolidation of practical knowledge, I suggest, could be explained by a level of socialisation (Wedell & Malderez, 2013) into established practices in the sector and a prioritisation of classroom management. The non-problematisation of the teachers' practices, evident in the lack of reference to

pedagogical debate and research, suggests that the relatively early adoption of regularised practices and consistent beliefs may have been at the expense of reflection informed by external perspectives.

Of the three identified instances of practical knowledge development identified in the research, two of these were restricted to changes of a largely atheoretical nature (Borg & Burns, 2008). Furthermore, the most evident cases of practical knowledge development (those of Diane and Rachel) also consisted of general teaching skills not confined to the teaching of speaking skills. The teachers' practical knowledge plateau therefore appeared to reflect an early stage of professional development (Bullough & Baughman, 1993; Furlong & Maynard, 1995) in which essential teaching routines and classroom management had largely been consolidated with teachers yet to focus more strongly on student learning. The lack of public theory evident in the teachers' practical knowledge also strongly suggests that the practical knowledge plateau in this study is related to a lack of meaningful engagement with professional issues to either motivate change or to actualise change where motivation exists. In the case of Alan, for example, the only teacher to explicitly mention established pedagogical models, there appeared to be a 'compartmentalisation' of knowledge (Borg, 2006), with idealised cognitions about teaching not informing practice. A feature of more expert teachers, in contrast, is their ability to transfer SLA theory into their practical knowledge (Tsui, 2003).

Overall, the teachers had established teaching practices which broadly conformed to contemporary approaches to the teaching of speaking in the field of English language teaching (see, for example, Hughes & Reed, 2016). The research, however, identified strong potential for increased teacher responsiveness to the migrant context; most of the teachers in

the study treated the classes as homogeneous and largely context-free, demonstrating limited awareness of the pedagogical implications of teaching adult migrants. Moreover, the practical knowledge plateau needs to be viewed in the context of the practitioners' own development needs. Individual teachers had themselves identified areas of their practice which remained 'unresolved' over the year (e.g. the role of authentic teaching materials and the teaching of phonology in the cases of Alan and Susan respectively). The fact that teachers were aware of these limitations in their practices but were unable or unwilling to address them highlights the implications of such an early plateau for pedagogical innovation and teachers' professional satisfaction.

Given the scant reference to public theory in the teachers' accounts of their practices, it is worth reminding ourselves that practical knowledge is not the opposite of theoretical or scientifically gained knowledge but instead encompasses theoretical knowledge adapted to the relevant teaching situations (Beijaard & Verloop, 1996). Indeed, Borg and Burns, identifying the atheoretical nature of teachers' explanations of their practices, argue that an absence of theory in teaching 'raises questions about the reliability of [the teachers'] judgements about its effectiveness' (2008, p. 479). These findings should also be viewed in the context of the broader sectorial issue of theory regarding the teaching of speaking receiving limited application in classrooms (Goh, 2017).

5.2 Factors appearing to affect practical knowledge development

Personal motivation is undoubtedly a necessary condition for practical knowledge development (see, for example, Wyatt & Borg, 2011) but this research suggests that the institutional-sectorial context is also highly significant both in influencing this motivation and providing the means by which desired change can take place. The institutional cultures into which the teachers were socialised and which perpetuate established ways of doing things

and talking about teaching (Wedell & Malderez, 2013) did not nurture teachers' practical knowledge development. The teachers in the study, for example, worked in relative isolation without the opportunity for 'reflective conversations' (Clark & Yinger, 1987) which might spur the motivation and basis for change. Whilst teachers were able to exercise agency within their individual settings, the institutions provided neither the engagement with a practitioner community with whom to share understandings of teaching nor consistent exigency to promote practical knowledge development. The practitioners' 'common-sense' ideas were therefore not challenged, as they might have been, through structured reflective practice engaging with research in the field (Wilson, 2017).

The two early career teachers motivated to develop in this study were both anxious to observe more experienced practitioners and to develop a better understanding of what constituted 'expertise' in their field. Such teachers can be viewed as being positioned on the margins of their academic communities and seeking models of practice (Clarke et al., 2014), to inform an aspirational self (Dörnyei, 2001). This serves to underline the potential of institutional arrangements such as mentoring systems (Karimi & Norouzi, 2017) and collaborative action research (Sunderland, 2008) to facilitate teachers' development of reflective skills and deepen their understanding of community expert practices. The case of Rachel provides an instance where formal classroom observation feedback provided an indication of institutional pedagogical expectations (and to which Rachel responded) but, as in the other institutional contexts in which this research took place, there were no effective teacher learning arrangements in place for the development of necessary identified skills. The situation appeared to be compounded by the teachers' part-time employment basis as they then lacked equal opportunities to develop developmental relationships with more expert colleagues and to access CPD provision. If data and evidence from research in the field can play a role in

triggering and fostering reflection as Mann and Walsh (2017) argue, structured opportunities to engage with and reflect on this public knowledge need to be embedded in a teacher's professional life.

The value of high quality CPD for teacher learning is well-established (see, for example, (Hayes, 2014; Mann, 2005). However, although non-accredited CPD events were provided by the FE colleges in this study, the sessions failed to motivate and engage the teachers. The research highlights the importance for 'experts' to be familiar with the local teaching context in order to be credible to practitioners. It also reinforces earlier findings by Dalziel and Sofres (2005), who concluded in their research into the impact of CPD on English language practitioners teaching migrants that there was strong teacher interest in CPD opportunities but only where these were regarded as being relevant to teacher' classroom situations. The fact that CPD events adopted a transmission model and were not based on consultation with teachers to identify teachers' own priorities and interests also appeared to be a strong contributing factor to their lack of impact. In addition, the limited available provision did not encourage teacher sharing of expertise nor teacher engagement with theory as a means of problematising their practices. Teacher perception of a lack of relevance of support suggests that a degree of negotiation of content with teacher involvement along transformational lines may be beneficial and that the experience of being consulted could in itself motivate teachers to engage with provision (Johnson, 2009).

6. Conclusion

The research identified the notable limitation of the early career teachers' practical knowledge development over the academic year. Such findings have strong implications for the quality of teaching in the sector. In simple terms, teaching cannot afford to be static (Macalister, 2018). The atheoretical nature of the teachers' practical knowledge appears to be

central to understanding this phenomenon as it is indicative of the lack of appropriate institutional arrangements to promote and effectively facilitate teacher engagement with public theory. The implications for language institutions in a range of contexts is that professional isolation can lead language teachers to plateau developmentally and there is therefore an imperative for inclusive systems to be in place which both share understandings of expert practice and create a culture in which research-informed pedagogical experimentation is the norm.

There were four case studies for this research and the limitations of the generalisability of the findings should be acknowledged. However, substantial data were generated for each case. The contribution made by the research is therefore to provide a rigorously-conducted and well-evidenced collective-case longitudinal study to provide an empirical basis to inform the need for effective professional development systems to be in place to nurture teacher learning.

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