

5 The Final Chapter

Task 5.1

Do you cycle? Do you know what 'freewheeling' is? If not, see whether anybody else in the class does.

Then read Silverman's comments (below) on what the point of the final thesis chapter is.

Since all reports, including dissertations seem to end with a set of 'conclusions', you cannot finally let go until your concluding chapter is written.

Having cycled painfully to the top of the hill, the great temptation at this point is to relax and freewheel down to the finish. In practice, such relaxation of effort is reflected in the all too common 'summaries' found in the final chapter of dissertations.

Although summaries are often quite useful devices at the end of the data analysis chapters, I suggest that **you should never write a summary as your concluding chapter**. If your readers need a summary at this point, then your macrostructure is not in place. If it is in place, then what you have said should already be crystal clear. So resist the temptation of a final downhill freewheel.

But do you even need a final chapter? Cannot your thesis stop after you have finished your data analysis?

Think of a musical example. Classical symphonies typically end with a fast movement marked *allegro* or *presto*. Rather than a mere recapitulation of earlier themes, they take them up and develop them still more. As such, they seem designed to provide listeners with some of the most stimulating material in the composition. So your final chapter is, indeed, necessary. **But it should function to stimulate your readers by demonstrating how your research has stimulated you.**

(Silverman 2000: 250, my emphasis)

What to include?

The conventional final chapter of a thesis has two main functions:

- to **refer back** to what you have written, reminding the reader of your argument, and giving some sort of evaluation and/or interpretation
- to **point forward** to what you think might happen in the future, with suggestions or recommendations, or predictions or warnings.

In addition, according to Phillips and Pugh (1994: 59-60),

In the most general terms [your final chapter] is a discussion as to why and in what way... the theory you started with is now different as a result of your research work. Thus your successors (who include, of course, yourself) now face a different situation when determining what their research work should be, since they now have to take account of your work.

Task 5.2

Can you be your own successor? How?

In their analysis of conclusions to *quantitative* dissertations, Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) suggest there are six potential elements:

- A. **Restatement of** hypothesis (or purpose)
- B. **Summary** of main points / findings; whether they support the hypothesis; whether they align with, or differ from, other researchers' findings
- C. Possible **explanations** for the findings; and/or **speculations** about them
- D. **Limitations** of the study
- E. **Implications** of your findings
- F. **Recommendations** for future research and **practical applications**

Task 5.3

Below are the headings of the final chapters of three qualitative theses. Compare them with the quantitative elements listed by Hopkins and Dudley-Evans.

What additional components can you find in the qualitative theses?

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 Research questions and main findings of the study
- 8.1.1 Classroom discourse "layers" and discourse worlds
- 8.1.2 Characteristics of stages of the lesson
- 8.1.3 Participant perceptions of rights and responsibilities
- 8.2 Relationship to previous research
- 8.3 Limitations of the study

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Conclusions
- 7.2 Limitations of the study
- 7.3 Professional recommendations
- 7.4 Autobiographical reflection

8. Review of the research and implications for receptionist training

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Review of the research
 - 8.1.1 Attitudes of subjects
 - 8.1.2 Method of data collection
 - 8.1.3 Problems during data collection
 - 8.1.4 Problems resulting from the research design
 - 8.1.5 Performance of researcher
 - 8.1.6 Summary
- 8.2 Social meaning in front-desk discourse
- 8.3 Receptionist training
 - 8.3.1 Feedback sessions
 - 8.3.2 Recommendations for training
- 8.4 Future directions
- 8.5 Conclusion

From that small sample of Conclusions chapters, it looks as if a possible qualitative equivalent of Hopkins & Dudley-Evans 'model' would contain these potential elements:

- (concise) **Recapitulation of purpose and findings**
- **Relationship with previous research**
- **Limitations of your research (Anticipation of criticisms)**
- **Problems arising during the research**
- **Implications of your findings**
- **Recommendations (for research; for action / policy / change)**
- **Your contribution to research**
- **Autobiographical reflection**

Task 5.4

Think about that list of possible sections. Can you think of any others that you will need to include in your own Conclusions chapter?

Language Boxes: Useful expressions for a qualitative final chapter

Recapitulation of purpose and findings

The aim / purpose / objective of my study was to...

This research was intended / designed to...

This thesis had the aim of exploring whether...

What I found was that... a tendency to...

One of the themes to emerge from my analysis of... was...

The findings suggest that X is a strong motivational factor for...

I found that X was a major perceived influence on....

The participants/informants showed some / a clear preference for...

Relating to previous research

These findings are broadly in line / harmony with those of researchers such as...

These findings are consistent with previous research

The findings run counter to the conventional / widely expressed view that...

My findings are (to some extent) at odds with those of...

Although these findings are generally compatible with ... there are several areas in which they differ from...

(Task 5.5 is linked with this section)

Limitations of your research / Anticipation of criticisms

Some common expressions for stating limitations of research scope:

I should stress that my study has been primarily concerned with...

My/This analysis has concentrated/focused on...

The findings of my study are restricted/limited to...

I have addressed only the issue/influence/role of...

I should make clear that I have deliberately/intentionally not...

Typical openings for stating that certain conclusions should not be drawn:

However, the findings of my study do not imply that...

My findings cannot / should not be taken / read as evidence for...

Unfortunately, the nature of my data does not allow me/us to determine whether...

The lack of... means that we cannot be certain/sure that...

(adapted from Swales & Feak 2012: 372)

Problems arising during the research

(Fill in this box as part of Task 5.6)

Implications of your findings

My study offers suggestive evidence for ...

The study appears to support the argument for a change in...

On the face of it, this would suggest that X may be an important factor in...

If the tentative conclusions of my study are confirmed by... then there will be a case for...

Recommendations

For future research:

I think possible areas for further research / investigation include...

Future research into... should / might usefully focus in particular on.. in other contexts.

One avenue for further study would be research into the specific...

Without further research into... it will not be possible to...

It is important / relevant to investigate (whether)...

For future action/policy:

Your contribution to research *(Task 5.7 is linked with this section)*

Autobiographical reflection *(Task 5.8 is linked with this section)*

Task 5.5: Relating to previous research

In the thesis extract below, the student relies a great deal on the hedging verb *seem*. Can you think of ways of using alternative expressions for the cases highlighted, in order to add variety and reduce the level of repetition in the text?

8.2 Relationship to previous research

This section will give a brief overview of the findings of the study and their relationship to previous work in these areas.

In terms of the first research question, which looked at the issue of “layers” of classroom discourse, the findings of this study **seem to build in particular on** the work of some of the researchers reviewed in Chapter 3. Many of these studies characterise classroom discourse in terms of functions, and the concept of the classroom-rooted and non-classroom variety of discourse is present in more than one analysis, as discussed in Chapter 5. The findings of Chapter 6, in the investigation of the second research question, looked at the features of the stages on the lesson, in particular the plenary checking stage and IRF discourse. The notion of the spontaneous contributions within IRF cycles **seems to echo** Erickson’s (1982) notion of spontaneity and ritual in classroom discourse. White & Lightbown’s (1984) finding that questions are frequent in classroom discourse **seems to be borne out by** the prevalence of checking sequences in the data, with their dependence on questions. Likewise, the existence of question types **seems to be confirmed in** the data, which exhibits both *display* and *referential* questions. White & Lightbown’s (1984) finding that teachers tend to repeat and rephrase questions **seems to ring true in** the analysis of instructions in this study. The analysis of the data in relation to the third research question, and the issue of subgroup activity during plenary and groupwork, **seems to follow closely on from** Hancock (1998), with his notion of *off-record* discourse. Slimani’s findings as regards the diversity of perceptions of salience **seem to be borne out in** this study, which shows some students more focused on vocabulary, for example, while others are more focused on interaction.

One of the main concepts from earlier work which has been applied to this study is that of the discourse world (Edmondson 1984). This concept has proved to be a useful one in the description of the layers of classroom discourse identified in the data. More generally, the findings of Chapter 7 **seem to back up** the various assertions in the literature that participants **do seem to make** an active contribution to the ongoing process. Their engagement in individual and subgroup activities makes a contribution to the overall process, as does task adaptation and spontaneous contributions. Reluctance to interact may require the teacher to give a further instruction, again influencing the overall process of classroom communication.

Task 5.6: Problems arising during the research

In qualitative studies the researcher is expected to be open about difficulties which came up in the research process and to comment on how they were dealt with. This is much less common on quantitative research, where control over the research instruments is seen as a requirement. The extract below is a good example of a student's effective open discussion of the practical and methodological problems that surfaced during her study.

Focus on the highlighted expressions to do with problems, their effect and their potential resolution.

Choose the ones you think might be useful **for your own final chapter**; add them to the empty Language Box on *Problems arising during the research* (page 59).

8.1.3 Problems during data collection

Several problems arose during data collection. The most serious of these was the failure to obtain recordings of telephone calls by patients to either Practices A or B, which led to the abandonment of the plan to analyse interaction through this channel. As a result there was only limited evidence for the performance of a gatekeeping role by receptionists, since most appointments were made by telephone. Only 42 appointments were made at the front desk and many (37.5%) of those were prioritised because they were made after consultations at the request of doctors, giving a very partial picture of discourse patterns for appointment-making. This was a great disappointment because it eliminated the possibility of giving full consideration to how discourse elements contributed to the negotiation of access by patients.

A second problem was observance of the conditions stipulated by the research ethics committee. In order to ensure that non-consenting patients were excluded from recordings I had to be in a position to observe patients approaching the reception desk. As a result, when receptionists were absent, patients sometimes addressed me directly. When questions were asked about medical matters I was able to apologise and explain that I was unable to help but I was sometimes drawn into general discussion with patients which, strictly speaking, the ethics committee had wanted me to avoid. There were also a number of occasions when I was unable to avoid overhearing personal information about patients who had not consented to be recorded. The decision was made to remain close to the desk in order to ensure that recorded data were ethically sound but this did result in some inappropriate involvement on my part.

The third problem concerned the research assistants who accompanied me to practices, explained the research to patients and obtained their consent. In the main they were treated courteously, even by those patients who did not consent. There were, however, a number of patients at Practice B who were verbally abusive towards them and a jacket belonging to one research assistant was stolen when she left it unattended for a couple of minutes at this practice. As well as illustrating the type of problem faced by staff at Practice B, these two episodes are reminders that not everyone viewed the research assistants favourably. Although both made major contributions to the research by persuading relatively high numbers of patients to consent, it is also possible that their individual personalities and styles attracted particular types of patient and caused some bias in the results.

8.1.4 Problems resulting from the research design

There were two features of the research design which may have affected the quality of the findings. The first was the decision to make audio recordings, rather than video recordings. Although there were sound reasons for this decision (see Section 3.1.1), the absence of a visual record limited the analytical possibilities, both in relation to the participation framework and the relational behaviour of participants.

For example, because I was unable to observe moves which were made non-verbally, I made some assumptions about the use of eye contact by receptionists to signal openings and had no evidence of the non-verbal moves which might have contributed to the performance of closings.

A second shortcoming of the research design was the limited value of the ethnographic information. Although the short questionnaires yielded useful information about age and gender, patients found it difficult to remember when or how often they attended practices, with the result that their answers to these questions were not reliable. I also concluded that, for close analysis of encounters, such as those in Chapter 7, it would have been useful to have far more information about patients. For example, if participants had been invited to comment on the interaction or to provide respondent validation of my own interpretations, it would have reduced the potential for error as well as providing insights from alternative perspectives (see Bloor 1997). If an ethically and practically sound manner of obtaining this information could be found, it would be a useful addition to future studies.

Whereas the pursuit of respondent validation would have complicated the research design, the interviews with receptionists could have been simplified and targeted more carefully on topics relevant to the analysis. Dingwall (1997) points out that informality will not bring the observer closer to the truth, and that sociological interviews are always forms of account (see Scott and Lyman 1981), which are more likely to represent views of the natural order of the social setting rather than its day-to-day reality. It might therefore have been better to pose more clearly defined questions to receptionists, as well as inviting them to comment retrospectively on recordings and transcriptions. Similarly, the research diary which was kept during visits to practices could have been targeted more carefully on relevant information, such as the paralinguistic features of closings.

Writing about the contribution of your thesis to the field

This can be a tricky section to write, even for native speakers. Your first (and perhaps your most important) readers are your thesis examiners, and part of their job is to decide whether your work is good enough to pass and then how good it is as a contribution to the field.

You need to strike a carefully judged balance between emphasising the elements that are distinctive and innovative in your work, and playing the role of the humble and modest PhD candidate. It could be that it is for this reason that many PhD students decide not to include a 'My Contribution' section in their thesis.

If you think you might want to include one in your thesis, the next Task (optional) gives you the chance to discuss and practise achieving that balance.

Task 5.7: Contribution to research

Chapter section 7.6 below is an adapted version of a PhD student's final draft. Read it carefully, find the places where she refers to her contribution, and decide whether you would advise her to modify her wording - either to make it stronger or weaker.

Then focus on her 'contribution' expressions; if you think they would be useful in your own final chapter, add them to the bottom box on page 60.

[CMC stands for *computer-mediated communication*]

7.6 Contributions

In addition to the provision of some directions for future research, my study has made three major contributions to the literature on computer assisted language learning and teaching, since research in these three areas is relatively new and the related literature is still limited.

Firstly, my participants were early-stage learners developing their oral skills in CMC. Among the four skills, speaking has been considered the most difficult to acquire for language learners, especially for those at beginner-level. My study should contribute doubly to the understanding of the development process of beginners' oral skills in CMC environments.

Secondly, the target language of my study was French, research into the learning of which is limited in comparison to that involving English. Although some Canadian researchers have conducted studies in relation to French (e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 2005; Lapkin & Swain, 2004; Lapkin, Swain & Smith, 2002), they have been in the Canadian immersion context where French is learnt as a second language, rather than a foreign language, as in this study. As a result, my findings should enhance our knowledge of the learning process of FFL learners, particularly those whose first language is non-alphabetic.

Finally, my investigation of the concept of social presence increased the originality of my study. Although its application to CMC started in the late 1980s (Lowenthal 2009), the concept and its impact on learners' acquisition of language skills remain unfamiliar to many teachers who include synchronous CMC in their curriculum. Therefore, I hope that the findings of my study could attract other language teachers' attention to this concept.

Task 5.8: Autobiographical Reflection

In some fields, such as education, it is acceptable (and increasingly expected) for the qualitative researcher to include a section describing their personal journey - how doing the research has brought about change in their beliefs and attitudes, in their approaches to professional and academic issues, and so on.

Is this something you intend to include in your final chapter?

Is it something you have discussed with your supervisor? (If not, do!)

If you do want to include an autobiographical section, the extract below may help you shape your ideas. (The student uses two acronyms in the text: DELTA stands for Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults; TEFL stands for Teaching English as Foreign Language).

Underline any expressions about **change and learning** that you think might be useful. Add them to the empty Language Box on *Autobiographical Reflection* (page 61).

7.4 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION

Undertaking this research study has been an invaluable learning experience. I have gained some understanding of the nature of research and of the cyclical, sometimes messy, nature of the research process. I have learned, for example, that things do not fit neatly into categories and that research can be frustrating and sometimes tedious, yet at other times immensely rewarding and even exhilarating.

This research study has also provided some key ideas which have helped me examine my own professional values, and guidelines for possible changes to my own future practice. As well as adopting the course provider recommendations above for DELTA courses, I intend to explore further the impact of other teacher education courses with which I may be involved, since I now have a growing awareness of how impact might be affected by process factors. I have also begun to question how my colleagues and I come across as course tutors, how much attention we pay to our participants' beliefs about teaching, how much we value what they bring to the classroom and the role that affective factors might play in relation to participants' experiences of our teacher education courses. The research process has also encouraged me to view my own TEFL context within the wider educational field and has provided a wealth of resources from which we can learn in order to improve the quality of TEFL teacher education and development.

Writing up your thesis

You have now reached the end of the Tasks for this unit on writing the Final Chapter.

You can now apply the ideas and language from this unit to drafting or revising the concluding chapter of your thesis.

You may also find it helpful to visit this website for further examples of written academic English relevant for drawing conclusions:

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/conclusions.htm>

Appendix to unit 5

Complete final chapter

I thought you might find it helpful (and inspiring) to read the example below, which is shown exactly as it appeared in an EdD thesis. It illustrates how the Conclusions chapter can provide a concise and effective ending to a qualitative study.

As you read it, think back to my quotation from Silverman at the beginning of this unit:

Classical symphonies typically end with a fast movement marked *allegro* or *presto*. Rather than a mere recapitulation of earlier themes, they take them up and develop them still more. As such, they seem designed to provide listeners with some of the most stimulating material in the composition. So your final chapter is, indeed, necessary. **But it should function to stimulate your readers by demonstrating how your research has stimulated you.**

See whether you think this final chapter [does that for you as a reader](#).

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 CONCLUSIONS

Overall

There was considerable variation in ‘journeys’ through the Diploma experience. Broadly, eight different journey types were perceived within this group of teachers (Appendix Twelve). The interviewees’ experience can be represented as a continuum, with life-changing impact at one end, a pedestrian experience at the other and varying degrees of experience in between.

Impact

Although the degree of impact varied, virtually everyone acknowledged that they had benefited considerably from the course. The perspective of the majority was that impact of the DELTA is substantial, sustained and relevant to subsequent teaching practice. This is a fundamentally optimistic picture of CPD and in line with researchers such as Powell et al (2003), Day (1999), Inglis et al (1992), Cope et al (1992), Bradley and Howard (1992), Williams, R. (2005) and Burchell et al (2002).

The five main areas of impact found in the data (Figure 4.1, p72) extended to: (a) propositional knowledge; (b) practical classroom aspects; (c) personal and psychological aspects; (d) organisational aspects; and (e) aspects relating to the wider TEFL profession. This shows some parallels with Harland and Kinder’s typology (1997). The impact described by interviewees was sometimes delayed, a finding in accord with Freeman (1989), Prosser et al (2006) and Knight (2006).

A key accomplishment I would claim for the present study is a five-part typology of impact depth (Figure 4.4, p78): changed beliefs and values; changed teaching persona; development of reflective skills; development of critical thinking skills; and identifying the course as a key developmental experience.

Background to taking the course

Interviewees’ motivation could be categorised into three broad types: extrinsic motivation, relating to institutions; extrinsic motivation, for personal reasons; and intrinsic motivation. A key finding was that those who gave intrinsic reasons ultimately described deep outcomes which corresponded to at least two of the five ‘inner core’ areas of deep impact described above (Figure 5.2, p102).

Where intrinsic motivation was absent or unacknowledged, deep impact was possible but less predictable. A key issue here is receptivity to learning: those who cited intrinsic reasons for taking the course were almost, by definition, receptive to learning from the outset. Those whose arrival on the programme was for extrinsic reasons often had to develop this 'receptivity' during the course.

A curious finding was that those interviewees who already had a strong professional self-identity before coming on the programme, and were therefore more confident of their skills, were least likely to describe 'deep' impact, and more likely to describe clashes of perspective with the course tutors. In this sense the DELTA appears to function better for those seeking a stronger sense of professional identity.

Virtually all those interviewed stressed that substantial prior teaching experience, before coming on the course, was the vital bedrock for learning on the DELTA.

Learning experiences

Highly favoured modes of learning were: discussion, interaction, experiential learning, reflection, mentoring, modelling, receiving constructive feedback on teaching practice. Transmission of propositional knowledge was not favoured by anyone in the study. This relates to the writings of Williams, M. (2003), Williams, R. (2005), Singh and Richards (2006), Lamb (1995), Roberts (1998), Gaudart (1994), Freeman (1994) and Kolb (1993).

Feedback on assessed practice was seen as a key learning tool, but the quality of feedback often came in for criticism. Some trainees identified a lack of balance between the positive and the negative, and many felt that positive feedback was as vital in language teacher education as in language teaching. Mentoring support, both during and following the course, was felt to be relevant and valuable by many interviewees, although this is not always offered by institutions.

The DELTA tutors, and their teaching styles, were universally experienced as critical to the success of the exercise. 'Good' tutors were seen as excellent models, enthusiastic about the DELTA course, providing good positive feedback and a lot of support, and inspirational to the trainees. 'Poor' tutors were seen as those who were not engaged, those who lectured, those who tended mainly to give negative feedback, those who were incongruent in their teaching styles and those who failed to acknowledge existing skills and prior learning. Thus the requirements of a DELTA tutor, if the programme is to run successfully, are much more than technical competence in their field of education.

Fellow course participants were also seen as important in a successful DELTA programme. Some interviewees even said that their learning from other students was the most important aspect of their learning. This connects with writing by Day (1999), Dadds (1997) and Eraut (1994). This suggests also that some attention to group cohesion is an important aspect of the DELTA tutor's role.

Developmental continuity

The possible explanations for impact lead to a tentative theory of developmental continuity, in other words, suggestions as to why and in what circumstances CPD has a chance of working. Further research would need to be conducted to establish whether this theory holds or not, but it is consistent with the data in the present study. In Chapter Five I discussed the PRACTICE – THEORY – PRACTICE model. The data suggests that CPD is most effective when the two transition phases, at the beginning and the end of the course (and model), are both smooth and pro-actively managed, that is, professional development is seen to have continuity. In the case of the DELTA, the pre-course transition has continuity if (see Chapter Five):

- *participants are independently motivated (whether intrinsic or extrinsic)*
- *participants' professional self-identity is such that they recognise their own learning needs in relation to the DELTA*
- *pre-course experience is sufficient to be a basis for effective learning*
- *the DELTA provides opportunities to bring learning from prior practice into the course experience, and to draw upon this during the course.*

The post-course transition has continuity if DELTA graduates (see Chapter Four):

- *can work in an establishment where their qualification and new-found skills are recognised*
- *can start to apply the learning from the course to their practice*
- *have the chance for their increased motivation, enthusiasm and changed professional identity to*

consolidate and flourish (in the ideal world with support in the form of mentoring).

A key point is that the impact of the course is determined not solely by the course itself but also by important pre- and post-course factors.

A hybrid model of CPD and its wider implications

The solidity of this PRACTICE – THEORY – PRACTICE model is further supported by the fact that the DELTA offers a ‘complete’ package or an ‘integrated unit’. The DELTA has the characteristics of a pre-service professional education course in that it involves academic learning, pedagogical learning and classroom training (see Chapter Four). However, in contrast to the ‘front-loading’ of theory on many initial professional education courses, criticised by writers such as Eraut (1994) and Freeman (1994, 2002), the DELTA takes place *after* teachers have already started their teaching careers, with the result that the theoretical learning on the course is seen as more relevant and can be better integrated into their practical classroom experience.

In this sense the DELTA is a hybrid model of professional development, an in-service course with pre-service characteristics, and is consistent with Eraut’s claim that *‘the potential of work-related ... mid-career professional education is underestimated’* (1994, p12). The receptivity to in-service learning generated by prior teaching experience, as many participants in this study have testified, together with the opportunity during the course to integrate theory and practice, to which they also bore witness, provide a potentially solid foundation for impact to take place. Although this study was specific to the DELTA context, it is nevertheless possible that this hybrid model may contain some pointers to the ways in which CPD in general could be developed in other fields of education in the future.

Methodology

The theme of ‘retrospective’ perceptions proved to be a viable method of accessing material. Although Bennett (1999) was investigating adults’ perceptions of their schooling, there are considerable parallels in this respect: *‘...retrospective autobiographical reflection offers a different kind of perspective on the meaning and benefits of formal education than that offered by other forms of evaluation. With the advantage of both hindsight and maturity, and with the ability to apply the ‘test of time’, adults can more easily identify the worth of both key features and critical phases in their earlier schooling’* (p173).

Although other methods may well have been possible, the phenomenographic case study also proved to be a satisfactory way of approaching the subject area of this project, given its particular emphasis on collective experience, and recurrent or shared themes.

The viability of semi-structured interviews had already been established at the pilot stage. The main study also showed that the interview process was not merely fruitful from a research perspective but also represented a meaningful exercise for the interviewees themselves. Many said they had both enjoyed and gained something from taking part in the study.

7.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It should be borne in mind that the study has a number of limitations:

- There were no interview questions specifically relating to learning processes, professional self-identity and post-course transitions, which, upon analysing the data, appear to be concepts of some importance in the study. This is perhaps one of the weaknesses of an exploratory study but does suggest a direction for further research.
- Due to the limitations of part-time doctoral study and full-time work, the main study interviews were held within a relatively short time period with only transcription time in between. More time between interviews to analyse/ponder/read would have been useful. Transcribing the interviews did provide some thinking time but this was only ever fleeting in the circumstances.
- The possibility of bias existed since I interviewed four of my own students. However, I have been transparent about this and I believe they were very honest in what they said (their transcripts certainly do not read any more positively than the others; in fact, they are quite blunt about some of the more negative issues).
- The research method uses only interviews, but it is difficult to access retrospective perceptions in any other way. I have tried to use DELTA documentation where appropriate and have also checked the findings with two other DELTA-qualified teachers.

7.3 PROFESSIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

I present this in three sections: to the DELTA validating body, to DELTA course providers and to prospective DELTA trainees.

A. TO CAMBRIDGE ESOL (DELTA VALIDATING/AWARDING BODY)

1. Previous teaching experience

In view of the findings reported in Chapter Five, previous teaching experience appears to be an important foundation on which to base the DELTA learning experience. It is therefore advisable that the importance of sufficient experience should continue to be emphasised.

The Cambridge ESOL webpages pertaining to the old, now superseded (since September 2008), DELTA suggest that two years is a recommended minimum. The webpages pertaining to the new DELTA modules (see Appendix One for more details), however, state that '*Candidates ... will normally have an initial ELT qualification and will have had at least a year's ELT experience but these are not requirements*' (my emphasis) and '*...previous teaching experience is strongly recommended... This is to ensure that candidates have sufficient prior knowledge and experience to benefit from the course*' (p4). The Handbook (p3) also states that for Modules 1 and 3 teaching experience is recommended but that for Module Two ('Developing Professional Practice') it is required.

Although the Cambridge ESOL website still suggests a minimum period of pre-course teaching experience, this has been reduced by a year, and more is being left to the course providers' discretion. The website makes a brief statement (see previous paragraph) about the link between the course and prior teaching experience but does not make clear how important this is to the integration of theory and practice during the course. Reducing the recommended prior experience to one year may not be advantageous since teachers are likely still to be at the 'survival stage' of teaching. In addition, they are likely only to have experienced one teaching context; being able to relate new learning to more than one context allows for better integration of learning and a stronger foundation upon which to address the demands of the written assignments.

2. Course tutors

Chapter Six demonstrates that it was not only tutor knowledge and skills which were deemed important; tutor qualities such as engagement, enthusiasm and understanding, and behaviours such as modelling and supporting were also viewed as highly relevant. Cambridge ESOL produces thorough stipulations on the extensive training that new DELTA course tutors must undertake before being accepted as authorised course tutors. While these clear training guidelines are praiseworthy in their detail, it may be useful to highlight the interpersonal and affective as well as cognitive aspects of being a tutor. This is reflected in Freedman's recommendation (1985, p252) that Diploma trainers needed '*interpersonal training in which communication skills are fostered*'.

3. Modes of learning

Certain DELTA modules may now be offered on-line (see Appendix One). It would be helpful if these include discussion forums that are both tutor-mediated and non-tutor-mediated. Chapter Six of the thesis has shown that interaction with fellow students was perceived useful in both scaffolding learning and providing much-needed emotional support. Course providers of both on-line and face-to-face courses could also pair/group participants so that they have a formal opportunity for peer support during their course.

4. Research course impact

Given that Cambridge ESOL view DELTA as their '*flagship teaching qualification*' (Zeronis, 2007, p4), perhaps the time has come for them to conduct some large-scale research of their own into the impact of the DELTA. When considering major changes to the structuring of the DELTA, Cambridge ESOL conducted a wide-ranging evaluation and review process (Zeronis, 2007, p5). The DELTA was modularised as a result (see Appendix One). Once the new Delta modules have been running for several years, the time might be ripe for Cambridge ESOL to commission an independent research study, possibly a comparison of perceptions between those who took the new modular DELTA and those who took the previous, non-modular version. Chapter Four of this thesis suggests that there is some considerable perceived impact; it

would be worthwhile for this to be confirmed/refuted on a wider scale, not simply as an evaluation study but as an investigation into the value of the DELTA for its graduates and the learning outcomes generated by the course, in the manner of Bird et al (2005), Butcher and Sieminski (2006), or Powell et al (2003).

B. TO DELTA COURSE PROVIDERS

PRE-COURSE

1. Pre-course experience

Candidates should have sufficient pre-course experience (see point 1, pp144-145).

2. Readiness

Chapter Five suggests that motivation needs to be in place if the applicants are to be able to engage with the course in sufficient depth for the impact to be substantial. This can be discussed at interview, but schools should engage with their own teachers about their readiness to take the course, and if possible facilitate the emergence of personal motivation without 'pushing' them.

One way of helping to manage participants' expectations and stimulate receptivity towards the professional learning experience may be to include on a course website transcripts or audio texts with DELTA graduates discussing the professional changes they experienced and the best way to prepare for the course.

3. Pre-course tasks

Pre-course tasks could be set which encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching. This might help to strengthen motivation and sharpen feelings of receptivity towards professional development, but the findings in Chapter Five also suggest that relating learning to previous experience was a common process. Raising awareness of the complex factors which make up any teaching context may help to lay in place the foundation upon which this integration process can be based.

DURING THE COURSE

1. The course teaching team (Chapter Six)

A teaching team should comprise at least three tutors (Freedman [1985, p252] also recommends '*more than one or two trainers*'), all of whom, as far as possible: have recent classroom experience; keep up-to-date with methodology/techniques; have been trained in giving post-observation feedback to experienced teachers; have an understanding of both adult and teacher learning; adopt a personal teaching style where they engage both on an individual and group level with course participants, and value what participants bring to the course.

2. Learning processes (Chapter Six)

A programme should include a variety of different learning processes, with lecturing kept to a minimum. Participants should be encouraged to capitalise on their own learning styles and strengths, and on supporting/learning from each other.

3. Exploring pre-course experience (Chapter Five)

A programme should explore not only beliefs, but also participants' previous experience. Participants should be explicitly helped to relate new learning to previous experience and vice versa, and to adopt/modify new learning so that it is relevant to their work situation.

4. Mentoring (Chapter Six)

An ideal programme should provide support for improving teaching, also recommended by Freedman (1985, p252), as training alone is not enough (Elmore, 2000, p47). A mentoring scheme where course participants share a teaching situation with experienced teachers is ideal. The helping processes should include: receiving feedback on non-assessed teaching; planning and teaching lessons together; being supported through the process of constructing a lesson plan.

POST-COURSE

Post-course support

DELTA graduates should continue to be supported in their post-course teaching, since it has been shown that impact is not necessarily immediate and the potential benefits are vulnerable unless the process is fully supported. In addition, academic managers should utilise the enthusiasm, motivation and confidence that many DELTA graduates bring to their teaching, through asking them to mentor other teachers and expanding their roles in other ways.

C. TO PROSPECTIVE DELTA COURSE PARTICIPANTS

These recommendations form different types of 'preparedness' for the DELTA experience.

1. When to take the Diploma course

The findings in Chapter Five suggest that it is helpful if prospective participants feel 'ready' and are not simply undertaking the course at the behest of an employer. If participants can be honest with themselves about their motivations for doing the course, this may help them and their tutors. Future DELTA participants would do well to reflect on the most appropriate time for their own professional and life circumstances.

Developing receptivity to a professional development experience may be helped by talking to another person in the same position, and talking to more experienced colleagues who have already taken the DELTA course (as Chapter Five suggests that motivation can be socially constructed).

2. Managing expectations: Possibility of major changes

Prospective DELTA candidates should be prepared for change and for honest and constructive feedback on their teaching. The findings in Chapter Six show that this is not always easy; being prepared in advance may help to ease the process.

3. Managing expectations: Types of change

Chapter Four shows that impact can come in many forms. Trainees can organise their own expectations of the course by reflecting on the areas where change might happen, the areas in which they feel learning 'needs' to take place, and the kind of knowledge/skills/ behaviours/approaches they would like to acquire. One means of achieving this might be to analyse their own lessons in a structured way, for example, why certain approaches/techniques/materials seem to 'work' or not 'work' in class. Talking to former DELTA participants, especially if they are familiar colleagues, about the impact they perceived might also help to clarify, organise and widen expectations of the course.

4. Professional identity (Chapter Five)

Pre-Diploma teachers might benefit from reflecting on their own professional identity as an EFL teacher. In their own view, where do they see themselves, both on their own career trajectory and also on the teaching trajectory from novice to advanced teacher? Where are they now and where would they ultimately like to be? How closely do they identify themselves with the overall community of EFL practitioners and with their own teaching community?

5. Preparation for integrating theory and practice

DELTA trainees may benefit from reading EFL methodology books and attending teacher development sessions prior to the course, and from trying to relate what they read/hear to their own teaching. The purposes are partly to familiarise themselves with concepts/terminology, but more importantly to begin the process (Chapter Five) of anchoring new learning within their own prior knowledge and experience.

6. Learning styles (Chapter Six)

Before/during the course Diploma participants could consider how they normally prefer to learn. They need to optimise what works best for them while remaining open to other methods. When making the choice of whether to take a full-time, part-time or distance learning option (see Appendix One), this point should also be borne in mind.

7. Integrating theory and practice

During the course it is advisable for DELTA participants to keep their own learners in mind. The findings in Chapter Five suggest that interviewees learned through relating new ideas to their own prior teaching and the context(s) with which they were familiar.

8. Seeking professional support during the course

If mentoring support is not provided as part of the course structure, participants could seek out another EFL teacher with whom they can discuss ideas, lesson plans and new theoretical concepts. Although they will no doubt gain help from fellow participants, interacting with another person who is not undergoing the same experience might provide the mentoring opportunity that the interviewees in this study so appreciated (Chapter Six) and which many writers advocate (for example, Day, 1999; Elmore, 2000; Dadds, 1997; Singh and Richards, 2006).

7.4 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION

Undertaking this research study has been an invaluable learning experience. I have gained some understanding of the nature of research and of the cyclical, sometimes messy, nature of the research process. I have learned, for example, that things do not fit neatly into categories and that research can be frustrating and sometimes tedious, yet at other times immensely rewarding and even exhilarating.

This research study has also provided some key ideas which have helped me examine my own professional values, and guidelines for possible changes to my own future practice. As well as adopting the course provider recommendations above for DELTA courses, I intend to explore further the impact of other teacher education courses with which I may be involved, since I now have a growing awareness of how impact might be affected by process factors. I have also begun to question how my colleagues and I come across as course tutors, how much attention we pay to our participants' beliefs about teaching, how much we value what they bring to the classroom and the role that affective factors might play in relation to participants' experiences of our teacher education courses. The research process has also encouraged me to view my own TEFL context within the wider educational field and has provided a wealth of resources from which we can learn in order to improve the quality of TEFL teacher education and development.

Final words

Whatever criticisms of the DELTA have been made by the participants in this study, the strongest single theme in their evaluations of their own learning is that this is a sound, valuable, well-integrated programme, containing most of the key ingredients of successful learning and development, and which none of the twenty interviewees regretted having taken. My own view, today, is that this fundamentally optimistic picture nevertheless leaves the DELTA as fruitful ground for further study aimed at refining the programme to the point where it is a model of educational excellence.