

Teacher knowledge of grammar in the primary school

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Teacher Knowledge of Grammar in the Primary School

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Abstract

This thesis presents an investigation of the beliefs, personal epistemologies and knowledge held by 8 teachers of primary age pupils in Years 5 and 6 about the teaching of grammar, and whether learning grammar brings about an improvement in writing.

The study was divided into three parts. In the first phase the teachers were interviewed about their knowledge and understanding of grammar before being taught an unfamiliar grammar programme to be administered to their classes. They were each filmed teaching a grammar-based lesson. After nine months the teachers were interviewed once more and a further grammar-based lesson was filmed. Fifteen months after the start of the project they were interviewed and filmed for a final time.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit their espoused changing attitudes to grammar teaching and to trace any increases in grammar knowledge over the period of the research. The filmed lessons enabled comparisons to be made between the teachers' claims relating to their changing knowledge and pedagogies and what was actually evidenced in lessons.

Interview answers were initially inductively open coded and then subjected to axial coding, leading to the identification of four main themes on which the findings have been based: subject knowledge; personal epistemologies; teacher pedagogies and pupil progress.

This study is important as it is concerned with what primary teachers know about, and their epistemological positions relating to, the teaching of grammar at an unprecedented time in English education, when they must all include the teaching of grammar in their curriculum for the first time.

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Chapter 1 - The Research Problem

1.1. - Introduction

Every so often the questions of whether and how to teach grammar become major focuses of attention in the English education system. It is a matter, comments Locke (2010:1), that ‘has arguably generated more acrimonious debate than any other’ among English/literacy teachers – and politicians. The subject has become increasingly political during the last two decades in England and other countries in the Anglophone world. Interest in its revival has once more blossomed, after years of disregard, due to the decision of the Conservative government, elected to power in 2010, to test children as young as 7 on their grammar knowledge, ostensibly as a means of improving writing. This decision directly contradicted the advice from linguists, such as the English Review Group (ERG), that attempting to learn grammar according to the officially selected model does not directly lead to improvement in writing attainment (Wyse, 2001; Clark, 2010a; Pullum, 2012). The government policy is based solely on a traditional, prescriptive model of grammar, concerned with accuracy and correctness, discredited in the second half of the 20th century because it was patently not improving children’s writing (Hudson & Walmsley 2005:593).

Many people are not aware that there is more than one ‘grammar’ (Crystal, 2008:217), and a descriptive, contextually based, functional grammar has been shown to make positive impact on pupils’ writing through research conducted in secondary schools during the last five years (Myhill *et al*, 2012). Unfortunately, no equivalent study has been conducted to examine the ways that grammar might be taught to the best linguistic effect in primary schools, (French, 2010:206) particularly in Years 5 and 6 (children aged 9 to 11 years), where pupils are more blatantly prepared for the national tests. The requirement about teaching a formal grammar programme for these pupils was decided with no professional discussion, and – most importantly – no training for thousands of teachers, most of whom are not grammar specialists. A very large proportion of these teachers have only the sketchiest knowledge of a grammar metalanguage, mostly acquired in a piecemeal fashion. Research by Myhill (2000) and Cajkler and Hislam (2010) showed that most student teachers did not know ‘parts of speech’, and they believed without question a number of

misconceptions about language use. No relationship was made between the new official grammar curriculum and previous government initiatives to promote the teaching of grammar, such as the ‘Grammar for Writing’ publication (DfEE,2000), which supported the Literacy Strategy in primary schools in the early years of this century. Primary teachers have found it necessary to reach out in many different directions, including the internet and text books of dedicated grammar exercises, to seek resources and strategies in attempts to secure successful test results for their pupils. In the main, they have been unaware of alternative models of language, such as those influenced by Michael Halliday and his approach of Systemic Functional Grammar (Collerson, 1994), where the emphasis is on the ‘functional’: i.e. not merely the ‘naming of parts’, but involving an interest in the functions words are performing in any sentence, and how language works to achieve various intended purposes.

Watson (2012:20), who investigated the beliefs about teaching grammar of secondary English teachers, states that:

in a time of curricular change it is all the more important to be aware of teachers’ beliefs. How teachers respond to policy is, in a large part, determined by their own values and beliefs, and particularly the ‘degree of congruence’ which they perceive between the beliefs which underpin the policy and their own “belief system”.

That personal ‘belief system’ has a strong influence on the manner of teaching. Hofer and Pintrich (1997:117) point out that beliefs about learning include knowing how pupils learn and what it means to have learned. For the best pupil outcomes teachers will also need to be aware of what constitutes secure subject knowledge and know how to plan and conduct their lessons in a way that makes learning purposeful. Hasweh (1996) and others, for instance, show that teachers espousing ‘constructivist’ beliefs (i.e. those involving active, exploratory learning, as opposed to passive, instructional learning) have a tendency to: devise richer teaching repertoires; were more likely to detect student alternate conceptions and displayed more frequent use of effective teaching strategies.

1.2. The scope and significance of this study

This unique study is concerned with discovering the ontologies and personal epistemologies of a sample of primary teachers in respect of teaching grammar

in the context of writing; to ascertain what subject knowledge they require and to discover the sorts of pedagogies most likely to lead to improving writing. It is the first in-depth study of primary teachers and their relationship with grammar since the introduction of the most recent national curriculum changes and it attempts to ascertain how teachers have responded to the new demands made upon them by the government and their schools, and to discover what might contribute to improved teaching of grammar. The project comprised close qualitative research with eight self-selected teachers of different ages and experience, through interview and filmed lesson observation.

Teachers' views on the place and possible effectiveness of grammar have been under-researched in primary schools. This study presented an opportunity for a group of primary teachers to express their feelings about the imposition of a grammar curriculum, and it reflects on what provision they require to achieve improvement in their pupils' writing through the learning of grammar. Previous research and inspection reports about writing (Ofsted 209:48: Andrews, 2010:94) have highlighted the need for positive change to raise standards in that area of literacy, but virtually none has recommended it be brought about through the strategy selected by the Department for Education in 2013. The problems and difficulties faced by primary teachers in this subject area should be noted by headteachers and their senior teams, teacher trainers, academic linguists, as well as the Secretary of State and education ministers, as it contains important findings related to the teaching of grammar.

This research explores the beliefs this group of teachers espouse; the ways in which they teach; the stances they adopt; the attitudes and approaches they bring to their teaching of grammar; the organisation of their classes and the resources they select. Most importantly will be the discovery of what these teachers know about grammar and how much more knowledge about it could lead to effective teaching and learning of this valuable but misunderstood subject. Nobody wants to see diminished teaching taking place in primary classrooms and the teachers do not want to feel insecure in any subject area, hampering significant and vital teaching. Further insight into these issues should aid the answering of the central research question: 'What subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in primary schools in the context of writing?'

Chapter 2 - A History of the Problems of Grammar in the Curriculum

2.1. Introduction

The central research question driving this project is ‘what subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in primary schools in the context of writing?’ It is an important question to put at this moment, when, for the first time in the history of English teaching, primary teachers have been obliged to teach grammar to children as young as 7. There are no easy answers to the research question, but some of the possibilities will be presented and considered in this thesis.

This chapter will look back to the place and practices of grammar and discover some of the many beliefs associated with the subject in the past and up to the present day. This part of the study is necessary to establish what has taken place in respect of the teaching of grammar over the last four hundred years of schooling in England. This information will serve as a comparator with modern ideas, and provide a setting against which the power struggles around grammar teaching and learning have taken place.

Grammar was a central component of the English/ literacy curriculum of English schools for hundreds of years (Keith, 1990:70; Clark, 2010b: 38; Hudson & Walmesley, 2005:595). Yet, during a period lasting approximately thirty years in the second half of the twentieth century it virtually disappeared from the classrooms of secondary teachers of English, and most primary schools, so that subsequent generations of pupils learned very little or no grammar at all in those settings. Much the same fate was experienced by grammar in other English speaking countries of the world (Locke, 2010): Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada and Singapore, to name a few, all witnessed a significant decline in the provision of grammar teaching in their schools at about that same time (Locke, 2010; Christie, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Myhill & Jones (2015). No single reason explains this linguistic phenomenon, but a mixture of explanations exists; the most notable interpretations will be explored in this chapter.

It is necessary to establish why grammar held such an esteemed position for so long. During the last three hundred years there was a belief that, in ontological

and epistemological terms, much of the explanation of the phenomena of the world and its events was situated beyond the ken of mankind, ‘out there’; what Walker calls ‘a Cartesian duality of mind and world’ (Walker, 1990: 176). This separation of the knower and what there is to be known, published in authoritative books without any challenge, bestowed a seeming objective status to knowledges of certain kinds, such as the knowledge of language. Cope and Kalantziz (1993:3) express this mindset in the following manner:

Traditional grammar is based on a uniquely modern logocientific culture and epistemology. It is based on the idea that the world can be described in terms of ‘facts’ and rules and regularities epitomised in tables to conjugate verbs or decline nouns. Language, it seems, is something that can be meaningfully visualised in taxonomies and rationalised into tables arranged across the two-dimensional space of the textbook page.

During the Victorian age, and up until the First World War, there existed across society a very different general mind-set, comprising much greater deference, more unquestioned respect for authority, and a closer adherence to ‘standards than we are accustomed to today’.

*By teaching parts of speech, by demanding standards of correctness, by being prescriptive about what were ostensibly language facts, teachers were teaching students respect, discipline, order (*ibid*).*

Strict class divisions in England and the countries of its empire kept people and their ideas in their place. Just as the population was hierarchically ordered, so language and utterances were equally fiercely divided and so were the texts produced through that language. Walker (1990:176) cites Rorty’s claim (1979) that Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey were among those who proposed that realities and knowledge of them are ‘pluralistic and culturally formed’. These changing attitudes present a necessary background for understanding why such a monumental turnover of the prevailing orthodoxies, including those to do with language, could possibly come about within only 50 years.

2.2. The early study of grammar

Disputes about ‘grammar’ in the English speaking world can be traced back as far as the Elizabethan age (Jackson 1985), when two literary giants, Francis Bacon and Ben Jonson, entertained quite different understandings of the word. Bacon, in his *Second Book of Francis Bacon; Of The Proficience and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human*, published in 1605, wrote

'Concerning speech and words, the consideration of them hath produced the science of Grammar', placing himself firmly in a paradigm that might later be termed the prescriptivist or 'grammar rules' category. By way of contrast, Jonson, in his 'Grammar', published posthumously in 1640, stated that 'Grammar is the art of true and well speaking a Language', inclining more to an arts orientated approach. Hudson and Walmsley (2005:598) illustrate something of the same distinction by quoting the linguist, Adamson, some three hundred years later (1907: 173):

The distinction between the scientific study of a language as exhibited in its grammar and the attainment of the art of speaking the language is now generally recognized; as a consequence it is no longer held that a vernacular speech is acquired through its grammar.

From the earliest of times of a language recognisable as English, there has been dispute and disagreement about its grammar, even extending to the definition of the word 'grammar' itself (Wyse, 2001:411). Peim (1999:30) claims, 'We know that grammar is *there* as a feature of the language and it is *there* in public concern about English teaching, but clear indications as to what it is and how we should go about dealing with it are not always to hand.'

2.3. Background to Grammar Teaching

Grammar derives from *Gramma*, a Greek word, meaning 'letter of the alphabet'. In the classical Greek culture it was broadly associated with the study of Greek literature, but later the word became attached to the earliest forms of language study, usually of Latin. In the Middle Ages it formed a third of a three-cornered programme of studies (the *trivium*), alongside rhetoric and logic, as the core curriculum of the earliest grammar schools and universities in this country:

In the history of English education...the study of language became limited to learning grammar in its narrowest perspective, in a pedagogic style that was mainly prescriptive and proscriptive, and which concentrated on the written user of the language (Keith, 1990:70).

Cameron (2007:1) informs us that a dry and sterile grammar was taught throughout the Middle Ages, when the language being studied and learned was Latin. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, England was undergoing great economic, political and social change, as it began to establish itself as a powerful nation state. One area attracting much attention was a more scholarly consideration of the English language, both as a method of

establishing national identity, and as a vehicle of power. At the same time as the French were devising an Academie Française to control and rule on the purity of their language, English scholars and writers began a close look at English, devising explanations about the way it worked. Dr Johnson famously contributed to a stabilisation of the spelling system with the publication of his dictionary in 1755, but a scan of the internet at the following address: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Grammar_of_English_Grammars/Catalogue yields the titles of over 400 other publications devoted to the business of grammar, all produced between the years 1750 and 1850. Influentially notable amongst them, and popular for many years, regularly reprinted, was Robert Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar*, published in 1762.

In keeping with the academic context of its times, Lowth and his contemporaries looked particularly to Latin for their overarching 'model' of language, to give their work scholarly respectability and historical precedent and background. They ignored the problem that English and Latin are two different sorts of language: English relying for much of its meaning on its word order, whilst Latin is heavily inflected; and forced them together in an unreliable alliance. (DoE, 1921:284) Thus' 'rules' about English, including one instructing writers about never splitting the infinitive of a verb, made sense in Latin, where the infinitive is expressed in a single word. Yet, in English the infinitive comprises two words, the first being the word 'to', as in 'to go', and there is no logical linguistic reason why another word might not be inserted between both parts to give particular emphasis. It is perfectly reasonable to write (or say) 'to boldly go', although the linguistic 'mavens' would direct otherwise. This attachment to the workings of a dead language was maintained in the English research repertoire for another 150 years without much challenge. Pullum (2012: on-line), calls these rules 'zombie rules': 'though dead, they shamble mindlessly on'.

2.3.1. Which 'grammar'?

Most people are surprised to discover there is not one single grammar in or to do with English; in fact, there is a large collection of 'grammars' known mostly only by academic research linguists. Crystal, in *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, (2008:217) lists the following: 'descriptive grammar', 'reference

grammars', 'theoretical grammar', 'comparative grammar', 'generative grammar', 'traditional grammar' and 'functional grammar' to name a few.

Different grammars also call for different ways of teaching. A summary of the different 'conceptualisations of grammar teaching' has been demonstrated by Watson (2012) in the following table:

Approach	Grammar	Pedagogy	Aims
Traditional	Prescriptive, Latinate	Deductive Decontextualised Exercises	Accuracy in the production of written standard English.
Rhetorical	Descriptive	Contextualised within writing / reading activities. Discussion and exploration of the linguistic choices available to writers and their effects.	Explicit awareness of choices made as a 'writer'; Expanded 'repertoire' of grammatical structures available for students' writing.
Functional	Descriptive, Functional	Contextualised within writing / reading activities. Discussion of choices and effects with particular focus on how texts are constructed socially and linguistically.	Explicit awareness of choice; Understanding of interrelationship between social and linguistic structures of texts; expanded 'repertoire'
Stylistic	Descriptive	Contextualised. Activities focused on manipulation of language for stylistic effect.	Explicit awareness of choice; ability to manipulate language to suit different contexts.
Contextualised	Descriptive	Inductive. Mini-lessons. Embedded teaching of relevant grammar points during writing lessons or writing conferences.	Explicit awareness of choice; knowledge of grammatical structures and ability to manipulate them for effect.
Implicit	Intuitive, without metalanguage	Exposure to different linguistic structures/patterns; experimentation with structures in students' writing.	General metalinguistic awareness (not linked to terminology); facility in the use of a variety of linguistic structures.

Table 1. Summary of conceptualisations of 'grammar teaching' Watson 2012:
28)

Against such a diverse background of grammars, and their associated pedagogies, Lefstein (2009:1) asks the following questions:

Debates about grammar teaching have traditionally revolved around curriculum content: Should grammar be taught explicitly and systematically? If so, which grammar?

There are ‘numerous approaches’ both to the ‘analysis of the English language and the teaching of grammar’, he claims, before focusing on two contrasting pedagogical approaches to grammar (2009:2): ‘rule-based’ and ‘rhetorical grammar’. The former is characterised by strict rules, learned through decontextualised exercises, which have simple right or wrong answers, and contribute to knowing the rules and the production of ‘proper’ Standard English. Rhetorical grammar, by way of contrast, is designed to make meaningful communication in real contexts, encouraging the exercising of judgement and the development of awareness, reflection and deliberation, regarding Standard English as one important variety of English, related to degrees of linguistic formality (2009:5).

The grammar that has been predominantly discussed so far in this study, and one which will occupy the most consideration as it develops, is a traditional /prescriptive/ rule-based grammar.

2.4. The purpose of grammar teaching

An assumption existed from the early days of grammar teaching that the close study of grammar would lead to improved and ‘proper’ writing, and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate toured schools across the country in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, testing pupils on their grammar knowledge. The belief that learning grammar would then naturally lead into better writing attainment was the main justification for its continuance in English lessons, although other reasons, as described below, also supported its inclusion. Not everybody, however, in those times shared the belief that an intrinsic relationship existed between learning grammar and improved writing. Hollingsworth (1972:238) points out that, ‘English as defined by the Board of Education was to be a combination of grammar and recitation (i.e. learning classic poetry by heart)’. ‘But’, he goes on, ‘Inspectors were far from unanimous that grammar was a subject of real educational value.’ Hollingsworth selects a

quotation from a Mr Helps HMI, Inspector for Chelmsford, who courageously, for his times, wrote:

Were it to be found that a knowledge of grammar induced facility and correctness in speaking and writing, there would be little to be said against its right to the place it now occupies in the curriculum; but experience shows that a child may give a fair knowledge of the grammatical rules, and even refinement of grammar, and yet be totally unable to turn such knowledge to account in speaking and writing. (What Her Majesty's Inspectors Say: London 1880; 35)

Even Matthew Arnold, an advocate for the teaching of grammar, giving evidence to the Cross Commission on elementary education in 1886, also justified grammar teaching on the non-linguistic grounds that its study is 'good training in logic' and an 'excellent mental training' (Hollingsworth, 1972; 162; Gillard, 2011). A contemporary American book, '*Teaching the Language Arts*' (Hinsdale, 1900:162) suggested that learning grammar has no positive effects on teaching writing, and yet includes recommendations for its study in such areas as 'disciplinary value' and 'logical training'. Even where proponents of teaching grammar were unable to make a good case for its inclusion in the curriculum on the grounds of writing improvements, there were still reserves of non-subject based justifications to be called on.

2.5. The politics of grammar teaching

Teaching grammar in maintained schools has been a highly contested political issue for over one hundred years, and remains a current topic of educational discourse. (On the very day that I was writing this page in October 2013, *The Guardian* printed a semi-serious article in its features section about writing accuracy, and a recent much-praised publication, *Gwynne's Grammar*, has the sub-title *the 'ultimate introduction to grammar and the writing of good English'* (my emphasis) (Gwynne 2013). On the one hand is a vociferous lobby, usually comprising advocates from outside education, who claim with absolutely certainty that teaching grammar as a separate area of the curriculum can lead to improved children's writing, and - to give their claim real importance - will also make them better citizens. On the other hand, an equally noisy, but often less powerful group, mostly situated in schools and universities has maintained that the decontextualised teaching of grammar has no effect on writing standards, and is a waste of pupils' time. Far from improving children's education, the subject is boring and demotivating, and has often failed to reflect

children's own language and experiences. Clark (2010a:189) typifies this latter attitude:

Despite the valiant efforts of those associated with the English teaching profession and with the writing of these documents, they virtually all, to varying degrees, bear testament to one of the most tenacious shibboleths of government educational policy and thinking. This is, that teaching pupils grammar will of itself result in improved accuracy in the production of language, and that this can be achieved by isolating activities associated with grammar from the rest of the curriculum for English.

2.6. The decline of grammar

Hudson and Walmsley (2005) tracking the history of grammar teaching, claim that the demise of classroom grammar began in the middle of the nineteenth century; quoting the American linguist, Fries (1940:19), who believed there was no direct connection between learning grammar and better writing: a claim that had 'been propagated throughout more than half the nineteenth century'. From the 1920s onwards, that view gained greater currency in a movement which they call 'a discipline systematically eradicated from the curriculum of schools and universities' (Hudson & Walmsley 2005:600). The teaching of grammar was often dull and routine, as it had been through the ages. Hudson & Walmsley (2003:601) refer to a much used textbook of the early part of the twentieth century, Nesfield's *Outline of English Grammar and Composition* (1898) which gives a clear sense of how relentless routines of learning grammar were conducted:

After learning about the parts of speech in the first two sections, the pupils went on to do parsing and analysis in parts III and IV. To parse a noun, they needed to give its kind, gender, number and case. Thus, 'deer' in 'The deer in my father's garden nibble the grass with eagerness [sic]' was a common noun, common gender, plural, nominative. (Hudson & Walmsley, 2005:601).

As the noun and pronoun do not have a 'case' in English, it can be seen how convoluted information about much of the language had become.

2.7. Grammar in the first half of the 20th century

The Newbolt Report, and George Sampson's book, *English for the English*, both published in 1921, were significant at a stage when Great Britain had recently been on the winning side of a massive war, but lost a frightening number of

young men on the battlefield, and as a result of which society was rapidly changing, illustrated in the abandoning of many Victorian values and mores. Mathieson (1975) suggests these two works, ‘are landmarks of any survey of the history of English’. She points to an upsurge of ‘patriotic feeling’ and ‘a sense of national mission and identity (1975:123).’ The Newbolt Committee was charged with the following tasks:

To inquire into the position occupied by English (Language and Literature) in the educational system of England, and to advise how its study may best be promoted in schools of all types, including Continuation Schools, and in Universities, and other Institutions of Higher Education, regard being had to:

- (1) *the requirements of a liberal education;*
- (2) *the needs of business, the professions, and public services; and*
- (3) *the relation of English to other studies.*

The report contains a whole section on ‘the problem of grammar’ (BoE, 1921:278), where it addressed the perceived ‘rapid disappearance’ from ‘all but a few schools, to the joy of children and teacher’. Dr P B Ballard, an educational psychologist, appearing before the Committee as a witness, described grammar as ‘the most unpopular subject in the primary school’ (BoE, 1921:279). Ballard asserted that not only did grammar not improve writing skills, it failed to be of use in the other qualities that it was supposed to bestow on learners, and he summed up by claiming that it took up time ‘which could, much more profitably, be devoted to the study of literature’ (*ibid*). The Newbolt committee came to realise that there were different conceptions of grammar, leading it to ask the question: ‘For why do we learn or teach grammar?’ (BoE, 1921:281) The eventual finding concluded: ‘The study of English Grammar is really a preparation for the careful and intelligent study of language’ (*ibid*), and recommendations were made about the necessity of achieving language knowledge for those studying Latin and foreign languages. But, these were set against a background which contended ‘Grammar is certainly badly taught as a rule.’(p.282). After a lengthy consideration of the differences between Latin and English, the report eventually decrees:

We are of the opinion, therefore, that the case for teaching pure grammar, a grammar of function not of form, is an exceedingly strong

one. But if it be taught, it must be taught as pure grammar and nothing else. (p.291)

A version of grammar called ‘English grammar’ was proscribed in this curious summary.

2.8. The rise of literature

Sampson (1921:54) gives little space to considering the issues of grammar pertinent to his time. He states:

But what I want specially to say...is that however helpful Latin grammar may be for older writers (and no one denies its value), it is of no use whatever in the early or elementary stages of English.

He objects strongly to what he regards as the ‘Ptolemaic education system’ that hands down ‘scraps of information’, comparing it to one that makes each learner a ‘civilised articulate human being’ (Sampson, 1921:27), but his priority is for the study of the cream of English literature texts, which he regards in almost theological terms:

We reach the English that is not a routine, but a religion (p77) and the reading of literature is a kind of creative reception. It is almost sacramental. (ibid)

Both these texts were, according to Mathieson (1975:120), promoting a ‘new patriotism, through knowledge of a cultural heritage’, a position Matthew Arnold had adopted half a century earlier (Arnold, 1869). The title of his book – *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) – indicates an obvious role for the promotion of literature with its supposed capacity to ward off the sorts of dark forces that had been destroying the old Europe through revolution and civil war in the 19th century. ‘The fear of strife and political restlessness’, state Ball, Kenny and Gardiner (1990:52), ‘expressed by Matthew Arnold is echoed in Sampson’s work; the task of literature would be to circumvent any possibility of insurgence, such as that witnessed in Russia.’ Eagleton, a Marxist critic and teacher, picks up the same themes when he claims that the Great War, ‘with its carnage of ruling-class rhetoric’ changed the way that English and Englishness was perceived, putting paid to ‘the more strident forms of chauvinism on which England had previously thrived’ (Eagleton, 1985: 30). With the challenging of and breaking down of formerly stable institutions, a different mind-set was developing in society. The previous dominance of religious faith and Classical studies amongst the educated elite was being gradually replaced by a new spiritual

energy, directed towards the reading and study of English literature, as a moral force (Bill, Kenny and Gardiner, 1990: 52; Myhill & Jones, 2015:2). Poulson (1998:24) sums up the consequences of the Newbolt Report as providing a ‘unifying focus for the nation after the war’, and identified the key roles of ‘English language and literature’ as central subjects of the school curriculum.

The ethos which had brought about the enhanced status of Classical studies, and its elitist, class-based position, was in fast decline (Eagleton 1985: 33). The study of ‘English’ at universities was secured, and it became overwhelmingly popular in a very short time. Eagleton describes this change thus:

In the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the 1930s it has become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else. English was not only a subject worth studying, but the supremely civilising pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation (p31).

This observation is a vital one in tracing the history of grammar in English. Hudson and Walmsley (2005:601) suggest that the Newbolt Report led to an ‘accelerated dissolution’ of grammar teaching’. Sampson’s book probably also played a part in bringing about a clear division in the subject known as English, which impacted upon the teaching of grammar: one ‘branch’ focused on teaching grammar and language knowledge, the other prioritising the immersion in and study of literature . The Report found itself ‘juggling with several kinds of grammar at the same time’ (*ibid*), and as a consequence of that confused picture ‘English grammar’ was rejected. The committee claimed too few teachers knew how to teach it, anyway. In practice, a ‘hybrid’ grammar evolved, but with the expansion of literature in English classrooms, less space existed in the English curriculum to include grammar lessons, and it was probably at this point that the more rapid decline of grammar began. Before considering the speed of that disappearance during the rest of the twentieth century, however, there is another aspect of the teaching of grammar that should be explored.

2.9. Standard English

Grammar teaching in the curriculum also satisfied other requirements of the more traditional exponents of English language study. Prescriptive, rules-based English grammar had come to underpin a particular form of English in the shape of a powerful dialect that had once been one among many such dialects spread

around the country, but had been fortunate to gain its *primus inter pares* status by being geographically associated with the national seats of power (e.g. the language of government, the law, the press and education) in the South East of England. This dialect came to be known as 'Standard English' and many have associated the word 'standard' with the notion of 'standards' relating to morality and behaviour ever since. There still exist numbers of people who claim that Standard English is the only possible correct form of the language, and believe it has been a tool of social order. Clarke (2005:32) explains some of its power:

As an institution, the education system plays a key role in transmitting dominant ideologies of society. One of the ways it does this is through the reproduction and maintenance of a standard variety of a language through which, in turn, notions of national and cultural identity are transmitted.

She states that to understand the current debates about the role of grammar in the English curriculum, one 'has to understand the ways which language is inextricably linked with notions of social class in ways which are unique.' Clarke reminds us that Standard English came to be associated with the middle classes from the eighteenth century, through 'processes of standardisation' (*ibid*:32). As such it has been an instrument of discrimination, assisting in maintaining a class-based society.

2.9.1. Grammar as an indicator of 'correctness'

These 'extra-linguistic' reasons for including grammar in the curriculum are also allied with another powerful feature associated with grammar teaching, alluded to by Cameron (2007:2) and Clarke (2005:42). Advocates approving its inclusion in the national teaching programme make strong claims for the powers of 'correctness' which have become enshrined as one of the concepts of grammar. And this 'correctness' is not limited to 'accurate' English: it also embraces 'moral' correctness alluded to in the 'standards' argument (see Section 2.3.1. above) Right wing politicians have regularly made this intellectual link, as they canvass for the return of grammar to all classrooms, illustrated most forcefully by an answer to a question on declining standards, by Norman Tebbit, the then Chair of the Conservative Party, on the Radio 4 *Today* programme in 1985:

'we've allowed so many standards to slip...teachers weren't bothering to teach kids to spell and to punctuate properly...if you allow standards to slip to the stage where good English is no better than bad English, where people turn up filthy...at school...all these things cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards then there's no imperative to stay out of crime.'

An illustration that these mindsets are not merely historical, but are still very much alive can be seen in a YouTube file featuring David Starkey, a right wing, semi-celebrity historian, following the civil riots in the summer of 2011, making assertions on the BBC 2 *Newsnight* programme that the breakdown of social order had to do with the adoption of 'black patois' overturning Standard English (BBC TV 12.8.11.).

Philip Pullman (2005), the author of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, ridiculed these attitudes in an article in *The Guardian* by suggesting that:

Needless to say, this goes against common sense. That particular quality of mind, the exclusive property of those on the political right, enables its possessors to know without the trouble of thinking that, of course, teaching children about syntax and parts of speech will result in better writing, as well as making them politer, more patriotic and less likely to become pregnant.

It is possible to see that a number of factors were at play in the evolution of grammar from the end of the First World War, until the end of the Second World War. Hudson and Walmsley (2005;598) refer to this period as a:

complex web of relations between linguistic practice, public perceptions of grammar, institutional shifts and political decisions (determining) the place of grammar teaching in England (ibid).

They also demonstrate, by way of contrast, the energetic activity about English grammar at university level throughout Europe (ibid), whilst nothing comparable was taking place in England and Wales.

2.9.2. Factors working against grammar

With no empirical certainty about whether teaching grammar aided writing attainment, scepticism grew about the claim that grammar teaching at least contributed to better behaviour. The increasing popularity of English literature, under the powerful sway of charismatic teachers such as Frank Leavis

(Eagleton, 1985:32; Ball, Kenny and Gardiner, 1990) was vying with the former moribund grammar curriculum for space in the English timetable.

Grammar had also been taught very badly, by teachers, many of whom were mystified by its complexities:

From the teachers' point of view, there was increasing uncertainty as to the purpose and use of grammar, and even as to its very nature. There can also be little doubt that parsing and analysis ...baffled not just the pupils but many of the teachers too (Hudson and Walmsley, 2005:598).

Verification of poor teaching appeared in an article from the *Use of English* in 1954, by a 'Senior English Master' in a grammar school:

Much teaching of English Grammar (capital letters in original) is done half-heartedly because the teacher is not really certain what purpose it serves. It may give the pupil some general verbal training, or, in a more limited and practical way, it may help the French master with his teaching. But what is its value, as an integral part of the English course? More often than not the answer is 'None' (Ritchie, 1954:158).

2.10. The course of grammar after the Second World War

The years following the Second World War proved to be significant in the history of grammar teaching, not just in England, but also in the USA and Australia (Locke, 2010). In England it was a time of massive social and educational change. The renewed grammar schools continued to teach language in the stolid ways of the past half century, but the secondary modern schools, which replaced the former elementary schools, and in which three quarters of the population were educated, required a programme more suitable for those who were less fluent and less confident in their language use. The first comprehensive school appeared in the 1950s, making further demands for change to the English curriculum. Whilst the 'Cambridge School' of literary studies flourished in grammar schools, a new movement, relating the teaching of English in schools closer to the lives and language of the children in the new educational settings, began to exercise greater influence. This movement was particularly strong in London, and led to programmes that avoided or rejected grammar study altogether (Goodson & Medway, 1990:4). Notable figures in this development were Harold Rosen, James Britton, Nancy Martin and Douglas Barnes, who believed that encouraging and publishing the 'authentic voice' of the child writer was the main purpose of English lessons (Goodson & Medway

1990:15), in line with the recommendations of Donald Graves (1969 & 1983). Davies (1996:19) also mentions the influence in this pro-literature/anti-grammar movement of David Holbrook and John Dixon, who shared ‘a passionate and confident belief that English teaching is essentially concerned with literature.’ Nevertheless, many schools still strictly adhered to the belief that some sort of language tuition ought to continue. Frank Whitehead, a fierce commentator on the state of English in those times, began an article in the *Use of English* magazine, published in the summer of 1952:

In many secondary schools it is traditionally felt that no pupil is equipped for mastering the use of his (sic) own language until he has been given a text-book containing a generous collection of what are known as ‘English Exercises’ (Whitehead, 1952:215).

He proceeds, mockingly, to point out how poorly such provision contributes to any sort of linguistic development, and touches on an issue just as relevant today: ‘the confusion between teaching and testing’! (Whitehead, 1952:216). Yet, a similar article from another edition of the same journal, written by a ‘Senior English Master’, published in 1954, outlines the English programme of a London secondary modern school ‘without once including the word ‘grammar’ (Harvey, 1954:149).

2.10.1. The 1950s and 1960s

The 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the rejection of an older order throughout society in the United Kingdom. A new spirit of optimism and possibility characterised this period, and the further the nation moved from the war, the greater was the sense of democracy and inclusion, embodied in the policies of the post-war Labour government. Huge social changes were evident in the establishment of great post-war institutions, such as the National Health Service, designed to take care of the nation’s medical well-being (Kynaston, 2007; Sissons & French (eds), 1963). Similarly, the Butler Act of 1944 signalled new policies for schooling. Returning soldiers from the war, and their families who had existed on rations, facing dangers as keenly as their men folk, wanted a different society from the harshly separated one that had prevailed before 1939. There was less deference, and increasing economic resources resulted in demands by many formerly disadvantaged groups to enjoy their share of property, technology and educational opportunity (Sandbrook, 2005).

Keith (1990:83) reminds us that although the 1960s ‘are sometimes referred to as the first grammarless generation’, there was, nevertheless, action research taking place ‘behind the main teaching scene’. Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), for instance, was influencing teachers by suggesting language should be considered in a variety of different social settings, such as advertising and dialectical forms. A government publication, *Language: some suggestions for teachers* (DfE, 1954), cast a different sort of light on the grammar debate, by recognising that ‘even the most trifling problems of language study in the classroom raise questions that are ultimately issues of philosophy and psychology’; a greatly changed attitude from previous documents from that source. Also significant in that period was the publication of Quirk’s *The Use of English* (1962), furthering a ‘descriptive’ approach to language, challenging the former ‘prescriptive’ assumptions of most school teachers.

2.11. The continued struggle around grammar

Hudson and Walmsley (2005) make a bold claim in their paper *The English Patient*, that ‘In the first half of the twentieth century, English grammar disappeared from the curriculum of most schools in England’. Andrews (2005:72) is more guarded in the following assessment:

The first problem...is the fundamental premise, that English schools stopped teaching grammar in the 1960s is flawed. It is true that there was a renewed emphasis on creativity and the personal voice in writing set by primary and secondary schools; but even a rudimentary survey of the textbooks published in the 60s and through to the 90s would indicate that although the initial stimuli and contexts for writing may have changed, the concern for accuracy, clear expression and a degree of knowledge about language persisted.

As a grammar school boy in the 1960s, I can remember vividly spending many hours in English lessons working through the sort of common parsing exercise Carter cites below (1990:104):

Leaving childhood behind, I soon lost this desire to possess a goldfish. It is difficult to persuade oneself that a goldfish is happy and as soon as we have begun to doubt that some poor creature enjoys living with us we can take no more pleasure in its company.

Using a new line to each, select one example from the above passage of each of the following:

- (i) *an infinitive used as the direct object of a verb*

- (ii) *an infinitive used in apposition to a pronoun*
- (iii) *a gerund*
- (iv) *a present participle*
- (v) *a past participle*
- (vi) *an adjective used predicatively (i.e. as a complement)*
- (vii) *a possessive adjective*
- (viii) *a demonstrative adjective*
- (ix) *a reflexive pronoun*
- (x) *an adverb of time*
- (xi) *an adverb of degree*
- (xii) *a preposition*
- (xiii) *a subordinating conjunction*

As a local authority adviser, concerned with literacy in the 1980s and 1990s, in three separate counties, I can confirm that many primary schools and some secondary schools were still providing weekly doses of these decontextualised drills, justified as capable of improving a broad range of language skills, until the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1997.

An authentic sense of the indecision and vacillation that surrounded the issue of grammar in schools can be observed in a book first published by the Assistant Masters Association, predominantly the professional body of male teachers in grammar schools, in 1952 and revised in 1973. George Watkins, author of the chapter on ‘Language teaching’, (1973:43) confesses, ‘You see, we were afraid of this chapter.’ The reason’, he claims, is that ‘hardly any two teachers of English agree with one another about what, if anything should constitute language teaching in secondary schools.’ An excellent summary of attitudes in that period can be seen in the following:

We knew that experts in linguistics, experts in curriculum-development, admissions tutors in higher education, employers, and the general public

all disagree with one another and with the teachers in schools about the same thing (ibid).

Teachers have 'become so bothered with conflicting advice, and so deprived of proper professional guidance', he claimed, that they are now so 'bewildered' and mistrustful of the contrary opinions they regularly receive, they have lost their professional confidence'. The years between 1955 to the early 1980s were not an easy time for teachers of English, who felt under constant pressure to teach some aspects of language, because at the simplest level it would have provided a helpful metalanguage to assist teacher/writer interaction. Yet, the experience of what actually resulted in English classrooms convinced many teachers that the existing supposed relationship between learning grammar, in its traditional prescriptive format, and the improvement of writing skills was fallacious.

2.11.1. Other considerations in the mid-part of the 20th century

Other issues touching on this conflict were also witnessed in an ontological struggle in English, already referred to in an earlier period, revived in the 1950s and 1960s which have to do with 'beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the best way to transmit or reproduce the knowledge that is accepted as important within a subject, or more generally, within a society' Poulson (1998:14). So, a struggle developed between those who placed 'high value on exclusive cultural traditions, the maintenance of authority and the status quo, and those who value challenge, diversity and change' (ibid). The former group claim that knowledge is fixed and solid within demarcated subject boundaries, whilst their antagonists are more willing to embrace change and the possibility of difference in alternative curriculum structures. This struggle particularly touches on the teaching of grammar in the English curriculum, although it was also evident in the teaching of literature, where it was not unknown for teachers to reassure their classes that they would inform them about what a specific text 'might mean'! It is not too startling to report that included amongst those who espoused the more constrained view of language knowledge were right-leaning politicians and press, whilst those who advocated a more liberal language learning regime frequently represented left-wing beliefs. Cameron, (1997:229) picking up a theme from George Orwell's memoirs, (Orwell:1968 / 1947:388)

claims that ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’ has long been the abiding philosophy of grammar teaching.’

2.12 Grammar at a time of changed curriculum management

Every so often, in English education, a ‘moral panic’ begins to grow like a large wave, which then seems to overwhelm all the current energies and practices taking place in schools. One of the main topics of these ‘panics’, namely the poor standards of English knowledge of pupils in schools, will regularly come to dominate public interest. They have reappeared forcefully over time. The Bullock Report (DES,1975:3) contains the following complaint, made in the 1920s:

Messrs Vickers Ltd reported “great difficulty in obtaining junior clerks who can speak and write English clearly and correctly, especially those aged from 15 to 16 years of age” (from the Newbolt Report 1921).

Messrs Lever Bros Ltd said, “it is a great surprise to us to find that our young employees are so hopelessly deficient in their command of English.”

Similar comments were received from Boots Pure Drug Company. Similar worries once again came to a head in the 1960s. Poulson (1998:31) records:

the debate about English re-emerged from the late 1960s onwards, and began to attract more and more attention from the late 1970s onwards. It was to become one of the most strongly contested issues in the imposition of a centralised national curriculum.

A study conducted by Start and Wells (1972) for the National Foundation for Educational Research seemed to suggest that reading standards of more deprived pupils were significantly below those of their more affluent peers. The findings of this study, whilst not remarkable in themselves, ignited a discussion on more general literacy matters, because:

there was a feeling that despite the investment in education since 1945, standards of literacy did not appear to have improved. The then Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Thatcher, set up a committee of inquiry chaired by Sir Alan Bullock to investigate standards of literacy and the teaching of English (Poulson, 1998:31).

2.14 A return to the struggle for control of grammar

The Bullock Report, as the findings of this committee are better known, was a most impressive document in the scale of its width and the extent of matters

with which it concerned itself, but it was, ultimately, a failure, to many different and opposing interest groups. (When I discussed the Report with Sir Alan Bullock at St Catherine's College Oxford in the late 1990s, he suggested that it made a 'better doorstop than contributor to national policy!') The right wing press condemned it as a limp apologia for the 'liberal' (a word used as a criticism) educationalists, whilst the more open-minded members of the teaching fraternity thought it too heavy and unworkable, lacking a direct condemnation about the worthlessness of the teaching of grammar. The strength of the venom engendered about the Report can be seen in the following analysis by John Marenbon, a right-wing academic commentator:

Even by the title of its report, "A Language for Life", Sir Alan Bullock's Committee indicated how fully it had absorbed the new orthodoxy. A brief chapter (remarkable for its confusion, vagueness and ignorant mishandling of the philosophical it employs) offers a "theoretical foundation" for the report, which is summarised in its concluding sentence: "to exploit the process of discovery through language in all its uses is the surest means of enabling a child to master his (sic) mother tongue" (1994:17).

Marland (1977:3), on the other hand, regarded the report in quite another light:

The central recommendation of the Bullock Report is a tough one, difficult to approach, complex to work out and extremely taxing to implement. Yet, despite its daunting challenge, comprehensive schools up and down the country have embarked upon an attempt to see what is in it for them.

These two attitudes give some sense of the divisions between different factions of the 'teaching of English' struggle.

The Report did much to popularise a concept that came to be known as 'language across the curriculum', whereby subject areas of the curriculum were expected to take responsibility for the more focused literacy skills associated with that particular area of learning. But, the idea failed to make an impression in many schools, despite the active interest of educationalists, such as Marland (*ibid*).

The Bullock committee report actually had little to say about the teaching of grammar. Margaret Thatcher, who convened it, was keen to see a return to more formal and directed teaching of grammar. The committee's remit allowed it

a free rein to sum up what was then current practice and consider a possible future:

To consider in relation to schools:

- a) *all aspects of teaching the use of English, including reading, writing and speech;*
 - b) *how present practice might be improved and the role that initial and in-service training might play;*
 - c) *to what extent arrangements for monitoring the general level of attainment in these skills can be introduced or improved;*
- and make recommendations.*

A remarkable feature of this remit is its gentleness and generality. Directives for subsequent committees and working parties were to be much more instructional, direct and transparent.

2.14.1. The 1970s and the movement to centralise grammar

This period in the early 1970s was an important watershed in a number of educational contexts. The general policy of government in the post-war years had been ‘hands off’. Local Education Authorities had direct contact with schools and often guided policy and curriculum content, whilst central government stood at a distance – the absolute reverse of the situation today. The only subject that schools had to teach by law was Religious Education. Every other area of a school’s programme had evolved over time and schools tended to interpret their understanding of each subject through subject associations, external examinations and a small, but influential, widely respected Inspectorate. Prime Minister James Callaghan’s Ruskin Speech in October 1976, criticising the ‘secret garden’ of the English schools’ curriculum was still some five years away. Whilst government was not seeking to change the whole system, there were serious concerns about intervening more closely in the teaching of language, because it is evident that many at that time shared the despair of Marenbon, who claimed that ‘Grammatical and literary failings among young people are evidence that, in most schools today, English is badly taught, and that it used to be taught better’ (Marenbonn, 1994:16).

The frustration of the right was not appeased by the committee’s conclusions on grammar teaching:

We do not conclude...that a child should not be taught how to improve his (sic) use of language; quite the contrary. It has not been established by research that systematic attention to skill and technique has no beneficial effect on the handling of language. What had been shown is that the teaching of traditional grammar does not appear to improve performance in writing (DES 1975:1971).

2.14.2. Increasing pressure for reinstating a grammar curriculum

Bullock did not break the deadlock, and, after an initial flurry of interest, the report declined in influence and impact. A vacuum remained, which Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) attempted to fill with the first of a series of booklets, *Curriculum Matters 1- English from 5 to 16* (DES, 1984). Davies (1996:33) suggests this document 'marks the first tentative shot in the direction of a National Curriculum for English'. And he goes on, 'it has proved to be far more influential than the rather more impressive' Bullock Report' (*ibid*). Their pamphlet probed a number of straightforward issues to do with the teaching of English, including a short, almost unobtrusive section on the possible reintroduction of the teaching of grammar, including the following, after bemoaning 'that many pupils are taught nothing at all about how language works as a system' :

We suggest that if some attention is given to the examination and discussion of the structure of the language pupils speak, write, read and listen to for real purposes, their awareness of its possibilities and pitfalls can be sharpened (DES, 1984:14).

The outrage of English teachers that followed this innocuous sentence was enormous. Indeed, so great was the size of the response, that HMI felt obliged to issue a follow-up publication (the only subject-related pamphlet to receive this treatment): *English from 5 to 16: The Responses to Curriculum Matters 1* (DES, 1986), which they stated had been the result of 'a great deal of interest both within and outside the teaching profession (DES, 1986:1). They then report that 'the objectives, however, evoked widespread disfavour, especially from the profession, and those which related to the fourth aim ("knowledge about language") (DES, 1986:3). This sort of curriculum intrusion, as many teachers interpreted these publications, was unprecedented and very unwelcome.

2.14.3 – Kingman and LINC

However, the then Secretary of State for Education, Sir Keith Joseph, was determined to follow up this issue by establishing a further committee in 1987,

chaired by Sir John Kingman, exclusively to concentrate on considering the teaching of language. Kingman was a mathematician, suggesting that the government was not prepared to appoint someone with an English teaching/research background, and they wanted this matter conducted by a ‘safe pair of hands’. The committee included a few non-professionals, presumably to represent a ‘common sense’ attitude. The conclusions of this committee, however, were no more approving of a return to traditional grammar teaching than its predecessors. It recognised (DES 1988:12) that ‘widely divergent views were held on the value of the formal elements of knowledge of language’. It went on to explain that ‘old fashioned formal teaching of grammar, at its best, had a ‘negligible’ effect on the development of writing ability, yet it balanced those statements with a concern about children receiving no language teaching at all. It also concentrated more thoroughly on a concept known as ‘knowledge about language’, which, as Myhill (2005:78) states, ‘implies a more liberal, learner-centred perspective than that suggested by the neo-conservative associations of the word “grammar”’.

Clark describes a major ‘educational, political, cultural, social and historic’ shift which took place about that time (Clark, 2010b:42), where the ‘pedagogic field’ had sway and control of the educational agenda, as long as the ‘official field’ allowed it to. When the ‘official field’ sought to curtail the autonomy of the ‘pedagogic’, conflict takes place – as happened at the return to power of a Conservative government in 1985. She claims the ‘role of government’ turned from being ‘meditational and supervisory’ to ‘administration’. Central government took away power from the local education authorities and bestowed it on itself. As part of this same development, steps were being taken to introduce a National Curriculum for the first time in education in England – and English would be the first subject to be directed about its content (Clark, 2010b:43). Protherough and King (1995:9) agreeing with this change of atmosphere, claimed that Sir Keith Joseph ‘started to use the powers vested in him as Secretary of State to curtail discussion with processional groups’ and to ‘formulate policy directly through legislation’. They believed that this ‘deliberate redefinition of the traditional balance between autonomy, power and accountability in education’ was taking place across the English speaking world (1995:10).

This final tipping point, however, did not materialise before one more attempt was taken to encourage the teaching fraternity to formulate its own language-focused area of teacher development (Lodge & Evans, 1995:101). In 1989, the government commissioned a national project, ‘Language in the National Curriculum’ (LINC), to ‘produce materials and to conduct activities to support implementation of English in the National Curriculum in England and Wales,’ in the light of views about language expressed in a series of recent critical reports (Carter, 1990:2). There was a need for a training regime to be established for teachers who – coming from schools where no grammar was taught for over two decades – knew little or no grammar. The content of this training was placed in the hands of academic linguists (Poulson, 1998:49; Hudson & Walmsley, 2005:609). It was such an uncharacteristic move for the government to make they must have been convinced establishing a focused research project of this nature could only lead to the inevitable outcome of recommending a grammar-based curriculum for schools. But, as Hudson and Walmsley (*ibid*) note, much new linguistic activity had taken place in English universities from the early 1960s, such that ministers and researchers were no longer capable of understanding the same meanings of the word ‘grammar’ (Poulson: 1998:49). Indeed, professional linguists were discussing their findings about ‘grammars’; a plural word that the Department of Education could not tolerate. The underpinning LINC theories, that ‘language is a social phenomenon...dynamic, and changes over time...according to context’ (Poulson, *ibid*) was not in accord with education ministers’ beliefs and requirements, and the training materials the project had produced were proscribed and never officially published.

2.15. Grammar and the National Curriculum

In the meantime, the decision to introduce a National Curriculum had been taken, commencing with the drafting of Orders directing the teaching of English. Kenneth Baker, the Secretary of State, established a committee, chaired by Professor Brian Cox, thought to be in sympathy with the government’s viewpoint. But Cox’s position had been changing, and he chaired his committee with a more open-minded stance than had been anticipated. He went so far as to describe what he considered an unhelpful position taken up by the antagonists disputing in the grammar debate:

An unfortunate feature of much discussion of English teaching is the false and unhelpful polarization of views...people set in opposition to each other's individual or social aims or utilitarian and imaginative aims, or language and literature...the best practice reflects a consensus rather than extreme positions. It is important that this is not seen as some timid compromise but rather an attempt to show the relations between these views within a larger framework (DES, 1988:2).

The Cox Report, outlining the shape of the future National Curriculum in English, was received with relief by most of the teaching profession, who felt that if they had to accept an externally devised curriculum, the version they were being offered was as good as any might be. Cox suggested the very diverse subject of English was structured on five 'views': cultural heritage, personal growth, adult needs, cross-curricular and cultural analysis. Some study of language was expected to be included in all five (*ibid*).

The right-leaning press, unhappy with Cox's conclusions, poured scorn on the report (Cox, 1991:7; Davies, 1995:39). Conservative politicians and 'think tanks', espousing the 'return to basics' and 'improving standards' points of view, also expressed their disapproval. Davies (*ibid*) claims that their major intent was to introduce a 'market-driven, rather than a teacher-driven, school system' (p39), leading to eventual total parental choice. Particularly active in this discourse was the Centre for Policy Studies, led by the Deputy Director, Sheila Lawlor, (the wife of John Marenbon, *(op cit)*, who regularly appeared on the radio and in articles in the newspapers, claiming that Cox's recommendations – like those of Kingman - were 'too complex and too clever by half' (Davies, 1995:36). The real attack was focused on the apparent inability of the Cox committee to subscribe to an English curriculum led by a, discredited, prescriptivist model of grammar. They believed the Cox recommendations to be over-complicated, and quickly lobbied for the findings to be replaced by a 'common sense' simplistic language programme.

Discussion of grammar and its part in the English curriculum at the time of the introduction of a National Curriculum was stalled and stunted because it seemed to most educators in schools and at the Department for Education that there was only one model of grammar: the traditional grammar of rules and labels. Clark described this obstacle to further realistic development by stating:

The teaching favoured by government ministers was based upon a prescriptive, Latinate grammar...taught in schools until the 1960s. By the 1980s that grammar had long been linguistically discredited....it was not until 1957, with publications such as Chomsky's "Syntactic Structures", and the 1980s, with the publication of Halliday's "An Introduction to Functional Grammar" that alternatives became available. (Clark 2010a:44).

Despite the considerable development of research taking place in linguistics departments of universities, little of this work touched on what was taking place in mainstream education. So, when reference was made to the term 'grammar', virtually everybody outside the highly specialist realm of linguistics would be acquainted with only one version. Cajkler (2010) quotes from the Bullock Report that a 'substantial number of teachers considered that the express teaching of prescriptive language forms had been discredited, but that nothing had been put in its place' (DES, 1975: 172). This situation enabled the right wing press to instantly make a connection with its readership, who would all share the same sense of the word: implying for most, rules, parsing, labelling and correctness. Poulson (1998:48) is confidently able to claim that 'Grammar and standard English (not 'Standard English', which Davies (1995:44) depicts as a different idea) became the focus of press comment as soon as the report was published'.

2.15.1. Grammar finally a requirement in the curriculum

Baker reluctantly accepted its recommendations, and published the *National Curriculum Orders* for English, making its teaching a legal requirement. It was not long before right wing political voices again questioned whether the literacy standards across the country were being best served by the new legislation. As Cox, who was caught up in these politics for nearly a decade, said himself: 'Mr Baker very much disliked the report' (Cox, 1991:11) and went on:

He wanted a short Report, with an emphasis on grammar, spelling and punctuation, which would have been easy for parents to read.

Cox developed a certainty, from his dealings in two committees, that, 'Conservative politicians were over-confident that they knew the right policies', and he saw that, 'to a large extent they were contemptuous towards the professional teacher' (Cox, 1991:13). It was not long before the first revision of the Orders was being contemplated. Davies (1995:43) reflects some of the incredulity of the English teaching force, when a document called *National*

Curriculum English: The Case for Revising the Order was published by the Government in July 1992, ‘not two years’ (his emphasis) ‘after English teachers started to teach’ the original version. By June 1993, other revisions had undermined the ‘Cox consensus’ (Poulson, 1998:45), and teachers, far from being content with the curriculum they now had to address, were boycotting the statutory tests. Dean (2003:28), personally involved in discussions with government at that time, reports that ‘the introduction of the National Curriculum in English in no manner concluded or resolved the problems of teaching grammar’, in fact, ‘it signalled the beginning of the most contentious period in the differences between the Department of Education ...and practising teachers’.

2.15.2 – Developments at the turn of the 21st century

During the early part of the 1990s the arguments and revisions continued. Poulson (1998:61) claims that the issues were less to do with the relative importance of language and literature, and the purpose of English in the curriculum, but ‘rather about the nature of knowledge and the most appropriate ways of teaching and assessing English’. This dispute illustrated the ‘Cartesian duality’, originally discussed earlier. Some right-wing politicians and political consultants really believed that ‘there is a fixed body of knowledge to be learned which remains relatively unchanged from one generation to another’ with particular application to grammar knowledge (Poulson, 1998:61). These beliefs about the nature of the subject could not have been further from the espousals of the LINC approach fifteen years earlier. Influential extra-governmental bodies, including the Centre for Policy Studies, were determined to establish English as a ‘fixed and narrow body of literary texts, spoken standard English, defined as correct English; and a set of ‘prescriptive grammatical rules’ (1998:62).

*The intention was that these things would be assessed by traditional examinations to which there were right and wrong answers. In such developments can be glimpsed the desire for a fixed and secure world in which everyone knew his or her place; in which there is clearly established authority and fixed rules, and on which language and its use reflect a prescribed, authoritarian social order (*ibid*).*

Once again, the rationale for studying grammar is not for linguistic enhancement per se, but rather to support the *status quo*, maintain differential

social relationships and resist change. This was an anachronistic goal to seek in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Davies, lamenting the passing of Cox's original recommendations through continual revisions of the English orders during the 1990s, suggests that all worthwhile vision had disappeared from the English curriculum, seeing it as a husk of its former self: 'a set of prescriptions'(1996:53):

In a climate of opinion about English teaching that has been increasingly dictated by the combined convictions of Rhodes Boyson, Sheila Lawlor, John Marenbon, Prince Charles, David Pascall, John Major, the Daily Mail and the Daily Express, there is clearly no room for an approach to language learning which allows exploration of, and reflection upon, questions of right and wrong in language use, or which is at all respectful of the learner's own knowledge and needs (ibid).

2.15.3. Grammar in the Literacy Strategy

Not long before they lost power in the 1997 election, Conservative ministers were planning yet another initiative to pin down the English literacy curriculum in a form that reflected their ideology. This time, however, they were aiming firmly at primary education as their starting point. When David Blunkett was appointed Secretary of State for Education he inherited a precursor of the National Literacy Strategy, already trialled in a number of local authorities. The incoming Labour ministers and their advisers were quick to translate this new programme into a national requirement; never quite given the legal authority many believed that it possessed, but expected to be implemented in all primary schools, policed by the Ofsted inspectorate. It recommended an hourly lesson of literacy each day that became standard practice across the whole country. Grammar and language study were central tenets of its content. Cajkler, an academic linguist, (2004:6) claimed that virtually every page of the grammar glossary published to support a document entitled *Grammar for Writing* (DfE 2000) contained linguistic errors, and 'that advice was often erratic, vague or misleading' (2004:7). Teachers who knew little about grammar were not assisted by that publication:

In sum, the materials often opt for untypical, incorrect or just silly examples...such faults are too numerous to list... the most important participants in teaching and learning (pupils, teachers, trainees, teaching assistants) have been left with a mixed bag of inconsistent imprecise materials (Cajkler, 2010:11).

Cajkler classified fewer than half the documents he examined as ‘clear and reliable (2004:13).’ They were ‘a patchwork of the good, the wrong and the imprecise’!

Others, like Cajkler (2010), Clark (2012a) and Wyse (2001:411) despaired because the new linguistically-related requirements were so poorly supported by academic research and genuine scholarship. The evidence that the study of grammar could improve literacy skills, especially written skills, had still to be produced.

In a follow-up study of the materials published by government to underpin the most recent curriculum requirements however, Bell (2016: 145) found the latest version of the Glossary (DfE, 2013) to be more accurate and teacher-friendly. The ‘key-terms’ of the Programmes of Study are defined, and it is intended as an ‘aid to teachers’, not a ‘body of knowledge to be learned by pupils’ (DfE, 2013: 70). ‘There is also recognition ‘that there are different schools of thought on grammar’, and that learning grammatical terms can be demanding.

Whilst some teachers argued that the Literacy Strategy introduced a welcome order and greater control in planning terms, many, if not more, critics were shocked by the prescriptive and centralising regime that it signified. Myhill and Jones (2011: 8), in a paper ‘Policing Grammar, note that:

Tony Blair’s establishment of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit, under the aegis of Michel Barber, signalled the dawn of a period of highly-centralised policy-making for literacy and more control both of curriculum content and teaching methods than at any time in history.

2.16. New grammars

New ways of studying grammar were also being introduced and researched in different parts of the world. Halliday’s ‘functional grammar’ was seen to be appropriate for teaching language understanding in schools in Australia (Christie, 2010), for instance, whilst sentence-combining had some measure of success and students were characterised as ‘enjoying it’ in the USA (Hancock & Kolln, 2010:32):

Nevertheless, other research, undertaken into the explicit teaching of grammar,.where it has been integrated into mainstream English activities, such as that of Myhill (2005) and Andrews(2005), amongst

others, has proved such teaching to be more successful (Clark, 2010a: 190).

Yet few initiatives were making any sort of positive impact on literacy education in England. The powers responsible for introducing these studies and producing the resources that supported them were still locked into notions of a grammar that had long been rejected and were mostly known not to engage the pupils who were subjected to those programmes. Although Hudson and Walmsley (2005) note that a gradual shifting of ground was becoming evident in the Government resource publications since the introduction of the National Curriculum, and through the Literacy Strategy implementation:

prescription is dead – non-standard varieties are tolerated, as are informal registers; variety is accepted, but different varieties are suited to different occasions so the focus is now on the matching of variety to context (2005:615).

2.16.1. A changing grammar discourse

Developments of a more enterprising kind, however, were being undertaken and causing teachers and others concerned with language education to take notice. This positive approach towards the study of grammar had been discernible in the first two decades of the 21st century. Even English teacher organisations, such as the National Association of Teachers of English (NATE), once strongly opposed to the teaching of grammar, published and endorsed resources designed to assist teachers anticipating teaching grammar in their lessons for the first time (Baine & Baine, 1996; Baine & Baine, 2003). The most ambitious research in this changing climate has been conducted by Myhill *et al*, (2012a) at the University of Exeter in the period 2008-2011, when a randomised control trial of some 30 schools and 700 students in Years 8 and 9 was designed, with the aim of investigating whether explicit teaching of grammar in the context of writing impacts upon the quality of pupils' writing. The results of this research were overwhelmingly positive and appeared to endorse the theory, regularly expressed in the past, that if focused areas of grammar knowledge are taught in a sound and real-life context, it can provide new dimensions for pupil writing. Christie reports from Australia that 'grammar is back on the agenda' (2010:66), 'some (schools) incorporating more functional grammar elements than others'. A 'Framing Paper' was published in Australia in 2008, causing a period of public discussion based on the premise of the

requirement of ‘traditional word- and sentence-level grammar, text-level grammar that teaches text types and the functional relations between these levels’ (National Curriculum Board – quoted in Christie (2010: 67). There was an evident optimism in some quarters, when the Literacy Strategy ran out of steam at the end of the Labour period of government, in 2010. The sense of a new horizon was welcomed by Clark:

Clearly, then, a revolution is taking place or is about to take place at both policy and subject level about the teaching of grammar and English more generally, across both primary and secondary levels of education. It seems that there is an end in sight to over 20 years of prescriptive government intervention, a willingness to bring the teaching profession in from the cold and even to embrace theoretical conceptualisation. What place, then, should the teaching of grammar have in such a re-worked curriculum?

2.17. Compulsory grammar

In 2012, the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove (Gove 2012), disregarding professional and academic advice, broke the deadlock in which the subject had been held for so long by imposing a test of grammar on all 11 year old pupils at the conclusion of their primary schooling. From the statements he made, it was clear that the model of grammar he had in mind was generally known by modern linguists as rules-based ‘prescriptive’. For the very first time the primary teaching force in England was expected to teach a particular form of grammar in a particular manner: delighting the political right and causing disappointment for political rivals of the left. Similar reintroductions of the teaching of grammar are taking place in some other Anglophone countries, but they are not reaching back in time to a long-condemned model of language in the way that Gove has done, but are adopting more modern alternative practices, such as ‘systemic functional grammar’ and its association with ‘genre knowledge’ (Christie, 2010; French, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

This study was begun at a time shortly after Gove’s diktat was announced. The research was originally intended to discover what teachers’ beliefs were about the nature of grammar and what they might need to enable them to teach grammar successfully in the context of writing. Yet, this extra unsolicited dimension of grammar teaching imposed on the primary workforce added a different sort of perspective on a subject about which these practitioners were ill-prepared.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss current research into discovering how we learn what we learn, and the occurrences that have a bearing on those learning activities to do with a construct known as ‘personal epistemology’. What and how teachers learn, and knowing the stages through which they pass in that process, is central to my research. I then report on my critical reviews of two areas of teacher knowledge; the ‘knowledge’ that enables teachers to become successful as practitioners in their classrooms, and ‘teacher subject knowledge’, pertaining to the specific teaching of grammar. Finally, I review studies which explore our understanding of metalinguistic knowledge and investigate the language about language, a sub-set of which is knowledge of grammar. This area has to do with what teachers need to know to teach grammar in the context of writing.

3.2. - Personal Epistemology

3.2.1. Defining ‘personal epistemology’

Epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is a relatively new area of study in modern psychology (Hofer, 2001:354). Its derivation is the Greek term ‘episteme’ (i.e. knowledge) and logos (i.e. explanation). The study of epistemology investigates ‘the relationship between learning and the beliefs that students hold about the nature of knowledge and the process of its acquisition’ (Elliott and Chan, 1998, on-line). These sets of beliefs are referred to as ‘epistemological beliefs’. Muis, Bendixen and Haerle (2006:6) state that ‘an examination of personal epistemology’, includes ‘exploration of the structure of knowledge, certainty of knowledge, sources of knowledge, justifications for knowing and developmental aspects of knowledge acquisition’.

Urman and Roth (2010:8) report that personal epistemologies are usually ‘unexamined, tacit assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired’. Most non-philosophers are unlikely ever to have consciously considered their assumptions about knowledge, whilst most people are unaware that they even have a personal epistemology, much less ‘whether their assumptions about knowledge are logical or useful for the reality of their

'worlds'. Yet, these unexamined assumptions, they claim, have a significant influence over the expectations of students, and instructors.

Hofer (2001:4) defined personal epistemology as 'subjective theories, which encompass four identifiable, interrelated dimensions that develop in reasonable, predictable directions'. The first two dimensions concern the nature of knowledge in terms of: the certainty of knowledge (i.e. the stability of knowledge and the strength of the supporting evidence) and the simplicity of knowledge (i.e. the relative connectedness of knowledge). Feucht (2010, 58) develops 'the third and fourth dimensions' describing the process of knowing and the justification of knowledge (i.e. the procedures to evaluate and warrant knowledge claims) and the source of knowledge (i.e. where knowledge resides; internally and/or externally'). Muis, Bendixen and Haerle (2006:4) assert the 'two most prominent concepts are knowledge and justification', captured in the following straightforward questions: 'What does it mean for a person to know something? What does it mean for a proposition to be justified?'

Children enter formal education with a variety of differing viewpoints (Perry 1970 & Baxter Magolda, 1992). Students' outlook on learning and the nature of truth in respect to what they have learned has been shown to have an influence on ultimate academic success (Hofer, 2000). Research in this area is important, to discover in what ways and with what beliefs about learning we come to and manage learning. Hofer (2000:7) states that: in the formal education context, where individuals are systematically confronted with the need to acquire new knowledge, 'the way in which they perceive and embark on the process of knowing is,...influenced by their beliefs about knowledge, knowing, and learning'. So, personal epistemology is the study of how individuals 'develop a conception of knowledge and knowledge acquisition', and how that conception leads to an understanding of their worlds.

Students regularly encounter 'new information, and may approach the learning process quite differently depending on whether they view knowledge as a set of accumulated facts or an integrated set of constructs' (Hofer, 2002:3). What also affects the learning process, she continues, is whether students see themselves as 'passive receptors or active constructors of knowledge' in their own learning contexts.

3.2.2. Origins of personal epistemologies and its earliest findings

Perry's research, at Harvard in the 1950s (Perry, 1970/98) sought to 'investigate why students responded in different ways to the plurality of the college experience', and he expected to find personality differences as the cause (Hofer, 2002:5). In fact, he discovered that the young male adult subjects of his research followed a seemingly similar trajectory from what he termed a 'dualist' position on a learning continuum, to one of 'relativism'. That is, his participants moved intellectually from a very accepting, non-challenging attitude in respect to their learning activities to a more critical and sceptical mindset, through four discernible stages: 'dualism', 'multiplicity', 'contextual relativism' and 'commitment to relativism'.

The stage he labelled '*dualism*' describes the belief that 'knowledge and truth are absolute' (Feucht & Bendixen, 2010:6). Individuals at this stage have a polarized black and white view of the world. Knowledge is regarded as right or wrong; clear cut. Those who transmit this knowledge are regarded as 'omniscient sources of knowledge...empowered to administer and communicate knowledge to the learner' (Feucht & Bendixen, 2012:6). They describe the '*multiplicity*' stage as the belief that individuals can have differing knowledge claims, stating that 'Competing knowledge claims are acceptable'. At this point along the spectrum, the nature of knowledge can be regarded as uncertain and absolute truth might be doubted. The third stage, *Relativism*, describes individuals who 'believe that valid knowledge claims can only be made in relation to their context, such as a certain domain or era (e.g history versus science)' (Feucht & Bendixen, 2012:6). By using a specific context as a frame of reference, some competing knowledge claims are believed to be better than others. At the fourth stage, *commitment in relativism*, are those who are certain about the 'contextualised truth of a knowledge claim, but recognise that this is subject to an on-going process of doubt and refinement.' Schommer-Aikins (2002:104) describes Perry's findings about the process as follows:

students entering college tended to believe in simple, certain knowledge that is handed down by authority. By the time they reached their senior year, most students believed in tentative complex knowledge that is derived from reason and observation.

Perry (1970) traced a relationship between knowledge and learning making a difference ‘in the reasoning of college students’ (Bendixen, 2002:192).

3.2.3. Further developments from Perry’s template

Although Perry’s four categories became the template for further understanding of personal epistemological research, other studies identified subtly different taxonomies. King and Kitchener, (1994) developed a framework they called ‘the reflective judgement model’, which develops along seven stages, summarised in three development levels: *Pre-reflective thinking*, *Quasi-reflective thinking* and *Reflective thinking*. Moore broke down these categories into even smaller stages, resulting in nine indicators (2002:19-26). According to Moore (2001:23), since the publication of Perry’s model, considerable research exploring similar and related issues around the world has taken place. Perry’s original sample comprised only white, male, middle-class, elitist students; not an accurate reflection of society at large.

Hofer (2001) describes a growing interest in non-university populations, such as women employed in small industries in Asian countries. Research conducted by Belenky *et al* (1986) was interested in the experience of women as learners. They conducted interviews with women from diverse educational settings; their landmark study of ‘women’s ways of knowing’ providing the first portrait of the epistemological perspectives of women and the developmental course of these views, elaborated in a five position model that parallels and extends Perry’s model’. (Hofer, 2001: 5)

3.2.4. Problems of definition and core understanding

These early studies had no obvious consensus about the nature of the various research projects, nor to the terms applied to some of the models derived from the research. Hofer lists a number of related but different terms which have all characterised a range of research studies: ‘personal epistemology’, ‘epistemological beliefs or theories’, ‘ways of knowing’ or ‘epistemic cognition’ (Hofer, 2001:3).

Whilst Buehl & Alexander(2001:389) refer to ‘definitional problems that plague this area of research’, Feucht & Bendixen (2010:4) point to different conceptual frameworks that have emerged, each defining personal epistemology in slightly different ways. The first one they suggest is a ‘developmental progression

through different patterns of epistemological thinking' (e.g. Baxter Magolda, 1992; King and Kitchener, 1994; Kuhn et al, 2000). The second has to do with 'epistemological beliefs' (Schommer, 1990); whilst the third deals with 'epistemological theories' (Hofer and Pintrich, 1997) and, finally, Hammer and Elby (2002) are interested in 'epistemological resources'.

Brownlee, Berthelsen and Boulton-Lewis (2004:2) state, that the term, 'personal epistemological beliefs', is preferred to 'epistemological beliefs' as it indicates beliefs held by an individual rather than broader philosophical beliefs about knowing. Schommer-Aikens (2002:104) explains that many researchers, from the 1960s to the 1980s, were working with 'unique focuses of investigation' and were 'without knowledge of each other.'

3.2.5. Development of research into personal epistemologies

Urman and Roth (2010) assert that, subsequent to Perry's study (1970), three distinct groups have worked separately, motivated by different approaches to the concept of personal epistemologies. Qualitative researchers, continued Perry's interview methods, but with 'different groups of participants, different assumptions about epistemology, and different models on which to structure their results.' This group created a number of developmental models, with 'very different formulations of the number of stages and what was contained in each stage' (2010:11). A second group, comprising quantitative researchers 'began to challenge the idea of a general, unified epistemology'. Schommer (1990), for instance, was convinced that instead of one general perspective from which students looked at knowledge, there might be 'several independent components that developed at individual rates' (Urman and Roth, 2010:11), amongst which might be counted separate subject domains. Some theorists saw personal epistemology as 'sets of resources which could be activated in specific contexts'. In general, 'these environments were classroom situations where specific topics required modification of common assumptions about knowledge' (Urman and Roth, 2010:31). Yet, only when synthesis of these many approaches was conducted by Hofer and Pintrich in *Personal Epistemologies* (2002) was it possible to recognise that 'an epistemological belief system was born' (2002:8).

The common factor of these studies has been a recognition that learners move through a trajectory from a more ‘certain/absolutist’ stance in respect to knowledge, through stages towards a more ‘reflective/relativist’ position (Perry, 1970; Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002). The process, according to Kuhn, Cheney and Weinstock, (2000:309) begins where the ‘objective dimension dominates’, to the ‘exclusion of subjectivity’. Learners, whatever their background, at this point, trust what they are in the process of learning; unwilling to challenge or question. Subsequently, ‘the subjective dimension assumes an ascendant position and the objective is abandoned’. Finally, the two are coordinated. Kuhn *et al* postulate that ‘progression... tends to occur in a systematic order across different judgment domains (personal taste, aesthetic, value, and truth), with the orders the reverse of one another in the two major transitions that constitute this progression’.

According to Muis, Bendixen and Haerle (2006:4), researchers of personal epistemologies ‘concur that epistemic beliefs are related to cognition, motivation, learning and achievement’. Epistemic beliefs are theorized to affect ‘how students approach learning tasks (Schoenfeld, 1987), monitor comprehension (Schommer *et al* 1992), plan for solving problems and carry out those plans, and are theorized to directly and indirectly affect achievement (Schommer 1990’).

Nevertheless, changes of attitude have taken place during the last twenty years in the field known as ‘personal epistemologies’. Johnston, Woodside-Jiron and Day (2001:223) suggest ‘more recently’ that epistemology has been ‘seen less as a matter of stage-wise cognitive development’, but more a process of ‘complex socio-cognitive learning’ which has ‘implications for classroom instructional practices’.

3.2.6. The problems of researching personal epistemologies

Buehl & Alexander (2001:388), highlight difficulties of researching personal epistemologies. They make a comparison of the ‘beliefs about and justification of knowledge’ with an iceberg, where some nine tenths are ‘submerged from clear view’, making it difficult to assess their true depth and character’. Schommer-Aikins (2002:115) describes epistemological beliefs as ‘for the most part unconscious, if not tacit’. A further difficulty arises when trying to differentiate knowledge that has been informally accumulated by experiencing

normal life-related situations, from that acquired through formal study in educational institutions or through specific vocational agencies. This phenomenon is only to be expected as ‘most people do not regularly discuss epistemological questions, such as “What is knowledge?” within the classroom’, where much of our formal knowledge is transmitted / acquired / constructed. What it means to know or how knowledge is justified is rarely part of classroom discourse. (Buehl & Alexander, 2001:388)

Perry’s model (1970) and that of King and Kitchener (1994) overlapped as both were concerned with subjects in late adolescence, or early adulthood, described as ‘late-onset developmental models’. Kuhn and Weinstock however, established a project with younger subjects that defined personal epistemology as ‘epistemological thinking’, and proposed three general developmental levels: *Absolutism, Multiplism and Evaluativism* (Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002). Difficulties, nevertheless, have remained evident when trying to discover the personal epistemologies of younger children (diSessa, 1995:98; Bromme, Kienhues and Porsch, 2010, 165), as the most usual methodology employed in personal epistemological research has been the semi-structured interview, or alternatives, such as Schommer’s 63 question questionnaire. These devices are inappropriate for discovering data from young children, resulting in a disproportionate focus on adolescents and young adults. Johnston, Woodside-Jiron & Day (2001:223) endorse the claims that studies of ‘personal epistemology’ and learning have mostly been conducted with adolescents and young adults, which has meant there has been virtually no research involving children of primary age.

Other research has explored whether learning takes place differently in different curriculum areas. Although there is agreement within educational psychology about relations between epistemic beliefs and various facets of learning and motivation, ‘there is a pressing debate’ according to Muis, Bendixen and Haerle (2006:4) regarding whether epistemic beliefs are domain general or domain specific’. Early research of this issue ‘implicitly’ assumed that ‘epistemic beliefs were generalized across domains’; a view shared by Buehl, Alexander and Murphy (2002:418). Muis, Bendixen and Haerle,(2006:3) conclude that epistemic beliefs ‘are both domain general and domain specific’, yet this is not

the conclusion of Corte *et al* (2010:293) who posit ‘there seems to be a growing consensus that to some degree epistemological thinking is domain-specific.’

3.2.7. Imbalances between personal epistemological research in science and mathematics and that in linguistic studies

More research is conducted about personal epistemologies relating to mathematics and the sciences than any other subjects. Muis, Bendixen and Haerle, 2006:13) suggest that physics, for instance, is ‘well structured, hard and pure’, which might possibly lend itself to a more focused examination than does English literature, in which the ‘learning’ might be more difficult to track; a suggestion endorsed by Buehl, Alexander and Murphy (2002:420).

Wilson and Myhill (2012:5) observe how little research there is which explores the personal epistemologies of English, or Language Arts teachers, claiming that the research study by Johnston, Woodside-Jiron and Day is ‘one of the few’ which explores personal epistemologies in subject English. Johnston’s paper also claims that in the process of becoming literate in school, children seem to be acquiring a great deal more than simply learning how to read and write words. They are acquiring literate epistemologies, ‘with literacy and epistemology inseparable’ (2001:223).

3.2.8. The relevance of personal epistemology study to the classroom

Pertinent to my particular study, is the relationship between teachers’ personal epistemologies and the ways they teach, the stances they adopt, the attitudes and approaches they bring to teaching, the organisation of their classes and the resources they select. Maggioni and Parkinson (2008:448) assert that research into personal epistemologies has been mostly conducted with students, whilst the study of teachers’ personal epistemologies is ‘relatively young’. They point to many complexities of this research, outlining how teachers acquire knowledge, reflecting on and evaluating how and what to share with their pupils, but gaining new and further learning in return – in the interaction of the teaching process – from the unique epistemologies of every one of their students. This ‘terrain’ is made even more complex because teaching happens within a relationship with students who, in turn, contribute their ‘unique view of knowing and learning, views that teachers cannot ignore in deciding what pedagogical

course of action better fits their overall educational goals' (Maggioni and Parkinson, 2008:449).

They claim a clear relationship between the way in which teachers teach and the beliefs they held about learning. Some teachers 'conceptualized learning as receiving a body of knowledge developed and delivered by experts (e.g., scientists or historians)'; whilst others perceived learning as 'the actively constructed understanding of the world' (Johnston *et al*, 2001:223). Teachers who espoused the former view of learning 'tended to prefer rigidly-structured, teacher centred practices', limiting their students' involvement in lessons and discussion, discouraging them from raising their own questions. These teacher-led situations caused didactic lessons to be 'safe', without controversy. Teachers who committed to 'a constructivist view of learning tended to share authority with their students', and established a more open learning setting where students were encouraged to challenge and develop their own personal understandings of their learning (Maggioni and Parkinson, 2008:451).

3.2.9. Personal epistemologies and pedagogy

Tsai (2002) interviewed junior high school teachers, measuring 'their epistemic beliefs about science and their perceptions towards the science learning environment'. He discovered coherences between teachers' epistemic beliefs and their instructional practices, and that more positivist teachers in their beliefs about science (e.g. science knowledge is 'discovered', science knowledge is certain) focused on students' test scores, spent more time on teacher-directed lectures, tutorial practices or in-class examinations. This approach contrasted with 'teachers who held more constructivist epistemic beliefs about science knowledge (e.g. science knowledge is tentative, scientists create knowledge, social negotiation is important to the justification process) spent more time on student-focused enquiry or interactive discussion'.

Brownlee, Berthelsen and Boulton-Lewis (2004:3) conducted research with caregivers in pre-school settings and discovered very similar results to those above, in terms of a learning trajectory. They claimed that a substantial body of research indicated that personal epistemological beliefs influence beliefs about teaching and learning. Individuals with relativistic beliefs about knowing are

more able to conceive of teaching as ‘facilitating’, rather than’ transmitting’ knowledge.

Hashweh, too,(2005), when researching 35 science teachers, found those ‘holding constructivist beliefs’ were ‘more likely to detect student alternate conceptions’; such teachers also had a ‘richer repertoire of teaching strategies’; and used ‘potentially more effective teaching strategies for inducing conceptual change’. These findings suggest that more attention should be directed towards encouraging student teachers to develop an awareness of these concepts, as a possible route to improved teaching. Much research has attempted to articulate a knowledge base for teaching concerned with the question, ‘what is it that teachers know that allows them to be successful in facilitating student learning?’ Yet, ‘discussions of teacher knowledge rarely query teachers about the knowledge that they need for teaching and few probe teachers’ beliefs about the nature of such knowledge’ (Fives and Buehl (2010:471).

Cady, Meir and Lubinski (2006) discovered that pre-service teachers, who might previously have held ‘sophisticated personal epistemologies’, regressed to traditional teaching beliefs in their first year of teaching’, but became more constructivist in nature over time. Those who previously held predominantly ‘objectivist personal epistemologies’ appeared less able to pay attention to mathematical thinking and were less likely to accept a range of solution strategies or algorithms that were invented by children’. These findings indicate that first year teachers may require extra support during this transition phase. Yadav and Koehler (2007) also found that similar distinctive practices were associated with different personal epistemologies in respect to literacy teaching.

3.2.10. The Impact of Personal Epistemology research on teaching and implications for learning

Since Perry’s original findings, the field of ‘personal epistemologies’ has made little impact on the larger educational world. Most teachers have not heard of the concept of a ‘personal epistemology’, or to the thinking it embodies. Like Dweck’s (2008) research exploring the importance of ‘mindsets’, which has a clear relationship with the study of ‘personal epistemologies’, these are still only peripheral concerns. Some of the reasons for this situation must be because

there is no clear agreement of quite what the field comprises or should be dealing with. Chandler and Proux (2012:197) state, ‘Our conceptual house is in evident disarray and in desperate need of being put in some better order’. Urman and Roth (2010:9) also point out a lack of unity in this area of scholarship, stating: ‘Studying these underlying assumptions is a complex task. The literature seems to go in all directions at once, with inconsistencies in definitions, focus, and methods’. Whilst contemporary studies are increasingly concerned with much broader aspects of the sources of learning, such as the ‘epistemic climates or systems’ (De Corte *et al*, 2012:293), which include considering the role of family, peers, classroom materials and the curriculum itself, more recent challenges to our knowledge of knowing are emerging through internet use and social communication networks. Considerable research still needs to be conducted, and a clear relevance with actual educational practice needs to be more firmly established.

In terms of my own research, an acquaintance with the field of ‘personal epistemology’ has made me more sensitive to the relationship between what teachers have learned about grammar and language from their past lives, from their primary school days to the present. It has enabled me to focus on their levels of confidence when teaching language / grammar lessons, and what they draw on in terms of knowledge, resources, frameworks and approaches. I have been prompted to pay attention to their possible changing attitudes to what constitutes learning in grammar, based on the sorts of initial findings of Perry in his study (1970), as they learn more about grammar from training and professional development. The ‘beliefs’ my study teachers hold about their learning have become more central in this research. I was keen to observe whether the lessons of these teachers became more open-ended, exploratory and collaborative, involving their pupils more closely in the leaning process, as their own learning in grammar and language education became more embedded and reshaped their teaching.

The next section deals specifically with what teachers know about learning and what they want their pupils to know about learning too.

3.3. Teacher Knowledge and Pedagogy

3.3.1. Context and Introduction

My study is concerned with what primary teachers know when preparing for and teaching grammar lessons. Through empirical research with a group of volunteer teachers, I hope to discover what they know, and how that knowledge might improve with training in a particular model of grammar learning. It might then be possible to identify what effect, if any, this knowledge has on their grammar teaching, and whether their teaching improves as a consequence of gains in their knowledge base over a period of time. Recent research about teachers in action has adopted an increasing interest in what teachers know to enable them to become more competent teachers, who, in turn, bring about better learners.

Few published findings about the specific relationship between primary teachers and their knowledge of grammar are available; more material exists about what mathematics and science teachers know enabling them to teach those subjects more successfully (Allen, 2003:4). This situation resembles the relationship between school subjects and Personal Epistemologies; studies about learning in mathematics and science vastly outweigh those to do with literacy generally, or grammar, in particular.

Good teachers require knowledge of the subject (deep content knowledge) and knowledge of appropriate teaching (i.e. a pedagogy). Should it be regarded as axiomatic that those teachers with good subject knowledge will, naturally, be competent teachers? (And what does ‘competent’ mean in this context?) What is the position of, and what are the expectations around, teachers of primary children, most of whom are not subject specialists, and whose knowledge of a subject, such as grammar, might be slender?

3.3.2. Earlier research on teachers and the nature of teaching

Teacher knowledge is ‘serendipitous’; ‘traditionally a patch work of opportunities – formal and informal’, according to Wilson and Berne (1999:174) Early research on teachers was more concerned with a ‘process-product’ model, where the teacher’s task was to implement an ‘expert made curriculum’, adopting the role of ‘manager and facilitator’ (Even and Tirosh (1995:2). They go on to cite Brophy and Good (1986) and Gage (1978) who probed the

relationship between teachers' subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, suggesting that teaching was 'content free', relying for success on a generic form of effective teacher behaviours.

Lawton writes (1981:111), it was assumed that 'not only was education "a good thing", but it was' in safe hands.' Freeman & Johnson (1998) demonstrate how limited such research was by claiming that prior to the mid-1970s, 'research in general education sought to describe teaching as a set of discrete behaviours, routines, or scripts drawn from empirical investigations of what effective or expert teachers did in practice' (1998:399). Bibby (2006:200) asserts that there is a 'large body of research which seeks to find the effectiveness of teachers', fuelling a sense that 'if these competences can be described' then 'good' teaching will 'become a replicable commodity rather than an apparently chance occurrence'. Allen (2003:4) comments that 'there's a strong consensus these days that adequate subject knowledge is necessary for teachers to be successful, whilst failing to define "adequate knowledge".

Verloop, Van Driel and Meijer (2001:441), describing the usual model of teacher training before the 1980's, state: 'The goal of the research was to detect those teaching behaviours that resulted in higher pupil achievement, and, subsequently to train teachers in these desirable behaviours'. This quest for identifying and 'storing' the replicable characteristics adding up to an 'effective teacher' meant losing sight of 'the complexity and interdependency of teacher behaviour as a whole', bringing about a 'fragmented and mechanistic view of teaching' (2001:442).

3.3.3. 'Pedagogy' defined

'Pedagogy' roughly translates as 'the science of teaching' - but there is no universal agreement about its meaning by academics seeking to discern the 'mental life that underlies teacher behaviours' (Smith & Neal, 1989:3). Brant (2006:1) claims that the word has 'recently slipped into usage in England' and 'it is a partly misunderstood concept'. Some believe it relates to the ways that teacher behaviours have an effect on teaching and learning: ways of keeping the classroom quiet and the pupils engaged; sorting out a seating plan; leaving 'wait time' after asking a question, and other procedural matters (Shulman, 1986:199). During the early 1980's, most attention in research of teachers focused on matters such as classroom control, whilst other, more abstract and

cognitively based qualities, such as teacher subject knowledge were regarded as difficult to identify as they were too complex and ‘tacit’ (Brant, 2006:2).

3.3.4. Shulman and the new research on teachers

Shulman lamented the disassociation of the pedagogic and the content knowledge of subjects (Shulman, 1986:198). He described this incomplete view of teaching, where the subject content knowledge and the pedagogic knowledge fail to meet in most teachers’ perceptions, as the ‘missing paradigm’; a blind spot in research terms, and a missing element of teacher understanding.

Shulman proposed filling the gap in essential teacher knowledge, with the addition of a third dimension to the teacher ‘knowledge base’. Two sorts of teacher knowledge involved in this proposal were *subject knowledge*, the expertise in the subject content, and *pedagogic knowledge*: teachers’ knowledge about the processes and practices or methods of teaching, encompassing, overall educational purposes, values, and aims. This third strand, at the critical intersection of the subject knowledge and the teaching pedagogical methodologies, he termed ‘*pedagogical content knowledge*’, a knowledge ‘unique to teachers’, enabling them to become not merely scientists (or, linguists; or historians) but science teachers, language teachers or history teachers. This knowledge, beyond mere facts or information associated with the subject, aids the scrutiny of that material and assists decision-making about what to teach, the manner of its representation and the issues, values and attitudes valuable and intrinsic to the subject.

Shulman believed earlier research into teacher knowledge had been superficial. It failed to investigate what went on in the minds of teachers capable of providing an effective bridge between the teacher’s knowledge and how that knowledge became secure in the learner’s understanding, which he regarded as a vital component of research. Its potential depended on asking questions, such as: where do teacher explanations come from? How do teachers decide what to teach, how to represent what they are conveying, how to question students about it and how to deal with problems of misunderstanding? Ball and McDiarmid (1989:1) suggest that although subject matter knowledge is widely acknowledged as a central component of teacher knowledge, research on teacher education has not, in the main, focused ‘on the development of teachers’ subject matter knowledge’.

Schulman was concerned about the process of transition from expert student to novice teacher: how new teachers establish command of their subject so that students become sufficiently empowered and confident in their learning to grasp and challenge its concepts, or: ‘the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others’ (Shulman, 1986:205). He wondered what beginning teachers experience that could enable them confidently to confront flawed textbooks, to successfully wrap up their ideas and communicate them in appropriate and supportive metaphor, analogy, examples, demonstrations and reworkings (Shulman, 2004:199).

Whilst Shulman’s studies were conducted with subject specialist secondary teachers, and whilst there is no exact translation of his findings with primary teachers, sufficient overlaps in the broadly understood common ground of ‘teaching’ justify considering his findings relevant and appropriate in that sphere.

3.3.5. The early development of Shulman’s theories

Shulman’s publications caused a strong reaction in the educational research world. Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008:1) acknowledge the impact on the research community, ‘focusing attention on the foundational importance of content knowledge in teaching and on pedagogical content knowledge in particular’. Shulman recognised that most teachers ‘begin with some expertise in the content they teach’ (1986:199). Student teachers, he noted, have usually studied a subject-related degree prior to teacher training, but that knowledge is not sufficient. He proposed that teachers need a variety of knowledges, such as ‘content knowledge’, ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ and ‘curriculum knowledge’ if they are to be regarded as properly equipped for working in the classroom.

In 1987, Schulman further proposed ‘a minimum’ of seven category headings’ that would constitute a ‘knowledge base’ for teachers: content knowledge (CK); general pedagogical knowledge (GPK), curriculum knowledge (CK); pedagogical content knowledge (PCK); knowledge of the learners (KL); knowledge of educational contexts (KEC) and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds (KEE) (Shulman, 1987:227).

Mishra and Koehler (2006:1021) agree that the vital part of teacher development ‘is the manner in which the “subject matter is transformed for teaching”, occurring when the teacher interprets the subject matter’, finding different ways to represent it and making it accessible to learners’. Ball, Thame and Phelps similarly endorse the importance of Shulman’s ideas, declaring: ‘In the mid-1980s, a major breakthrough initiated a new wave of interest in the conceptualization of teacher content knowledge’ (2008:1), causing researchers all around the world to begin looking closely at ‘PCK’.

Shulman, whilst questioning the elements that comprise a genuine ‘knowledge base’, reiterated that: ‘teaching is trivialized and its complexities are ignored and its demands diminished, if policy-makers and teacher educators are only interested in content knowledge and general pedagogical skills’. Previous research, he states, has been ‘simplified and incomplete’, and has had ‘more influence on teacher training and appraisal than it warrants’ (Shulman, 1987:225).

The newly proposed category of ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ or ‘PCK’ drew together, but went beyond, matters of pedagogy and content knowledge, having a serious effect on research of teaching. New empirical evidence, from studies with secondary school teachers, showed that teaching could be characterized ‘as comprehension and reasoning, as transformation and reflection’ (Shulman, 1987:233). ‘Comprehension’ was about teacher understanding of the subject or domain; ‘reasoning’ had to do with the rationale of what were the priorities in what was selected for learning; ‘transformation’ concerned that vital skill of involving students in the learning process and transferring that learning to them, whilst ‘reflection’ is that retrospection in which all effective teachers engage, reconsidering their lessons and, in their own turn, learning from them.

3.3.6. Case studies

Teaching is ephemeral, hampering longitudinal research: once lessons are over they are lost in the ether, unless recorded on camera, which is not always satisfactory evidence of events. Shulman recommended devising ‘cases’ in teacher training, covering a broad area of teaching. The use of case method would benefit the increasing amount of qualitative research, and be supported by the growing number of technologies, enabling recording and repeated replaying. Unlike many other professions, most of the time teaching ‘is

conducted without an audience of peers, devoid of a history of practice' (1986:209). Cases, he suggests, are also a necessary resource because we are only half way toward 'understanding the knowledge base of teaching'. Case method contributes to 'developing strategic understanding, for extending capacities towards professional judgement and decision making' (1986:210)

Case method teaching also provides models of how to think professionally about problems, claims Kleinfeld (1990:on-line). She describes how students 'learn how to use theoretical concepts to illuminate a practical problem'. It also gives an opportunity to 'learn how to spot the larger issues implicit in what might seem to be a minor classroom decision'. Teaching by the case method helps students learn how to think productively about concrete experience, thus enhancing their ability to learn from their own experiences.

Aubrey agrees with Schulman (1986:210) that prospective teachers should have a 'case literature' of the best lessons, which is difficult to collect in teaching. Stones (1992:280) argued that, case models are 'deeply flawed'. They 'recycle approaches to theory building', and hamper 'genuine progress'. He predicted case studies would bring about a conservative approach to teaching, interested only in 'what has been', rather than 'what could be.'

3.3.7. How other researchers have amended and adapted Shulman's ideas

Mishra and Koehler (2006:1020)) agree with Shulman that teaching 'is a highly complex activity that draws on many kinds of knowledge'. Whilst, historically, knowledge bases of teacher education have focused on the teacher, recent teacher education has 'shifted its focus primarily to pedagogy, emphasizing the general pedagogical classroom, independent of the subject matter'. Mishra and Koehler relate how Shulman 'advanced thinking about subject knowledge' by conceiving the idea of pedagogical subject knowledge (PCK). Prior to that breakthrough, teacher educators and others researching in the field of teacher knowledge saw subject matter or pedagogy as dichotomous; Shulman proposed consideration of 'the necessary relationship between the two by introducing the notion of PCK'. They claim that Shulman's approach and his ways of describing teacher knowledge have 'permeated the scholarship that deals with teacher education and the subject matter of education.' (2006:1022).

Developments, starting from Shulman's seven knowledge bases, influenced Guzey and Roehrig (2009), who were concerned with teaching science with technology. Acknowledging their debt to Shulman (2009:28), they explore the contents and purpose of a new subject-specific knowledge base, TPACK. They point out that technology knowledge is 'much, much more than just knowing about technology', a deeper understanding of technology is required 'to use technology for effective classroom instruction, communication, problem solving and decision making' (2009:29).

Hill, Ball and Schilling (2008) explored and extended Shulman's original PCK theory, identifying a necessary sub-clause of PCK which they term KCS. This means 'content knowledge intertwined with knowledge of how students think about, know, or learn this particular content' (2008:375). In their focus on mathematics teaching, this knowledge has to do with the keen awareness of ways in which students might, for example, make common mistakes.

3.3.8. Challenges to and disagreements about Shulman's theories

Shulman is not, however, universally admired. Some researchers question, or completely disagree with the notion of pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman himself warned that:

A knowledge base of teaching is not fixed and final.' Although teaching is among the world's oldest professions, educational research, especially the systematic study of teaching, is a relatively new enterprise (Shulman -1987:233).

Brown and McIntyre (1993:8) warn about not over-interpreting pedagogical subject knowledge, as Shulman has not claimed that the concept is valuable for describing the ways in which teachers actually think, it merely has the status of highlighting 'an aspect of teaching that merits attention'. Stones (1992:279) disliked Shulman's idea of the 'transmission of content knowledge', which he calls a 'recipe for rote-learning', asserting that teachers cannot transmit knowledge'; they can only 'transmit words, which may or may not lead to change in readers' or hearers' concepts in the subject of study'.

Shulman's valuable research has problems. The first concerns the definition of a 'good' or 'effective' teacher. Brant (2006) claims there are no fixed definitions, even from an organisation such as Ofsted, charged with inspecting schools and

judging quality of teaching, which might be expected to operate agreed criteria. He claims that, ‘there is no consensus...of what expert teaching might be and the kinds of knowledge that teachers need to possess’ (Brant (2006:61). Stones, (1992:5) calls the ‘idea of “good teaching” a value-laden concept’. He describes the supposed agreement about what constitutes ‘a good teacher’ to be fallacious, and goes on to ridicule ‘much current argument’ as ‘unequivocally partisan.’ Shulman himself has proposed multiple lists about a range of subject-related ‘knowledges’ that lack – in his own words – ‘great cross-article consistency’ (Shulman, 1986:202).

In an otherwise positive paper about Schulman’s theories, Huckstep, Rowland and Thwaites (2002:1) mention that ‘PCK is particularly difficult to define and characterise’. Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008:392) also state that there is ‘no precise or agreed-upon definition’ of PCK’. They claim it is often unclear: ‘how ideas in one subject area relate to those in another subject area, or even whether findings within the same subject take similar or different views of teacher subject matter knowledge’. Hill, Ball and Schilling (2008:373), point out that ‘scholarly evidence about precisely what PCK is can be ‘actually quite thin’. No large scale study, according to them, has ‘related teachers’ PCK to students’ gains’ (2008:273): it remains ‘underspecified’ and ‘its relationship with student achievement undemonstrated.’

Whilst Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008:3) are complimentary about Shulman’s work, they do not readily accept his ideas, complaining about the lack of precision of some of Shulman’s terms, such as ‘pedagogical content knowledge’. They assert there is no shared understanding of what those ‘knowledges’ might be, suggesting that some of the citations and references are too generalised, without ‘direct attention to a specific content area’. Acknowledging that whilst Shulman’s findings are the result of ‘extensive observation of classroom teaching’, subsequent investigation has failed to challenge or probe into the original claims; accepting the ‘theoretical foundations, conceptual distinctions, and empirical testing (as if they) were fait accompli’

Shulman’s rhetoric, according to Edwards and Ogden (1998) lacks a sharp focus on meaning. They point to the suggestion that Shulman makes about

pedagogical subject knowledge being ‘an external body of information’ at the same time as ‘mystifying’ to the ‘status of tacit knowledge’ by describing it as ‘unique to teachers’. (1998:736) Edwards and Ogden, as teacher educators, wonder how they are able to equip their students with this ‘special amalgam’, when they are not teachers themselves.

Edwards and Ogden are also unconvinced about ‘Shulman’s seductive categorisation’ of his different knowledges (1998:737). They are concerned that Shulman only describes an ‘external body of knowledge’, which fails to capture the true complexity of the knowledges a teacher in action will be exercising. They are not merely interested in the ‘what’ of teacher knowledge, but the ‘how’ of the ways that teachers came across what they practise. They dismiss Shulman’s categorisations as merely ‘opening shots’ in a much bigger debate.

Finally, Grossman and McDonald (2008:189) indirectly challenge Shulman’s focus on teacher knowledge , and the need for further investigation of it, by reminding us that ‘teaching at its core is an interactive, clinical practice, one that requires not just knowledge but craft and skill’. They go on to maintain that research in teacher education requires the addition of the ‘pedagogies of enactment to our existing repertoire of pedagogies of investigation’. Just as Dewey suggested a century ago, teachers need to be put through intensive practice classroom situations, and, like professional musicians, encouraged to continually address the difficult or problematic features about their teaching (1916).

Shulman’s theories, however, have important implications for this study. The development of sound Pedagogic Content Knowledge (PCK) is a complex, never linear process (Van Driel & Berry: 2012:2), and claims by Aubrey (1996:183), Poulson (2001:44) and Myhill (2013:88) that this sort of teacher knowledge is the most salient factor in improving pupil success makes it a priority area for consideration in the teaching of grammar. Primary teachers concerned with subject matter, on which their pupils will be tested, about which they have limited acquaintance, will be less focused on exploring a range of learning possibilities. Despite any encouragement to adopt a culture in which PCK figures fully, these teachers will be more likely to reach for didactic approaches to learning, weakening the synthesis of Content Knowledge, (CK)

and Pedagogic Knowledge (PK) necessary, according to Shulman (1987:233), for the realisation of a richer teaching experience. Some of the teachers in this study were initially keen to think again about the possibility of designing more exploratory grammar lessons, enhancing pupil knowledge and understanding, but those preparing children for the SPaG test reverted to narrower pedagogies. An important goal in teacher development could be aiding primary teachers teaching grammar to reach a consistent approach to PCK, which includes:

an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons. (Shulman, 1986:9)

3.3.9. Why these findings and results from research matter

Research that has developed from Shulman's theories, particularly to do with pedagogic subject knowledge (PCK), has been significant and yielded findings of much interest to teachers. For instance, Aubrey (1996:183) researching mathematics teachers of early years pupils discovered that even though a number of teaching styles and environments were observed, 'the critical factor' that resulted in effective learning was the 'teachers' pedagogic subject knowledge'. She also maintains that whether teachers are aware of it or not, they 'represent the subject to the children through the teaching tasks they select'. So the beliefs and attitudes that teachers bring to the classroom, not just the subject knowledge in isolation, contribute to the learning process, because those beliefs and attitudes get translated into the whole learning landscape provided to bring about effective learning.

Ball and McDairmid (1989:13) point out that not only do teachers represent their subject to the learners, but they also shape the approaches and attitudes of a new generation of learners, by the manner in which the learning is framed. If teachers are insufficiently knowledgeable about a subject they are more likely to close down possible, more developed discourses, to ask questions which require only mono-syllabic answers and to be less likely to recognise those students with real potential. Pupils will not sense the 'constructedness' of subject knowledge, and be prepared to challenge and rebut ideas being offered to them, but will think of them as factual givens. Teachers must be well-educated to enable learners to develop their minds.

Ball and McDairmid also make mention of teachers learning from their own lessons. Teachers with superior subject knowledge are more likely to evaluate their lessons with greater insight and understanding than less-well informed colleagues, capable of asking keener, more focused questions of their practice, and able to make informed resolutions about what they have discovered in subsequent teaching (1989:7.)

Across a number of subject domains, Darling-Hammond calls on evidence that confirms 'teachers who have greater knowledge of teaching and learning are more highly rated and are more effective with students, especially at tasks requiring higher order thinking and problem solving', (1999). Teachers new to the profession with little training, appear to have greater difficulty in preparing their instruction to bring about effective student learning, and display more problems in planning the curriculum and teaching, amongst other pitfalls. She states: 'Perhaps it is not surprising that alternate route teachers from short-term programs report less satisfaction with their preparation and less commitment to remaining in teaching than other recruits' (Darling-Hammond, 2000:167).

These findings accord with the warnings of Goulding, Rowland and Barber (2002:691), who discovered that teachers who lack confidence in their PCK are likely to 'avoid risky situations in the classroom' and 'be inhibited by children's unexpected questions'. They may also attempt to teach only younger pupils, fearing that their lack of confidence might be exposed, although, on the other hand, a lack of confidence could equally lead to more thorough planning, and the use of a wider range of resources than colleagues who are more comfortable with the subject.

Being an intellectually able subject teacher can lead to different sorts of difficulty. Some, despite their increased understanding and insight into very challenging subject matter, still encounter difficulties in attempting to teach. They often struggle to understand the 'experiences, perceptions and knowledge bases of pupils who are very different from themselves' (Darling-Hammond, 2000:171). Their teaching, for all its good intentions and expertise, can seem dry and distant from the life experiences of the learners they are encountering.

Ultimately, however, Darling-Hammond's research discovered a number of fundamental observations that convey important messages about teacher

training and touch on the contemporary views embracing what we have discovered about the most effective learning and the involvement of pupils in that process. She claims that the most effective teaching requires teachers with a ‘deep and flexible knowledge of the subject matter, and who understand representing ideas ‘in powerful ways’ (2000:16).

3.3.10. Secondary subject specialists and primary generalist teachers

Long-standing discussion has concentrated on whether children should be taught by subject specialists or generalists (Ardzejewska, McMaugh and Coutts, 2010). Subject specialists usually operate in the secondary sector and are considered to be properly qualified. Learners deserve to be in contact with those with good subject knowledge, who can manoeuvre their way confidently around it. Their knowledge, however, may be contextualised and they may lack the wherewithal to make effective links of their own subject with others. Most generalists teach in the primary phase. This setting provides the opportunity for cross-curricular approaches, enabling children to make links of connected issues and to ‘join up’ learning. Bibby, (2006) recognises that the amount of subject knowledge required ‘presents a serious issue for the generalist’. In a study involving primary science teaching, Traianou (2006) discusses the importance of learners’ prior conceptions ‘about the phenomena being studied’, emphasising that the teachers need to be ‘at home’ with their subject to enable teachers to model the ‘challenging of everyday conceptions’ (2006:827). She maintains this would require ‘adequate subject knowledge’ and ‘an appropriate understanding of constructivist theories of learning’. She ponders about whether there should be a level of subject knowledge ‘above some specified threshold’. However, unsurprisingly, there is no clear agreement between researchers in this field of what that ‘threshold’ might be (2006:828).

Poulson (2001) investigated whether the ‘Stanford model’ of subject knowledge described by Shulman stands up as firmly in the context of primary or elementary schools, as it does in secondary schools, where Shulman’s research was conducted. This special interest is necessary because primary teachers in Britain and elementary teachers in the USA teach a number of subjects, with a high probability of not being fully acquainted with all of them. Grossman (1990:28) states: ‘Given the differences between the demands of preparing to teach one subject and preparing to teach five or six subjects ... the

implications of this research for elementary school teaching should be drawn cautiously'.

Poulson (2001:43) cites projects, conducted in primary schools in the 1990s, suggesting that some primary teachers admitted that they are not confident in a number of subjects – chiefly science and mathematics – implying that more subject knowledge teaching is necessary in training institutions. More recent research has suggested that this extreme positioning is not borne out by the evidence; partly because the researchers found it difficult to codify degrees of knowledge. A study by Askew *et al*, (1997) of 90 successful primary teachers in terms of results, cited by Poulson (2001:44), suggested that: 'a sound grasp of the content to be taught, along with the ability to represent this to pupils, and to make conceptual connections between different aspects of a topic or content - in short, what Shulman and others have referred to as pedagogical content knowledge - may be more important than detailed knowledge of subject matter itself'.

Medwell *et al* (1998) and Poulson, researching another group of primary teachers teaching literacy, again cited by Poulson (2001:45), also concluded that there was no clear relationship between teachers' explicit academic knowledge and their effectiveness in teaching literacy. From the evidence of these and other studies, Poulson agrees with the Shulman's conclusion, when she writes that the relationship between 'subject knowledge, and the way it undergoes pedagogical transformation and articulation', are much more complex 'in relation to primary school teachers than for single subject specialists in secondary schools'. (2001:45)

Many of these teachers did not have considerable specific subject knowledge of literacy, but were, nevertheless effective teachers of the subject. In the classroom they succeeded in their teaching work with children, making great progress. Yet, they did much less well in de-contextualised tests of their ability. Poulson called their knowledge 'functional', that is, they knew about and taught the features of language 'in use', but had greater difficulty with language 'as a system' (2001:46). Poulson concluded that there appeared to be no clear relationship between a high degree of academic scholarship in a subject and 'effective teaching in the primary phase of teaching'.

A recent on-line and interview-based study by Safford (2016), exploring the reaction of primary teachers' to the newly introduced testing regime for pupils aged 11, found that a large proportion were frightened of the grammar element of the Spelling, Punctuation and Spelling (SPaG) test.

Of the teachers interviewed (n=171), none, including those with many years of classroom experience, felt confident to teach grammar for the first SPaG test. (2016:5)

A significant growth of grammar lessons, both contextualised and decontextualised, was reported and the grammar requirement led to a reshaping of the literacy curriculum in many schools, where grammar lessons were used as lesson 'warm-ups', and in stand-alone situations. Whilst many pupils appeared to enjoy the test, the majority of teachers were less sanguine: particularly concerned about the applicability of the test-based grammar in wider literacy development.

These findings have clear resonances for my own study, which is concerned with examining the degree of subject knowledge a cohort of primary teachers can call on when teaching grammar to their classes. I am exploring what differences, if any, are made to their teaching and the sorts of activities they plan, when they have been trained in a subject about which they had little former knowledge. They may not be 'specialists' in the way that secondary teachers are, but I want to discover how much knowledge they may have gained from training sessions, and from the interactions with their pupils, before they can be regarded as prepared for 'transition', as Shulman describes this state. That is, when will these teachers be capable of: 'defining for students the accepted truths in the domain'. They must also be able to explain why a particular proposition is deemed warranted, why it is worth knowing, and how it related to other propositions, both within the discipline and without, both in theory and practice (Shulman, 1986:203).

Ultimately, what is being sought in my study is the teacher understanding of the activities of 'comprehension, transformation, evaluation and reflection', mentioned earlier, where 'teaching itself becomes the stimulus for thoughtfulness as well as action' (Shulman, 1987:238).

3.4. Teachers' subject knowledge

3.4.1. Introduction

Having explored a range of studies and research about teacher subject knowledge in general terms, the next necessary step is to investigate this area in relation to the teaching of grammar. The ‘grammar experience’ of children will depend on teacher knowledge of grammar, and how that particular knowledge is employed in supporting and improving good writing practices. This section looks into some of the issues of teaching grammar and reports on disputes between those who believe there is no relationship between better writing as a result of grammar lessons and those who hold an opposing view.

3.4.2. Evidence of problems with teachers' grammatical subject knowledge

Recent political requirements in Anglophone countries to reintroduce the teaching of grammar into their primary schools have led to the identification of a significant educational problem: a teaching force that lacks a secure knowledge of grammar

Much evidence exists to indicate that many secondary teachers, or teachers in training, know only the most rudimentary facts about grammar, and what they know can be inaccurate or unhelpful to their pupils. Summarising this situation, Jones and Chen (2012:150) state: ‘there is a considerable body of research that attests to the inadequacy of teachers’ grammatical knowledge’, whilst Alderson and Hudson (2012:2) assert: teachers’ ‘knowledge of metalinguistic terminology for grammar is very variable’. This state of affairs, also reported by Myhill (2005), Hammond & Macken-Horarik (2001) and Harper & Rennie (2009), is true for teachers in primary and secondary education.

A requirement to study ‘knowledge about language’ introduced into the National Curriculum in England since the late 1980s, (Jones & Myhill, 2011) has had minimal effect for most pupils. Considerable numbers of primary teachers ‘report low levels of confidence’ about teaching subjects such as maths and science’. Yet, Sangster *et al* (2012) discovered that whilst they mostly felt more equipped to teach ‘literacy’, their knowledge of ‘grammar’, as a separate construct, was not so sound. Alderson and Hudson (2012:4) claim that ‘English teachers still worry about how little grammatical knowledge about language they learned either at school or in university...just as they did fifteen years ago’.

Goodwyn, studying secondary English teachers and their attitudes, discovered that ‘the most generally expressed anxiety is of a lack of understanding about language, and that *bête noir*, “grammar” (2010:24)’. This state of affairs is not surprising, as the vast majority of English teachers in secondary schools studied English literature at university, with – at best – minimal acquaintance with grammar.

Sangster also discovered that not only did many of the students tested not know much about grammar; a large proportion thought they knew more than they actually did. If the teaching of grammar is to be included in the curriculum, then it should be undertaken by teachers who are confident with the subject; little worthwhile learning will be achieved by pupils being taught misleading or erroneous information. Andrews *et al* (2001:51) repeats Perera’s maxim, that it is ‘important to have some knowledge of grammatical construction in English’ in order to teach the subject effectively, respond accurately to their pupils’ work, and be properly equipped to answer their questions. Myhill *et al* (2013:) drew attention to weaknesses in teachers’ grammatical content knowledge’, but also warned that this problem might not be the one deserving of most attention when ‘grammatical pedagogical content knowledge … may be most salient’, (Myhill et al, 2013:80). Later in their paper they conclude that ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ is more critical than ‘subject knowledge’ (2013:88).

Being well-qualified in grammar impacts upon the sorts of resources teachers are likely to choose to support and develop their teaching. Myhill (2010:152) points to a recent ‘proliferation of educational textbooks to support grammar teaching’. Some of these texts comprise collections of exercises, based on memorising aspects of word classes, much like their predecessors from former days. By way of contrast, other modern sorts of textbooks promote an ‘exploratory’ and positive view of grammar, giving due weight to the relationship between language and meaning. Unconfident teachers of grammar are vulnerable, not knowing the relative worth of these resources, possibly teaching unacceptable content and demotivating pupils in respect to grammar. Teachers lacking confidence with grammar lack the necessary knowledge and understanding to challenge the content of such publications and often put their faith in poor materials.

Teachers, who had received the limited training provided to accompany the National Literacy Strategy grammar strand in England in the early part of the twenty first century, were poorly prepared and enjoyed limited benefit from it, claims Wales (2009:523). She states that ‘most teachers implementing the NLS had not received adequate pre-service training in contemporary linguistics’, and were thus ‘very ill-equipped to achieve the linguistically organised objectives of the programme’. Jones and Myhill (2011:59) present examples of unhelpful grammar teaching by insecure teachers, where pupils are persuaded to concentrate on the grammar features, to the detriment of the more ambitious possible meanings to be explored in the text, from which learners take away wrong conclusions about grammar and its worth. They discovered that in grammar lessons the grammatical feature itself is becoming the object of study, rather than acting as a tool for demonstrating how language works, or discussing different possibilities for expressing intended meanings.

They suggest the introduction of three elements of policy relating to the teaching of grammar:

1. *Establishing a clear conceptualisation of a pedagogic rationale for the teaching of grammar:*
2. *Devoting committed attention to the development of teachers’ linguistic subject knowledge:*
3. *Enabling collaborative development of effective pedagogies for the teaching of grammar:*

3.4.3. What to call grammar or language knowledge

The vocabulary of language study presents problems. Some studies are concerned fixedly with matters of ‘grammar’, usually meaning a focused attention on and knowledge of word classes, syntax and linguistic structures and related technical terms. Other researchers use the phrase ‘Knowledge about Language’ (KAL), which came into common use after the findings of the Kingman Report (DES:1988a) and the subsequent Language in the National Curriculum initiative (LINC), in the early 1990s. This term is mostly about a broader, more generalised linguistic approach than had been experienced in former grammar lessons. Richmond explains that KAL is about opportunities for the development of knowledge about language which should be found through the whole language and English curriculum: speaking and listening, reading,

writing, drama, media education and information technology. (1990:37). This sort of overview is a great distance away from the prescriptivist rationale, common in classrooms in the first half of the twentieth century.

Perera (1984,54), who found that children under the age of fourteen are easily confused by grammatical ‘labels’ and ‘descriptions’, presents three kinds of knowledge that could qualify as ‘knowledge about language’: firstly, the ‘implicit knowledge’ about language that all native speakers bring to school; second, ‘explicit knowledge’, about the nature and functions of language, and thirdly, the knowledge which is concerned with the structure of language including technical terminology, speech sounds and the meanings between words.

Lefstein (2009:381) examines the idea of Knowledge about Language and its associations with, what he terms, ‘New Grammar Teaching’; another phrase that emerged from the LINC project. His interest is essentially with what he terms ‘rhetorical grammar’, but he demonstrates how the LINC Knowledge about Language content overlaps with rhetorical grammar: the former partly concerned with ‘understanding language (and through it the communications on which society operates) as a goal, in and of itself’, as opposed to the latter, which is doggedly about improving children’s writing.

Myhill, however, makes a clear distinction between the terms ‘knowledge of grammar’ and ‘knowledge about language’ (Myhill, 1995:78), and points to the political dimensions such terms represent. She specifies that ‘grammar’ is a sub-set of a wider language concern called metalinguistics (discussed in detail in a later section), and suggests that any term containing the word ‘grammar’ is resonant with ‘traditional, neo-classical associations’. The term ‘knowledge about language’, on the other hand, ‘tends to carry ‘positive associations’ that possibly imply ‘insider- knowledge’ and a more professional view of ‘what is valuable and important for children learning to be literate’. However, she then considers ‘grammar’ within the greater province of ‘knowledge about language’, in an argument that ameliorates the more unpleasant associations that the word ‘grammar’ conjures. Jones and Chen (2012:148) confirm the lack of a common conceptual vocabulary by stating that the metalanguage of grammar is itself a source of varied interpretations rather than shared understandings.

3.4.4. Grammar is not just the ‘naming of parts’: what constitutes grammar subject knowledge

Most language study in schools begins with the learning of word classes, as if they are the only possible starting point for grammar knowledge. This is not necessarily so. Myhill (2001), for instance, advises that: ‘arguably, there is no strict hierarchy of knowledge in grammar, and learning about grammar could begin at one of several starting points’. It is just as reasonable to begin with studying sentences, or even whole texts, and then ‘work backwards’ to word study. Myhill warns that, for various reasons, the ways that the categories mentioned above interrelate should be a prime matter of learning and not overlooked.

Many learners, teachers and their pupils alike, depending on frail and undeveloped understanding of word classes, quickly come up against simple problems, based, for instance, on issues such as ‘functional shift’, where a word like ‘dancing’ – usually classified as a verb – becomes a noun in the following sentence: ‘I enjoy ballroom dancing’. Because pupils and teachers have been taught that a ‘verb is a doing word’, any subsequent word they encounter which suggests movement is immediately categorised as a ‘verb’. In all grammar study, it is necessary to be alert to the function of any word in a sentence before unthinkingly assigning it to a word class category. Myhill (2010) and Cajkler and Hislam (2002) cite actual observations or tests where this sort of confusion has regularly arisen in classrooms.

Macken-Horarik *et al* (2011:10) ask fundamental questions about the sorts of grammar knowledge which might be regarded as core in the classrooms of the future: ‘what do teachers need to know to develop understanding about how the English language works?’, and how is it possible to promote ‘language that is portable and applicable to new situations across the school years and beyond’? Keen writes (2013:433), that to widen the scope of enquiry about language ‘requires teachers and pupils to have access to a language for talking about language, a “metalanguage”’. But this ‘metalanguage’ operates in the language it is exploring and explaining. Andrews (2005:71), adds another layer of difficulty likely to cause problems for inexperienced or untrained teachers:

it is worth trying to clarify the relationship between “knowledge about grammar” and “knowledge about language”. It is going to be difficult,

because the former is an abstraction of an abstraction, and the latter is a curriculum notion and set of practices, rather than a concept.

Watson (2012:27), exploring teacher attitudes to teaching grammar, discovered that ‘the clear message’ emerging from research is that ‘grammar is a source of significant difficulty’ for a large proportion of English teachers. They require support that is capable of turning ‘linguistic and pedagogical subject knowledge’ into classroom practice. But an important finding from Watson’s research related to the extent those teachers felt they wanted and needed that support. Teachers were uncertain about what actually constituted ‘grammar teaching’ and could not readily work out a relationship between that subject teaching and a broader, more vague ‘language study’. Terms such as ‘metalanguage’, and ‘metalinguistic knowledge’, even ‘language about language’ are the staple of those who study linguistics as an academic discipline, but they are frightening and demotivating to many teachers, who see their subject from their literature studies as a very different construct.

Halliday claimed that language enters into the learning process in English in three related but distinct ways: ‘Language development is three things: learning language, learning *through* language and learning *about* language’ (Halliday, 2009, p. 216). But language study is difficult, because, as Lefstein (2009:379) remarks: ‘The term *grammar* is used in many different ways’. Halliday believed that there is confusion between two understandings of the word ‘grammar’. Whilst it can be regarded as the name of the everyday usage of language, it can also be applied ‘to various codified descriptions of language’, that is, the language about language. Halliday described this dilemma in the following terms:

How does one keep apart the object language from the metalanguage – the phenomenon itself from the theoretical study of that phenomenon? (Halliday, 2002, p. 384).

Macken-Horarik *et al* (2011:11) claim that this unhelpful overlap of meanings is ‘not new’ and ‘not confined to Australia’. Halliday (2002:384) suggested that there should be two terms, as a means of overcoming some of these confusions: ‘grammar’ and ‘grammatics’. Halliday explained that ‘grammatics’ would be a more helpful term to ‘refer specifically to a language talking about language’, whilst ‘grammar’ continues to retain its current commonly-held

meaning. Macken-Horarik *et al* (2011:11) set great store by these distinctions, claiming that:

Such a definition allows us to investigate the necessary stretch or expansion which any grammatical framework will need to accommodate if it is to engage seriously with language and how it works in texts.

Researching the topic over many years (2006, 2011 and 2012) Macken-Horarik develops Halliday's term, 'grammatics', coined because Halliday was concerned about the 'slippage' from the study of language 'proper' to judgements about the value of a person's use of language and thence to their worth as persons. This confusing situation militates against pupil learning. As Halliday remarked:

Linguistics is language about language...language turned back on itself. How does one keep apart the object language and the metalanguage? (Halliday 2002,384)

Macken-Horarik (2012,190) describes 'grammatics' as a metalanguage based on careful study of grammar - a way of thinking with grammar in mind. Unlike other forms of previous grammars, particularly traditional prescriptivist models, 'grammatics' is closely concerned with possible meanings made through clauses and sentences, not single words in isolation.

In similar vein, a model of language study has been devised and described by Giovanelli (2016) for his student teachers, many of whom have only slender knowledge of grammar. The aim is 'to provide beginning teachers with necessary knowledge but also to provide a space for them to re-conceptualise their ideas on language work and what it can offer to their students' (2016:192). His programme is based 'loosely' on the Kingman model of language (DES, 1988), and includes attention to such concepts as 'phonemes', 'morphemes', 'phrases and clauses', 'language varieties' and 'language acquisition and development' (2016:192). Using grammar knowledge to analyse a range of real texts in the world, these students explored 'how and why a language user might be motivated to choose a certain way of presenting a series of events', and other linguistic meaning-making purposes.

Giovanelli (2015:4) outlines Halliday's three aims of teaching grammar: 'productive, descriptive and prescriptive' (1967:83). His programme is solidly situated in the 'descriptive' aim, which is:

more content-driven, building students' knowledge about the language levels of discourse, semantics, syntax, lexis, morphology and graphology in ways that allow them to describe different kinds of language use accurately and systematically, with due attention to the contexts in which communication takes place.

This aim contrasts strongly with the ‘productive’, which has to do with the development of learners’ skills, and the ‘prescriptive’ concerned with correctness and standardisation; adding ‘nothing to the pupils’ linguistic abilities’, according to Halliday. (*ibid*)

Attempting to simplify understanding of the vast territory called ‘grammar’, van Gelderen (2009:111) isolates six ‘issues’. The first he calls ‘the validity of the approach’: some approaches see the teaching of grammar as ‘inherently’ valid, whilst, in contrast, others see grammar teaching as ‘merely instrumental’. The second is about the ‘explicitness’ of the content, whilst the third addresses the ‘process’ or ‘product’ argument. A fourth issue ‘concerns the pedagogical function of grammar teaching’, contrasting ‘*prescriptive / deductive* starting points, to do with rules and correction with the ‘*descriptive/ inductive*’ beliefs, recognising the ‘language phenomenon comes first followed by a description of regularities and irregularities’. His fifth issue concerns ‘the place of grammar teaching in the mother tongue: should it be a *systematic* course unrelated to other parts of the English curriculum, or an ‘*incidental*’ approach, touching on grammar matters as they might arise? (italics in the original) Finally, the sixth issue concerns ‘the topics that are regarded as important for teaching, which he divides into three so-called perspectives (formal, semantic and pragmatic): the formal perspective directed towards the structure of words and sentences; the semantic perspective has its focus on the meaning of words and sentences (“in and out of context”) and the pragmatic perspective deals with functions of language use in specific communicating contexts. Van Gelderen uses these perspectives to ‘define what is meant by *declarative knowledge* (knowing that) and *procedural knowledge* (knowing how)’ (2009:112). He outlines a sequence moving from ‘declarative formal semantic and/or pragmatic knowledge before using this knowledge procedurally’, in the context of real texts.

To be supportive and challenging in the teaching of grammar, teachers will need more than a limited knowledge of word classes. They will need to know

more than their pupils to enable the choosing of relevant resources, secure their introductions to different topics, be prepared to engage with their pupils, who will always raise searching questions beyond the straightforward script, and deciding the procedural contexts in which language operates. Perera (1987:3) and Leech (1994:18) agree that teachers' grammatical knowledge needs to be richer and more developed than the grammar necessary to teach students. A particular hazard of studying grammar is that whilst the exercises used for practice might contain 'perfect sentences', or other linguistic structures, authentic written texts are rarely so limited. Effective teachers alert to such pitfalls will be better prepared to deal with any difficulties of this sort.

3.4.5. New grammars in the twenty first century

Hudson and Walmsley (2005:595) claim that the twentieth century witnessed an ever-widening gap in England between the practice of professional grammarians on the one hand, and the lay public and practice in schools on the other. Quirk, established the Survey of English Usage at University College, London in 1959, bringing about the meeting (according to Hudson and Walmsley, 2005:599) 'of English grammaticography' and 'the teaching of grammar in schools'. In both universities and schools the teaching of grammar played a small part, relative to the attention given to the study of English literature.

Most people who had been taught grammar in schools, either ostensibly to improve writing by rendering it more accurate, or as preparation for teaching/learning a foreign language, would probably have encountered the former prescriptive traditional model, (Carter, 1990; Dean, 2003). So, many teachers suddenly expected to teach grammar, would have been taught only that approach. Yet, in the English-speaking world new approaches were being introduced, offering an alternative to the right/wrong, absolutist paradigm associated with grammar, which had held sway for more than a century. (Clark, 2009); Christie, 2009; Hancock & Kolln, 2009). Researchers no longer regarded grammar as a monolithic, 'out there' phenomenon, with its unchallengeable rules and its certain certainties. Rather, it was developing into an intensive study of the language at work in normal every day, familiarly contextualised circumstances. Such study might include interest in patterns and relationships

of certain aspects of language, but in ways that occurred spontaneously in a range of human discourses, not concerned with rules and a ‘deficit’ belief.

The changes that interested academic linguists took a long time to impact upon education in schools. Hudson and Walmsley (2005:516) point out that most UK linguists, including those working on English grammar, have very little interest in school teaching, with some notable exceptions. A researcher who played a considerable part in challenging the linguistic community to think differently about language was Michael Halliday. From the 1950s to the 1980s linguistics developed significantly (Clark, 2009). Chomsky challenged thinking in this field, resulting in a ‘generative’ model of grammar, focusing on how sentences are made. Halliday, meanwhile, published *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, (1985) focusing on language in use. Terms such as ‘performance grammar’ (a description of the syntax of English as it is actually used by speakers), or ‘reference grammar’ (explanations of the principles governing the construction of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences), or ‘pedagogical grammar’ (grammatical analysis and instruction designed for second-language students) were matters of interest to linguists through the second half of the twentieth century – yet, completely unknown to most teachers in primary and secondary schools.

3.4.6. Teaching the ‘new’ grammar

Teachers embracing new thinking about language have to learn a new approach to grammar, overturning a representation which regarded it as sets of exercises, mostly depending on memorising ‘parts of speech’, taught in isolated units in routine dedicated lessons. Keith claims that ‘the instructional style of teaching can lead...to an over-simplified view of language rules and structures which does not take into account the elasticity inherent in the language system, or the complexity of the functions involved in making meanings’ (Keith, 1990:73). Teachers of functional grammar have to be open-minded, prepared to consider a wide range of texts as grist to their mill and be prepared to engage with the unusual issues of grammar as they arise in lessons. Hudson and Walmsley discuss how Halliday’s approach was ‘able to throw light on the structure of almost any kind of text’, contrasting with traditional prescriptive grammars which reflected specific genres, such as great literature, but had little involvement with more mundane texts, such as weather forecasts. (2005:610)

Exercising this alertness and capitalising on the opportunist possibilities language offers is illustrated in Keith's observation that: 'bringing grammar to life is not a matter for classroom gimmicks to inject a few E numbers into otherwise mechanical lessons on adjectives, prefixes, collective nouns or whatever'. He continues: 'Grammar is not merely labelling bits of language, but it should be regarded as 'a living force used every minute words are uttered' (Keith, 1997:9). The most effective teachers in this new language-learning climate were those who could instil in their pupils a sense of 'noticing grammar' (Keith, 1999), recognising the multitude of 'grammars' through which our social experiences are given meaning. This is a challenging concept for younger learners, but one that teachers in Australia and New Zealand, for instance, are realising is not an insuperable problem in increasingly confident and experienced hands.

Functional language has been 'implemented and trialled' (Derewianka, 2012:130) in Australia for the past twenty years, and this new 'functional' model of pedagogy 'has its roots in the research of Michael Halliday'. His interest is in the way language 'is a resource for meaning-making, through which we actively shape and interpret our world for ourselves'. Whilst prescriptivist grammar was taught in a way that usually privileged classical or established texts, a functional model of grammar might show, for example: how the language of mathematics differs from the language of history; the language we use when talking to close friends differs from giving a formal oral presentation to an unfamiliar audience; how spoken language differs from written language (Derewianka, 2012:129).

Another feature of functional grammar is its relationship between context and language use, although Myhill challenges those concerned with functional grammar to avoid thinking of 'contextualisation' as a 'meaningless mantra' (2005:82). Whilst it was understandable, she states, that 'decontextualised' exercises, representing the prescriptive model, were disposed of, the adoption of the term 'contextualised', without 'genuine discussion or consideration' of what the word properly means might mean no more than 'not decontextualised'! Teachers should avoid devising lessons where the real grammatical issues are merely add-ons to the other issues being explored and learned in the subject.

Watson's research about teachers' attitudes to grammar (2012), confirms Goodwyn's inquiries (2010), indicating that many practitioners need to adopt a changed mindset in regard to the teaching of grammar. Many teachers interviewed or questioned in those studies retain an antipathy towards teaching any grammar whatsoever, regarding it as incurably boring. According to Watson, they quickly made 'the association of the word 'grammar' with traditional or "old fashioned" teaching' (2012:27), which could mean that secondary English teachers have not experienced the positive possibilities of teaching grammar capable of maintaining the engagement and interest of students studying the subject.

3.4.7. Making the link between grammar and teaching writing

Proponents of 'grammar' usually understood it as a strict, rule-based, prescriptive model, most often taught as detached, stand-alone units, which were subsequently expected to be discernible in improving pupils' written composition. It was assumed that pupil writers would draw on their recent acquaintanceship with grammar, preventing them making the sorts of common mistakes regularly seen in school writing. Classes might be taught the plural of nouns, the use of the apostrophe or the complex sentence – all as separate ideas. This manifestation of grammar is the one which has been tested and researched by academics in a range of institutions. Their common verdict has been that 'grammar' (or, at least the type of formal traditional 'grammar' they have researched) does not improve writing.

3.4.8. Disputes about the value of grammar learning

The question, however – 'does grammar knowledge improve writing?' – has preoccupied researchers, academics and educationalists for decades. Whilst evidence of some recent research initiatives has made a strong case denying any relationship between the teaching of grammar and an improvement in writing, Myhill (2011) and Tomlinson (1994), are amongst those who have challenged the sorts of analysis that has been practised in such institutions as the EPPI-Centre review of 2004, situating some academics in a paradigm that denies all possibility of grammar knowledge improving writing.

Tomlinson (1994) refused to align himself in that manner, questioning the criteria of 'improvement' of writing in these reviews. In a critique of research supporting the belief that grammar failed to improve pupils' writing, he raised

important questions weakening the arguments of the study. He demonstrated how small a part grammar actually plays in assessment of writing criteria. His analysis of a supposedly defining test, conducted by Robinson in 1958 (1994:21), reveals that seven eighths of its content had to do with word classes. The final part of the test was composed of 'questions on subject-verb-object, and the second half contains ...questions on identifying clauses as either noun, adjectival or adverbial' (1994:22), which could contribute in only a limited way to the writing process. Tomlinson concludes (1994:23): 'Robinson was testing little that could carry over into pupils' written work'.

Myhill (2005:80), however, suggests a need for a more thorough, sceptical reading of the apparently expert conclusions of at least one prestigious study, conducted by EPPI in 2004 (Andrews et al 2004), which made its negative judgements on, what Myhill claims is, too little evidence. She demonstrates how unreliable the 'evidence' can be (2005:80), citing two studies, one by Wyse (2004) and the other by Hudson (2001), both claiming to be based on 'empirical evidence' that reached opposing conclusions. Myhill concluded that 'methodologically rigorous and valid evidence is...extremely limited', and 'sensitive readings' need to be conducted in 'systematic research enquiry and professional critique and debate'. Teachers justifying their teaching of grammar to improve written skills need to be clear about what it is they are expecting to improve.

Myhill (2005:80) states that the EPPI analysis (Andrews et al, 2004) lacked a rationale about its own understanding of 'teaching grammar', and failed to acknowledge significant developments taking place in grammar teaching, or to consider research conducted in the UK. Most studies of the relationship of grammar and writing, she reminds us, have considered only circumstances where grammar and writing have been taught separately, often with the distance of days between the two activities. Other matters that could feasibly affect the development of children's writing attainment include the extent of teacher grammar knowledge, the explicitness of the grammar teaching, deciding on what areas of grammar should be included, and the circumstances in which the writing exercise is conducted; none of these addressed in the EPPI research report. Much of current teaching about writing is concerned with

content and, what might be termed, more literary effects. The ability to make choices and take greater control of writing, the really substantial reasons for teaching grammar, learned through the study of language, are not properly focused or well-developed.

New developments in grammar scholarship may well have the capability of imposing a recognisable effect on the improvement of writing. French (2010) makes a case for the introduction of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) into schools. It is a ‘descriptive’ grammar… ‘as are most grammars these days’ (2010:210) and not concerned with correctness, or right and wrong rules. Its purpose is to make meaning, best studied and explored in real textual interactions – ensuring a more secure relationship between the skills of reading and writing. French continues: ‘it follows therefore that SFG is able to relate grammatical knowledge of whole texts and their structure’ (2010:210). She explains that ‘functional grammar’ sits within ‘systemic linguistics’, and that genres are ‘a sequence of stages through which a text moves to achieve a social goal’ (2010:211). So, the relationship between grammatical feature and ‘generic stages is not merely coincidental...the lexico-grammatical patterns create the stages.’ It becomes possible to teach children about the structure of texts at the genre level and the part played by the lexico-grammatical features that make it the sort of text it is. Grammar knowledge becomes intrinsic to the writing process in such a system of language understanding, especially in the way that it enables patterns of language to be more clearly explained.

Myhill and Jones (2007) challenged those critics who concluded that grammar was not linked to the improvement of pupils’ writing through the exercise of a research project conducted in over 30 secondary schools, involving more than 700 children aged 12/13 in Year 8, setting out ‘consciously’ to ‘provide a more nuanced understanding of the grammar and writing issue’. The research question guiding the project sought ‘to explore the impact of contextual grammar teaching on the quality of children’s writing’ (2007:69), because of the lack of studies in which grammar had been taught in the context of writing lessons ‘with a view to developing children’s writing’ (Myhill et al, 2012a:141). This research directly examined the link between grammar skills and writing grammatical skills with the writing, rather than learning grammatical matter for

its own sake. Their randomised control trial (rct) procedure meant that teachers were unaware of whether they were assigned to an intervention or comparison group until the data gathering was complete. All texts used in the research were authentic examples, readily available, not specifically created for this exercise. Considerable discussion was encouraged in classrooms about language knowledge. No previous research had been conducted within such parameters, and the positive results indicated that the students in the ‘intervention group’ ‘improved their writing scores by 20% over the year, compared with 11% in the control group’ (Myhill *et al*, 2012b:32).

A notable feature of this research, inevitably, concerned teacher knowledge, as part of research design was focused on ‘whether teachers’ confidence with grammatical knowledge might...influence the intervention in any way’ (Myhill, 2012a:152). Some participating teachers were unused to the degree of explicitness the researchers planned (Myhill, 2012b: 37), and several were troubled by the terminology expected to be used. Yet, the project illustrated the potential for pupils taking more control of their writing, and the realisation by pupils that writing mostly comprises different options, allowing them greater freedom of choice. This endeavour has reframed the research on probing the relationship between grammar knowledge and writing success, and needs to be recognised as the foundation on which further discoveries might be made.

3.5. Metalinguistic knowledge and the metalanguage

3.5.1. Introduction

Whilst much dispute has been associated with the teaching of grammar, it is only part of any mature writing programme. Grammar is a sub-section of a much bigger concern, termed ‘metalinguistic knowledge’. This study will explore what constitutes and defines metalinguistic knowledge and the part it plays in enabling pupils to become more fluent, reflective and controlled writers in a range of writing in different social contexts. They will, as a background to their increasing metalinguistic knowledge, acquire and employ a ‘metalanguage’ which is, simply, the language about language.

3.5.2. Defining metalinguistic knowledge

Even though Jakobson (1963) demonstrated that one of the meanings of ‘metalinguistic’ has to do with functions of the language, there is disagreement about what ‘metalinguistic’ actually means. Fontich and Camps (2013) describe the concept as ‘multifaceted’, whilst Bialystok and Ryan (1985:229) complain that ‘there is no consensus regarding the precise domain of activities which properly may be called metalinguistic’. Myhill (2011:249) recognises that establishing a consensual definition of metalinguistic understanding is difficult, because the word ‘metalinguistic’ is used ‘across the research literature with a spectrum of meanings’. Most academics agree that ‘metalinguistic’ has to do with ‘a conscious reflection on language as an object of knowledge’ (Wilkinson *et al*, 1984:2130), or it is a term given ‘to the adoption of a reflective attitude in regard to language objects and their manipulation’ (Gombert, 1992).

Camps and Milian (1999:6) define metalinguistic knowledge as the ability ‘to take language as the object of observation and the referent of discourse’ (1999:6). Garton and Pratt (1998), supply a metaphor for the notion of ‘metalinguistic knowledge’, likening it to a car window through which we normally look at the world beyond. Being aware of linguistic knowledge is like concentrating on the actual screen through which our view of the world passes.

Myhill and Jones (2015:841) note the dearth of research on metalinguistic knowledge in relation to writing, except for many studies of infant school-based beginning writers. Extensive material exists about the metalinguistic capabilities of L2 learners (those studying a modern foreign language) (Robinson, 2005:39) and there is much about metalinguistic knowledge aiding comprehension skills in readers (Zipke, 2007:376), particularly early readers. Little focused research information exists, however about writing by pupils aged between 10 and 16. As Robinson (2005:39) comments, it is often assumed that metalanguage and metalinguistic awareness are more significant in initial language acquisition, but people never stop growing linguistically. There is good reason to conduct research with primary and secondary pupils, to explore whether writing attainment can be increased by improved metalinguistic understanding through different phases of education.

Other problems hamper a universally agreed definition of the concept ‘metalinguistic’ assert Jones & Myhill, as psychologists and linguists regard the term in different ways (2013:80) Gombert (1992) explains that psychologists are interested in investigating the many cognitive and behavioural activities taking place when language is being generated or comprehended; what Myhill and Jones (2015:841) describe as the ‘monitoring regulatory function of selecting and shaping language’, whereas linguists are keener to regard the actual linguistic material under consideration as valuable data for study in its own right. Gombert relates how some authors ‘define the field of metalinguistics as the subject’s *knowledge* of the characteristics and functioning of language...or, from a more functionalist perspective, of its structure, its functioning and its usage.’(1992:2).

The psycholinguistic interpretation of the term ‘metalinguistic’ is, according to Gombert, ‘broader than that which linguists give to the concept’ (1992:4). In the field of linguistics, ‘metalinguistics’ means everything to do with metalanguage, and is regarded as the ability ‘to use language that refers to itself’. Psychologists, on the other hand, analyze the linguistic behaviour under consideration and attempt to ‘infer cognitive processes of conscious management... of the language objects, either as object *per se* or in terms of the use to which they are put’. Wang and Wang (2013:47) summarise the difference in the following manner: metalinguistic activity within the linguistic discipline may be viewed as ‘language about language’, but, within the psycholinguistic discipline ‘it may be referred to as language cognition – two separate constructs’.

Camps and Milian (2000) and Myhill and Jones (2015) observe that in English ‘metalinguistic’ is an adjective, requiring a pre-determining noun to become meaningful. Wang and Wang (2013:47) suggest that ‘metalinguistic’ can be regarded from a number of perspectives: ‘for example, metalinguistic awareness, metalinguistic activity, metalinguistic function, metalinguistic faculty, metalinguistic capacity, metalinguistic representation, metalinguistic reflection, metalinguistic analysis, and metalinguistic control’. The undiscriminating addition of a range of nouns by researchers meant that concepts which differ from each other – whilst almost corresponding – have been regarded as

overlapping. But, ‘metalinguistic knowledge’ differs from ‘metalinguistic awareness’; and those, in turn, are similar but not exactly the same as ‘metalinguistic understanding’, or ‘metalinguistic skill’, although used synonymously on occasions.

More agreement exists about common features regarded as ‘metalinguistic’. The first of these beliefs is the knowledge that language can be objectified; can be studied as a ‘thing’. There is a widespread agreement that language is structured and functional. Words and sounds of the language have no intrinsic meaning, but have symbolic, semiotic meaning only. Roth, *et al* (1996) describe it as “the ability to objectify language and dissect it as an arbitrary linguistic code independent of meaning” (p. 258). Because language can be regarded as an artefact it can be controlled and manipulated. Myhill and Jones (2015:842) drawing on data from their own research, and from wider evidence, offer an ‘interdisciplinary theoretical frame’ in the following definition of the metalinguistic:

the explicit bringing into consciousness of an attention to language as an artefact, and the conscious monitoring and manipulation of language to create desired meanings grounded in socially shared understandings. (italics in the original).

These features are only fully understood by mature language users, so they must be developmental and grow with the language user.

3.5.3. Implicit and Explicit Language Use

Considerable academic interest exists about whether linguistic activity takes place intuitively, without conscious consideration or thought, known as ‘implicit knowledge’, or whether such activity is a result of conscious, planned intentions, known as ‘explicit knowledge’. This section will consider the difference between the two concepts.

Young children learn to use language ‘for functional communicative purposes’ (Allen, 1982:89) long before they arrive in formal education. They have the capability to listen carefully and can distinguish stories (Gombert, 1992:17). They quickly imitate the language around them, and after fewer than two years report such activities as ‘I wented to Granny’s’, without ever having heard that whole statement before. Most children develop the capability of employing their

growing language information bank to consider and analyse their own utterances, spoken and written. How quickly and through what procedures this awareness becomes, however, is the focus for much speculation and subsequent on-going research.

Whilst growing, children are increasingly aware of language and begin exercising its social communicative possibilities. They will use language extensively, but their understanding of that language is regarded as being ‘implicit’ because the child is unable to reflect on the knowledge it is demonstrating, nor able to verbalise what is taking place in any linguistic transaction. Ellis (2008:1) states that even though they have learned ‘complex knowledge of the structure of their language’ from their various adult care takers,’ ‘paradoxically they cannot describe this knowledge’. He cites an experiment with a pre-school child, devised by Jean Berko Gleason (1958:3) illustrating vividly the difference between implicit and explicit learning. Asked how to form ‘a plural’, the child will not know what to do, but:

‘tell her ‘here is a wug, here is another wug, what have you got?’ and she is able to reply, ‘two wugs.’

Linguistic activity indicating linguistic knowledge has taken place, but the child lacks the capacity to name or explain the transacted process. Whilst verbal interaction has demonstrated the child’s ability to illustrate a grammatical function, it is not yet able to articulate the workings of that function. It is possible to see children performing what seem like metalinguistic tasks, but possessing no knowledge of what has taken place, unable to explain the degree of their success.. They are unable to position themselves at a distance from their linguistic knowledge or utterances; unable to verbalise any sort of rationale for the linguistic activities they enact.

During this stage the child is mainly making automatic responses to the environment or immediate stimuli. The child is demonstrating implicit understanding only, and could not be said to be employing explicit ‘linguistic knowledge’, although Bialystok and Ryan (1985: 238) point to research claiming that ‘children are able to repair their own speech errors’ at 2 years of age and other evidence that pre-schoolers adapt their talk to meet ‘the age and status of their interlocutors”.

Wang and Wang (2013:48) concur with the differences mentioned above: implicit metalinguistic awareness ‘is knowledge about language that is intuitive and cannot be explained by the user’. Marques-Pita (2010, on-line) would claim that, ‘No explicit conceptual structures are represented in this format’. Explicit metalinguistic awareness, on the other hand, ‘is knowledge about language that can be explained either in everyday language or using specific metalinguistic terminology’. Wang and Wang cite the research findings of Karmiloff-Smith (1986), an important contributor to the complex study of what constitutes explicitness or implicitness. Her Representational-Redescription Model of learning is important in Psycholinguistics. It comprises three recurrent phases, not stages, as they are cyclically repeated. Wang and Wang (2013:48) and Marques-Pita (2010: on line) describe not just two stages: implicit and explicit, but point out that Karmiloff-Smith describes the ‘explicit’ learning phase as having three subdivisions (E_1 , primary explicit knowledge, E_2 , secondary explicit knowledge, and E_3 tertiary explicit knowledge), each concerned with different learning behaviours, but not in a hierarchical way, with some overlaps. Pine and Messer (2003:286) claim that the Representational-Redescription model ‘presents cognitive development as implicit information gradually developing into consciousness until it can eventually be verbalised and used more flexibly’. They suggest that ‘cognitive development is not conceptualised as a progression from failure to success, from less complex to more sophisticated thinking, but from implicit to explicit levels of representation’. According to the R-R model, knowing whether a child has an ability only gives us part of the picture about development. Pine and Messer advise: ‘assessing whether the child understands and can talk about the skill reveals far more about the child’s representation of a task, and such abilities constitute *Level E₃*’ (2003:286).

3.5.4. Metalinguistic Development

Gombert, according to Myhill (2011:250), has devised the ‘most comprehensive theorization of metalinguistic development to date’. This section will consider the evidence about children’s growth as language users, and how they increasingly monitor, analyse and take control of their linguistic interactions. Gombert (1992) claims there are two levels of control of language use: the

epilinguistic and the metalinguistic phases which children pass through – in that order.

Epilinguistic activities are described by Gombert (1992:13) as: ‘behaviour manifested from an early age which is related to metalinguistic behaviour but is not consciously monitored by the subject’. ‘Such activities in the subject’s behaviour’, he goes on, ‘are explicit manifestations of a functional awareness of the rules of the organization or use of language.’ Metalinguistic activities, on the other hand, are a ‘subfield of metacognition concerned with language and its use – in other words:

1. Activities of reflection on language and its use;
2. Subjects’ ability intentionally to monitor and plan their own methods of linguistic processing in both comprehension and production.’

(Gombert, 1992:13)

In a challenge to Gombert, Culoli (1990), proposed three levels of developmental growth and Karmiloff-Smith *et al* (1990) believe there are four levels, but there is universal agreement that two essentially different skill areas are at work as the child grows: the epilinguistic and the metalinguistic. The epilinguistic condition is regarded by some researchers as separate from the metalinguistic state, but others recognise that it remains constantly present in the mature adult language, sometimes in action where oral responses or composition do not require focused conscious attention. Adults, for instance, do not usually think much about ‘finger spacing’ between words when writing. Whatever the beliefs about this concept, ‘epilinguistic’ means the condition of not being aware of what is going on in a linguistic exchange, and lacking the ability to articulate the language user’s part in any transaction: it is the implicit form of learning. Although Gombert (1992:13) refers to the epilinguistic as ‘unconscious epilinguistic activity’, Buđevac *et al* (2009:124) state: ‘The first level of language development includes early epi-linguistic competence’, but continue: ‘children are not aware of its complex, rule-governed nature’. They assert that language in this phase is: ‘implicit, internal and un-reflected knowledge and consequently cannot be deliberately guided and performed.’

'Metalinguistic awareness' enables the language user to be alert to linguistic interactions, although quite what defines metalinguistic activity or metalinguistic skills is not wholly agreed by researchers in that field. Bialystok and Ryan (1985: 229) inform us that 'the range of tasks that have been used to assess metalinguistic awareness is enormous'. Language activities deemed 'metalinguistic' included: 'segmenting sentences or words into constituents, judging grammaticality, substituting words in various sentence constructions, and adjusting speech to accommodate special listener needs'. Their concerns are that 'no consensus' exists about what properly constitutes 'metalinguistic', and no agreement exists about the age at which metalinguistic abilities are thought to become evident.

Some broad agreement, however, has been reached about the constituents of metalinguistic development. Myhill and Jones (2015:843) summarise Gombert's analysis of his model of metalinguistic development of five sub-domains in the following, which are not necessarily hierarchical:

- Metaphonological: developing understanding of the sounds that build words
- Metalexical/metasemantic: developing understanding of word structures and word meanings;
- Metasyntactic: developing the ability to reason consciously about syntax and intentionally control it;
- Metapragmatic: developing understanding of how to use language appropriately in social contexts;
- Metatextual: developing understanding of text structure including cohesion and coherence.

These sub-domains originally referred to the development of talk, but can apply equally well with metalinguistic development in relation to writing.

The learner in the 'metasyntactic' sub-domain will realise that employing language involves a degree of control and decision-making. According to Myhill (2011:253) 'writing is always an act of selecting, shaping reflecting and revising'. So, even the youngest writers must have an actual and potential depository of language knowledge - metalinguistic knowledge - from which to draw in the exercising of decision-making described above. Early signs of this

control are evidenced by most children in the oral language position which precedes writing, but it becomes an essential requirement at the onset of writing; a more formal, more demanding language skill. Most children will encounter their earliest formal writing tuition at their first school attendance, at which time their potential metalinguistic abilities will have been stimulated and start to develop.

Acquisition of the first linguistic stage, according to Gombert (1992:186), suggests that children pick up skills from adults, from the positive and negative feedback, accumulating a storage ‘in memory of a multiplicity of unifunctional pairs’. At the earliest stages they display an ‘initial level of automation of linguistic behaviour’. They gain ‘feedback relating to production’, but the responses they make are never interpretative...simply an action’. As they grow, children acquire ‘epilinguistic control’ (1992:188), enabling them to ‘repair’ linguistic mistakes, yet unable to express why they occurred. Gombert claims (1992:190) that a keen involvement in language leads to a richer linguistic knowledge and understanding. It ‘triggers’ the appearance of linguistic awareness, evidenced by the child’s increased employment of a metalanguage – the language about language.

3.5.5. Grammar as a sub-section of metalanguage

This section will be concerned with the relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and successful writing. Little research has considered the interactions of writing and metalinguistic knowledge in older school pupils, aged 9 to 16. Arguments about how much writing depends on metalinguistic understanding have been waged for decades, some points of view not always from educational positions. What much modern research, including my own, is seeking to understand is just how much explicit metalinguistic knowledge pupils need to become fluent and competent writers. Does good writing, indeed, rely on metalinguistic knowledge? Should all children be taught explicitly, and which children will benefit most from this sort of linguistically based programme?

Camps and Milian (2000:3) claim that many studies on written composition assume that there is ‘an interrelation between the act of writing and conscious knowledge and control of the text production and verbal processes’. A central challenge facing those who research in this field is: ‘How can knowledge on language and discourse and writing competence be integrated?’ For the

purposes of this study, the next layer of questions is particularly apt: we need to know ‘whether and how this knowledge on language and discourse appears in the composition’ (Camps and Milian, 2000:3), and ‘whether and how this knowledge about language and discourse appears in the composition process, whether and how other types of knowledge appear, which type of knowledge this is, and how it is made conscious and controlled’.

Dissenting voices, however, exist about how important it is to teach metalinguistic knowledge. Van Lier questions the value of metalinguistic knowledge, ‘measured in solitary demonstrations of knowledge’ (1998:136). He argues that being able to articulate knowledge is of less significance than being able to demonstrate it. Myhill *et al* (2011:143) pin point Van Lier’s concerns, positing that his claims that ‘metalinguistic knowledge’ is ‘not transferred into linguistic performance’ is central to the issue of whether grammar supports writing development.

Myhill and Jones do believe in the importance of metalinguistic knowledge in the writing process: suggesting the impossibility of writing without engaging in metalinguistic activity at some level’ (2015:841) Writing is one of the most complex and challenging cognitive activities humans undertake. Hayes and Flower (1980:39) claim that ‘turning verbal thought into text is a demanding task’, requiring, amongst other things, knowledge of the purpose of the writing, identification of the genre or type it will adopt, the needs and interests of the potential audience, as well as the orthographic skills that enable the piece of writing to become a permanent script. Myhill (2011:247) concluded, from the research referred to on page 86, by adding further: the ‘selection of ... syntactical structures, holding of local and global ideas in harmony, and the shaping of communicative messages for the intended audience’. Vitally, however: ‘the act of writing is always about making choices’ (Myhill, 2011:247), meaning that students must develop an awareness of the choices available to them, and ways in which meaning can be subtly changed. They should be assisted to recognise and understand, as Benveniste posits (1974), that they have to place themselves ‘above language’, to contemplate language from a distance, and to develop a reflexive and analytic attitude to employ in their quest to compose increasingly fluent, focused and accurate written material.

The National Curriculum revision of 1995, and the National Literacy Strategy of 1998 placed a renewed emphasis on explicit grammar teaching; a situation that has become a greater priority for pupils at the end of Key Stage 2, for pupils aged 11, and in secondary schools. Bialystok (1987:1999) argues that metalinguistic understanding involves two related components of language processing: analysis and control. *Analysis* is the ability to represent explicit and conscious knowledge' and *control* is 'the ability to selectively attend to and apply knowledge'. These tests only assess pupils' declarative grammar or language knowledge, not their procedural abilities which can only be demonstrated through their application of grammar knowledge in real text composition contexts.

Teachers unfamiliar with teaching language or grammar have concentrated more on details of grammar than the uses and effects to which that information can be put. Myhill (2011:247), commenting on the evidence of misinformed metalinguistic teaching, states that there is a tendency 'to see grammatical features rather formulaically as having intrinsic merit'. This includes the "adding more" phenomenon, where writers have "learned" that writing is supposedly improved by adding more adjectives, or short sentences, or connectives... learning entirely constructed in the classroom'. Too few teachers are confident teaching metalinguistic skills in relation to writing; a situation that can only be rectified by effective professional training (Jones & Chen, 2012; Myhill, 2005). Governments and policy-makers need to be informed of the sorts of knowledge teachers will require to teach the programmes successfully, ensuring their full preparedness. Gordon (2005) and Andrews (2005) discovered that teachers with secure linguistic knowledge were able to see beyond the superficial mistakes in their pupils' writing, enabling their pupils to make better progress.

Increased research has become more closely focused on what pupils know about language, and the relationship between the extent of that knowledge and the quality of their writing output. Myhill (2011:248) highlights the importance of understanding better how developing writers think about their emerging texts and 'how they make choices in the composing process', to bring about instructional pedagogies that enable writers to become confident authors of written texts'. A project conducted by the University of Exeter discovered much

about the metalinguistic knowledge, attitudes and problems encountered by teachers and pupils, related to writing in those classrooms. Many Year 8 pupils, aged twelve and thirteen, subscribed to a range of misconceptions they had been taught in their English lessons and had a ‘vestigial’ knowledge only, unable to match their partial definitions ‘to words in text’ (Myhill, 2011:154).

3.5.6. The Role of Metalanguage in Writing

This section will be concerned with exploring the part that metalanguage, or knowledge of the language of language, plays in writing development. It will seek to answer questions such as: does explicit knowledge of linguistic terms improve the writing abilities of students? Can children as young as nine years old understand grammar? Is language learning too abstract?

A subsection of the overall metalanguage of our language has to do with grammar and the terms associated with it. Because of an on-going debate about whether or not children should be explicitly taught the metalanguage of grammar has dominated much linguistic educational discussion, ‘very little genuine research attention has been accorded to the way pupils learn grammar and the problems and difficulties they face in acquiring metalinguistic knowledge’ (Myhill 2000:152). Issues also exist concerning what is known as the contrast between ‘declarative knowledge’ and ‘procedural knowledge’. Declarative knowledge is about ‘knowing that’; knowing the facts of whatever is being studied. Procedural knowledge is about ‘knowing how’, the application of that knowledge, gleaned in real situations. Much grammar teaching used to be driven by the ‘declarative’; teachers were accused of little more than labelling ‘parts of speech’ and basing much of their teaching on parsing decontextualised exercises. Procedural knowledge does not automatically develop from declarative knowledge – pupils can sometimes perform activities which they do not necessarily understand. Just as students may be able to describe a grammar rule, control it through exercises, but fail to apply it in a real-life context.

An important way of increasing pupils’ metalinguistic understanding is to teach them the metalanguage of our language. This comprises the vocabulary of technical terms associated with the process of writing (e.g. sentence, clause, phrase), making possible sophisticated discussion and analysis about the language at work. Myhill and Jones (2015:843) warn that metalanguage and

grammar are often understood to be one and the same in some research findings. This is not so; grammar is only one sub-section of a much bigger bank of linguistic/ text related terminology. They name at least three more aspects of metalanguage, likely to be encountered by older students: literary, genre-specific and process. Mertz and Yovel (2003: 250) widen the purpose of metalanguage, regarding it as having the capacity to create, structure and form language and on-going speech. They claim that a ‘core function of metalanguage is its role in constituting and framing on-going discourse’ (2003:253). Space only allows for the area of metalanguage dealing with grammar to be considered here.

French (2010) argues that in the debates about whether young school children should be taught grammar at all, ‘questions about how best one might go about teaching such grammar have been secondary and often irrelevant.’ But Myhill *et al* offer a clear reason why such endeavours can cause problems. Whilst agreeing with Robinson (2005:39) that ‘the role of metalanguage is highly significant in the ongoing development of pupils’ language abilities’, they are concerned about ‘a danger that the terminology obscures the learning focus of the lesson, or indeed becomes the learning focus’ (2012a:105). Other research warns that to concentrate on naming and labelling contributes little to language learning and, particularly, writing development (Fearn & Farnon, 2005 and Mulder, 2010). ‘Weak linguistic knowledge,’ assert Myhill *et al*, could lead to an over-emphasis upon ‘identification of grammar structures without fully acknowledging the conceptual or cognitive implications of that teaching’ as well as leading to sterile teaching, ’divorced from the realities of language in use’ (2012a:142). These practices earned traditional forms of grammar teaching a negative reputation in the past. Keith (1997:8) is direct about the proper positioning of the metalanguage: ‘grammatical concepts come first and then the terminology.’

Robinson (2005:39) reports she has become convinced ‘the role of metalanguage is highly significant in the on-going development of pupils’ language abilities.’ Linguistic reflexivity, the use of language to talk about language, ‘is a fundamental element in everyday linguistic interaction’ (2005:40). Metalanguage, she claims, is not merely restricted to

English/language learning lessons, but used by teachers of different subjects, focusing on the features which characterise the genres associated with each subject, and also a metalanguage of creative and figurative texts to bear in mind. She claims that two sorts of metalanguage have developed: the ‘lay’ – mostly to be found in schools, and the ‘professional’, the province of academics and researchers. She conducted a study to discover how big was the part knowledge of the metalanguage played in the writing process, and found that all her subjects, of whatever ability, ‘utilised terminology in a high proportion of their responses’ (2005:43). Pupils demonstrated their ability to use appropriate terminology ‘to reveal some of what they know about language.’ Robinson believed ‘the sentence’ was the most difficult concept to teach and for pupils to explain.. She concluded from her study, that the ‘use of metalanguage terminology in itself is not indicative of higher ability’. She recommended that pupils should have more practice discussing metalanguage, and be encouraged to reduce the parroting of what teachers have said, to speak in their own words and advance their controlling and decision-making skills. Her final conclusion was that whilst knowledge of metalanguage is not the most important feature of writing progress, ‘it seems to be one necessary factor in language use and development, and seems to be significant in terms of both range and context of application to pupils’ written language development’ (2005:53).

Myhill’s research also describes the range of metalanguage knowledge witnessed in lessons, including instances of other metalanguages, specifically ‘literary’ metalanguage, employing terms such as ‘enjambment’, ‘simile’, ‘prose’ and ‘alliteration’. Myhill (2011:249) informs us that metalinguistic discussion about the use of language in composition can take place without a metalanguage; perhaps when focusing on a feature such as the ‘effect’ of a piece of composition. Her research discovered much about the close relationship between the confidence and expertise teachers had in knowing the metalanguage of grammar and the quality of their students’ knowledge and understanding.

For instance, the study revealed that, even though the relationship is a complex one, teacher subject knowledge has significance. Teachers with an insecure knowledge of grammar were more likely to depend on the lesson notes

provided by the researchers. Pupils in the intervention groups demonstrated enhanced metalinguistic awareness as a result of their teachers' subject knowledge. Research suggests that teachers who embed grammar in the teaching of writing 'making connections for writers between a particular grammar feature and its possible effect in writing' will bring about improved writing development; 'not the naming or identification of grammatical features' (Myhill *et al*, 2010, on-line).

3.5.7. Summary of the literature review

As much as I have attempted to gain a full picture of the issues concerning this topic through my reading, there are inevitable gaps. Much research of personal epistemology involves teachers of mathematics and science, with few findings drawn from the social sciences and none specifically focused on the teaching of grammar. Similar difficulties were experienced when I was exploring what research had discovered of 'teacher knowledge'. Once again there was a heavy bias towards the mathematical, scientific and technological, but virtually nothing relating to the teaching of English/language and what little there is mostly applies to secondary school teaching.

Nevertheless, Perry's scheme of epistemic development (1970) outlining the stages (he preferred to call them 'positions') of a trajectory describing attitudes to do with learning, from a very trusting acceptance to the acknowledgement of multiple and, possibly, conflicting 'truths', offered an important comparator against which to gauge the cognitive and affective perspectives of my research teachers. Hofer and Pintrich (2002) brought together the findings from many diverse studies all operating under the broad title of 'personal epistemologies', 'spanning a wide range of intellectual territory' (2002:xi), although very little of the material related directly to teachers' learning. There was, however, sufficient overlapping research evidence to apply to my sample.

Each of the five developmental models of personal epistemologies share a common view that individuals move through some specified sequence in their ideas about knowledge and knowing, as their ability to make meaning evolves. (Hofer, 2001:356)

Shulman has contributed much to the development of teachers and teaching since the 1980s, by pointing out the disconnect between subject knowledge and appropriate pedagogy. He addressed this alleged deficiency by proposing a

third dimension to teacher practice; pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) exclusive to teachers, he claimed (1987a). Despite many critics of his suggestions (Stones, 1992; Brown and McIntyre, 1993:8; Ball, Thames and Phelps, 2008:392), and his own uncertainty about some terms, Shulman's intervention in this field has, nevertheless, brought about changed professional thinking and new directions in teacher practices, 'putting to rest the arguments we have had over the years about whether process or content is the more important' (Brandt, 1992:18). His assertions have direct resonance with my study. I am interested in exploring the interface of new grammar knowledge and changed teaching behaviours. But his recommendations go beyond simply knowing the information to be taught, it also requires teachers to know their pupils very well, and to be aware of how really effective learning can be brought about (1998: 380).

Because few primary teachers have been taught grammar at any stage of their education, most have only a limited knowledge of it (Hudson & Walmsley, 2005). Indeed, many teachers are surprised to discover multiple grammars. Despite the National Curriculum requirements in respect to the teaching of grammar, it has remained a gap in most teachers' learning. Not being confident with grammar leads to constrained pedagogy and blind reliance on, often, unsuitable resources. Like academic linguists, some teachers are unsure of the most secure definition of 'grammar'. A lasting problem of grammar study is that research will inevitably be conducted in the language it will be looking into. Halliday (2002:384) suggested the term 'grammatics' to differentiate the language study articles from the artefact 'grammar' being examined.

Grammar is only one feature of a bigger concept, known as 'metalinguistics'; generally regarded as concerned with the difference between understanding and producing language and the adoption of a more reflexive attitude, to do with linguistic choice. Gombert (1992) recommends the terms 'epilinguistic' for that early developmental area of employing language to respond to the environment and share needs. In turn, language users move into the 'metalinguistic' phase, increasingly capable of reflecting on and consciously pondering about their writing and talk. This objectification of language enables it to be seen as an artefact, the subject matter of language teaching, although Nesdale and Tunmer

(1984) caution that 'given the newness of the field, and the complex and multi-faceted nature of the construct, refined and generally accepted methods of assessing metalinguistic awareness are still in the process of being developed'.

Whilst research material was available that looked into the issues of grammar, few studies explored how grammar learning actually played out in classrooms, and certainly not in classrooms of primary children. So there would seem to be an important missing space relating to the discovery of what teachers of children aged 10 and 11 know about grammar, and how they plan for and actually teach grammar to their classes. It is this space which my study seeks to address and through which I hope to make an original contribution to knowledge. This study sets out to develop theoretical understanding of the inter-relationships between teachers' personal epistemologies related to grammar, their grammatical subject knowledge, and their pedagogical practices in the classroom.

In the light of these deficiencies it is, therefore, of concern to discover the answers to the central research question driving this study is: **What subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in primary schools in the context of writing?** Accompanied by the following related supplementary questions:

What are teachers' personal epistemologies of grammar in the context of writing?

What pedagogical and subject knowledge barriers do teachers experience when attempting to teach grammar in the context of writing?

How does the grammar knowledge of primary teachers influence how they teach grammar in the context of writing?

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1. Aims – Why this research matters

This particular research matters because primary teachers of literacy and secondary teachers of English in England have been required, through national policy, to teach grammar as a part of their literacy curriculum. Yet, there is no published or shared overview of what the subject term ‘grammar’ might mean from teacher to teacher and school to school, nor from phase to phase. Also lacking is any substantial professional guidance which might assist or make clear the ostensible reason for teaching grammar: the improvement of pupils’ writing.

My central research question - What subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in primary schools in the context of writing? – becomes salient in such a pedagogical and educational vacuum. Of equal supporting importance, in the current circumstances, are the supplementary questions:

What are teachers’ personal epistemologies of grammar in the context of writing?

What pedagogical and subject knowledge barriers do teachers experience when attempting to teach grammar in the context of writing?

How does the grammar knowledge of primary teachers influence how they teach grammar in the context of writing?

Primary teachers are mostly non-specialists with regard to teaching grammar, their situation explored in earlier chapters. Their knowledge and attitudes to do with the issues of teaching and worthwhileness of grammar in the primary curriculum have usually been acquired in a piecemeal manner. Until recently there has been limited supporting material to support and encourage the teaching of grammar to L1 (i.e. first English language speakers) language learners aimed to improve writing in schools with children of any age, but there was almost none concerned with the area of teaching in primary schools, the focus of this research.

New publications by Myhill *et al* (2016), Lury (2016) and Horton & Bingle (2014) all contain information about improving provision of grammar in primary

classrooms. An updated and improved *Glossary* (DfE,2014), training programmes provided by The English and Media Centre, and the *Englicious Grammar website* (englicious.com) all have the potential to develop teacher knowledge and improve pedagogies.

4.2. From paradigms to methods

This study, linked to teacher attitudes and their necessary knowledge, will be interpretive and exploratory, able to call on only limited previous observed practice in this field.

Academic research, 'the systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomena' (Kerlinger, 1970:11), has to meet many strict requirements to be regarded as valid and worth taking seriously. A clear logical relationship has to exist between the different stages and features of the research, and its rationale. Most research guides recommend that the first consideration is deciding the 'paradigm' in which the research will be situated. Cohen *et al* (2011:5) state that since Kuhn's 'ground-breaking' work in the early 1960s, 'approaches to methodology in research have been seen to reside in paradigms', which in this context means a way of 'looking at or researching phenomena'; it is a means of conceiving 'social reality', underpinned by four sets of assumptions, according to Burrell and Morgan (1979:23), which are: ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods.

Scotland (2012:9) reminds us that knowledge, and the ways of discovering it, are subjective. At the beginning of all serious research should be the recognition of an 'ontology', from which, according to Grix (2002), one's epistemological and methodological positions follow. The concept of ontology, according to Cohen *et al*, concerns claims about the notion of social reality, which touches on 'the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated'; explaining that one's ontological position depends on the researcher's understanding of social reality either as existing 'out there' in the world, waiting to be discovered, or coming about by developing as a construct in people's consciousness (2011:5).

The second set of assumptions is said to be, by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and a number of other writers of research methods (Wellington, 2000; Cohen & Manion, 1994; Walford, 1991), the ‘epistemological’; having to do with all aspects of knowledge: its nature, its acquisition, its veracity and how it is communicated. Scientific knowledge is often described as ‘hard knowledge’, whilst knowledge in the realms of social sciences is regarded by some critics as ‘soft’. These assumptions follow natural paths from the two sets of alternative ontologies.

Having related the preferred paradigm to the relevant ontology, and those two assumptions in turn being linked to an appropriate epistemology, the researcher is in a position to consider the nature of the methodology to be adopted. Wellington (2000:22) defines methodology as: ‘the activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying the methods you use’, and claims it is impossible to judge a piece of research without knowing its methodology. This essential feature of research will embrace the selected paradigm, the ontology and epistemology, and act as the collective term for the research design and the various instruments employed to gather the data necessary to discover the validity of the answers to the central research questions. There have traditionally been two main methodologies: the quantitative, usually comprising numerical findings to answer its questions; and the qualitative, depending on observation and interview, to explain behaviours. These research features are discussed in detail in the next sections.

4.3. Research paradigm and theoretical position

4.3.1. Research paradigm

A ‘paradigm’ is a way of regarding the world and this viewpoint will have a bearing on all aspects of any sort of academic research (Schwandt, 1989:379). Kuhn (1970:12), who coined the term ‘paradigm’, regarded it as a set of generalisations, beliefs and values of a ‘community of specialists’. My qualitative research project is positioned within the ‘interpretive paradigm’, with its ‘primary focus...on trying to understand particular people and events in specific socio-historical circumstances’ (Hammersley, 2013:27). Hammersley states that interpretivism ‘carries a range of implications’ for research, including adopting ‘an exploratory orientation’, and – importantly, to research such as

mine - learning to understand the 'distinctive perspectives of the people involved' (2013:29).

'The ontological position of interpretivism,' states Scotland (2012:11) 'is relativism'; a view that holds that reality is subjective, and differs from person to person (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:110). I am concerned with paying attention to and exploring matters of teaching behaviour, different degrees of subject and teaching knowledge conducted in unique, unrepeatable lessons, crafted by eight very diverse people, in six different schools. This sort of data cannot be expressed in numerical form. The positivist paradigm may 'look for explanation of behaviour', but it cannot come up with meaning (Poetschke, 2003:2). 'Meaning', in this instance, will be made in the mind of the researcher; it does not exist as a fully formed phenomenon, waiting to be discovered 'out there' somewhere in the world.

The selection of this paradigm should better enable me to 'discover the 'logic' or 'rationality' of what teachers are experiencing and have to know, in relation to the teaching of grammar in primary schools. My study will be situated in the interpretive paradigm, as it seeks to elicit the thinking and understanding demonstrated by the participating teachers throughout the course of the project. Cohen *et al* (2011:15) state that despite 'different epistemological viewpoints', those researching the social sciences do not believe that 'human behaviour' is 'governed by general, universal laws, and characterized by underlying regularities'. They go on to suggest that the 'social world' can only be understood from the point of view of the individuals who 'are part of the on-going action being investigated'. There could not be one single model of those individuals. Each one of them is separate and unique: in the variety of their backgrounds; the ways they teach; their motives for participating in this research, and the degree of change brought about to their own knowledge base and, subsequently, to the skills of their pupils, by acquiring more grammar knowledge and practice designed to bring about writing improvement.

Pring, discussing the merits of various research approaches, declares that, 'if one wants to know something, one goes out and has a look' (2000:33). By this statement, I understand him to mean that this form of data has to be discovered in the wider world. It is not obtained by studying in a laboratory and controlling

the elements which are being researched. The particular teaching being witnessed and the types of data gathered through interview could not be replicated in the hands of any other group of eight teachers, even within the same schools. The ‘key feature’ of this method, Pring believes, is that there will be a ‘consistency of approach’, because whatever will have taken place will have been seen or heard by myself, the researcher: the one consistent feature of the study. This project has attempted to maintain that maxim throughout its course. The study will not be ‘generalizable’, but cognizant that ‘the uniqueness of each context does not entail uniqueness in every respect’ (Pring, 2000:119), the experiences under review will reflect the practices and beliefs which are shared by many primary teachers in schools across the country, as I have learned through much of my professional life in education.

4.3.2. Ontological position

‘Ontology is the science or theory of being. It concerns the question of how the world is built: “is there a ‘real’ world ‘out there’ that is independent of our knowledge of it?” (Poetschke, 2003:1).

The ontological and epistemological positions of any researcher are vital components of the research design. These two elements play an important shaping role in deciding the theory and method of the subsequent research programme; they are the foundation stones of the inquiry. Marsh and Furlong (2002:17) describe the positions that researchers adopt as a consequence of their ontological and epistemological positions as, ‘more like a skin than a sweater: they cannot be put on or taken off whenever the researcher sees fit.’ In turn, these beliefs will activate a particular related methodology, which will have a strong influence determining the types of methods to be employed in the research process.

Crotty (1998:42) contends that any research requires a framework of four major elements, which include: a paradigm worldview (e.g. ontology, epistemology); a theoretical lens (e.g. feminist, racial, social science theories); the methodological approach (e.g. ethnography, experiment, mixed method), and methods of data collection (e.g. interviews, checklists, instruments). Blakie (2000:8), focusing in more closely on this selection of paradigms, states that ‘ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality’. So, with this comment in mind, it is possible to see how ‘different

scholarly traditions', buried in 'fundamentally different cultural contexts' can have 'diverging views of the world and differing assumptions underpinning their particular approaches to social inquiry' (Grix, 2000:177). An individual's ontological position is their answer to the question: 'what is the nature of the social and political reality to be investigated?' (Hay, 2002:63).

Those researchers who believe there is 'a real world' out there, waiting to be discovered, are motivated in what is known as a 'positivist' paradigm. They subscribe to a view that knowledge is objective, hard and capable of being transmitted in tangible form (Opie, 2004:13). Their evidence can be translated into numbers. Those researchers who take an opposite view of the world; who see knowledge as softer, subjectively based and created in the mind of the individual, are deemed to place their research in an 'interpretive' paradigm. In times past these two paradigms were regarded as immutably separate, with no possible overlaps, but research fashions have subsequently changed, so that today it is not unusual to see some researchers employing 'mixed methods' (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011), where aspects of both sorts of research share a relationship. Indeed, in my own study, which is mostly based in the qualitative paradigm, some evidence of teacher grammar knowledge was obtained using the quantitative method of a grammar test.

This research is concerned with exploring and identifying what teachers of the upper two year groups in primary schools, teaching children aged 9 to 11, need to know and understand if they are to employ their knowledge of grammar to become successful teachers of writing. The stance taken in this research recognises that every intervention in a classroom is a socially-mediated enterprise. Each classroom is unique in almost any way it might be regarded. Every classroom has its own individual dynamic, its own community of writers and writing practices. Each classroom is dependent upon the extent of teacher knowledge, and pedagogical styles will vary within and between schools. Thus, whilst the outcome of this study might determine how effective was the grammar training, and inform understanding of the different ways that training was realised in different classrooms, and the different ways it is experienced by different students, there is no possibility that the training could be – however effective it might have been regarded – simply replicated in different school

settings. There is no such thing as a ‘real world’; each classroom is constructed by its inhabitants interacting in unique ways at every succeeding moment.

This research has not been designed to identify any one single truth about the teaching of grammar to improve writing, but is about recognising that the training directed at all eight teachers, however consistently it may have been framed and presented, will result in multiple manifestations of practice, depending on: the grammar background of each teacher; the way it was perceived and understood by each individual teacher; the nature of the classes they teach, their personal epistemologies and the aims of learning they will be attempting to achieve.

4.4. Researcher position

Whilst probing the beliefs, knowledge and teaching approaches of the research participant teachers, I also acknowledge for my own part that I have a long personal history of involvement with the teaching of grammar in the context of writing, having formerly been an English teacher and subject inspector in my professional life. Wellington (2000:43) warns that, ‘The first task...is to question any assumptions about yourself: your own values, knowledge, motivation and prejudices.’ My conception of ‘grammar’ and the possible ways in which it might be taught, in a range of contexts, will be very different from the conceptual understanding of those same matters experienced by my participant teachers. My understanding of, and beliefs about, the potential for ‘grammar’ were very different from those particular teachers at the outset of the project, although they became more aligned as the project proceeded.

Contrary to some opinions that teaching grammar is a poor use of teaching time in primary schools, leading to limited improvement in writing ability and achievement, I firmly believe from personal experience of teaching and observing in many classrooms, that learning about grammar, framed in motivating and exploratory ways, such as the meaning-orientated approach, influenced by the functional tradition contained within this research, can be successfully integrated into the teaching of writing to bring about improvement in composition. Just what those possible preparations might include is the central enquiry of this research. Scepticism of this position has, in the past, been prevalent because the teaching of grammar in primary schools has mostly

been undertaken by teachers who have been ill-prepared for the task, or who have failed to explore how best to use their acquired grammar knowledge in a teaching of writing context. They invariably employed now discredited traditional methods of teaching which had more to do with supposed rules of language than of its meaning. Ontologically, I am aware that the reality being researched ‘can never be independent of the person researching it’ (Pring, 2000:45). Lichtman (2013:25) supports this position, declaring that the researcher’s role is ‘critical’ to qualitative research, as it is through the ‘conduit’ or ‘filter’ of the researcher’s beliefs and knowledge that what is to be studied and who is to be studied is decided. Nevertheless, the greatest care has been taken to prevent the project reflecting any bias on my part. I have attempted to ensure that the collecting of reactions and responses of the participating teachers has entirely reflected their own perceptions, interpretations and understandings relating to the teaching of grammar.

4.5. Epistemological position

‘If ontology is about what we may know, then epistemology is about how we come to know what we know, (Grix, 2000:177)

Epistemology is concerned with the scope and nature of knowledge, the different ways of gaining and validating knowledge, and dealing with the vital questions of what knowledge is and how it can be acquired and transmitted. The questions it asks might be concerned with: what criteria qualify and justify something as ‘knowledge’; what standards of evidence we should use in seeking truths about the world and human experience; how we can distinguish between truth, belief and falsehood; what are the sources of knowledge and the structure and limits of knowledge? Its study enables us to be more certain about what we think we know, and can rely on as evidence. Epistemological debate has to do with *empiricism* (a claim that knowledge can be derived from the external world through systematic observation) and *rationalism* (which is concerned with gaining knowledge from reasoning). There is more than one type of knowledge: *a priori* knowledge – or knowledge that is automatically known apart from experience – and *posteriori* knowledge, a knowledge that is gained from experience, being two such examples.

Whereas ontology, which is philosophically closely related to epistemology, is concerned with being and regarding the world from a particular viewpoint, epistemology requires us to adopt a position in relation to what we perceive as truth depending on the view of the world we have adopted. Some sorts of knowledge can be obtained by experiment and this is likely to be the approach to discovering or justifying ‘truth’ undertaken by a positivist researcher. Positivists believe that ‘research should be designed to yield objective and scientific evidence’ (Lichtman, 2013:24). They believe that it is important to stay outside the realms of whatever is being researched, for the sake of greater objectivity. They are more interested in the ‘whatness’ being revealed by their findings. Interpretivist researchers, on the other hand, are interested in the ‘whyness’ of their evidence. They want to explore how the subject of investigation understands their worlds, and will be keen to probe, the ‘lived experience’ about which the research is focused. Scrutiny will be built around discovering what meaning the subject or its interventions might be. The researchers might be participants in whatever activity is being regarded, but they are unlikely to be anonymous and detached, realising that their presence will affect, if not define, whatever situation is taking place. The purpose of social science research is to understand the social reality of the world; and the ‘truths’ that such research yields will require explanation in prose, not numbers.

According to Gialdino (2009: on line), epistemology ‘raises many questions’. These include asking about: ‘how reality can be known; the relationship between the knower and what can be known; the characteristics, the principles, and the assumptions that guide the process of knowing’. Finally, there is a question about whether there is a possibility that the process can be ‘shared and repeated by others’ to check its quality and reliability. Mason (1996:4) and Gobo (2005:on line) both claim that qualitative research makes use of flexible analysis, and explanatory methods, sensitive to both the studied people’s special features and the social context in which any data is produced.

This research will be interpretivist by nature; that is, the knowledge obtained is constructed through social interaction, rather than seeking objective knowledge already situated ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered. Researchers working within this tradition analyse the meanings people confer upon their own and others’ actions It will be ‘predicated upon the view that a strategy is required

that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman, 2001:12). 'The stress' of this approach, according to Bryman (2001:264), 'is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants'. 'As researchers,' writes Darlaston-Jones, 'we must instead utilise methods of enquiry that accept and value the role of the subjective rather than the objective in our attempts to understand phenomena from the idiographic perspective' (2007: 21). It is an approach that emphasizes validity, possibly at some cost in terms of reliability and representativeness, discussed more fully later in this chapter.

4.6. Methodology

"methodology is a system of ontological and epistemological assumptions on which research is to be based" Noorderhaven, 2004:91.

As this research is situated in the interpretivist paradigm, the scope of its data-gathering interests is focused on people in their professional lives and the natural events in which they participate, supported by observation and flexible interviewing, designed to 'approximate with ordinary conversation' Hammersley (2013:5). Yet, whilst the study was framed within qualitative research methodologies, the participant teachers and their colleagues agreed to take part in a written test at the beginning of the project and the remaining participant teachers also agreed to be re-tested at its conclusion, yielding numerical results usually associated with quantitative research. This additional element accords with Wellington's assertion that 'qualitative research can never be complete fiction; it must depend on some inter-subjective (if not 'objective') reality...methods can and should be mixed' (2000:17).

4.6.1. Qualitative research

There are numerous definitions of the 'qualitative' in the research literature, but few of them are capable of entirely engaging the whole picture of this paradigm. So, Lichtman (2013:7) writes: 'I find myself struggling to provide you with a definition that is meaningful, inclusive and yet conveys the diversity within the broad term qualitative research.' Nevertheless, the principles shared by most definitions of this paradigm include terms such as 'subjective', 'personal' and 'collaborative' (Wellington, 2000:17), or 'words' (Bryman, 2008:366), 'natural'

(Hammersley, 2000:1) and ‘human’, ‘actions’, ‘involvement’ and ‘small-scale’ (Cohen *et al*, 2011:46). The qualitative approach is based on the close proximity of the researcher to the activities of the research, and its participants. The research is based in real-life situations, not contrived in laboratories. It does not require an initial theory to worry at, but endorses the practice of theories being inductively developed and changed in the light of new data, in an iterative (backwards and forwards) framework. The outcomes of qualitative research are predominantly comprised of words and explanation. Alasuutari claims that its most vital feature is a particular kind of analysis, very like ‘riddle-solving’ (1995:7).

Suter (2006:41) lists a number of pointers which describe the foregrounded features of quantitative research. These include: the testing of specific hypotheses, usually stated in advance of the research; it incorporates methods which can be analysed statistically, often using tables and charts; the findings can be generalised beyond the sample to a wider population and the researcher attempts to stay at some distance from the subject of research, to minimise the possibilities of bias. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is comfortable about the hypotheses emerging after careful exploration, observation or interaction. The description of observations might be reported through narrative, and researchers in this paradigm believe that the educational outcomes of this approach are too complex to reduce to numbers.

Therefore, the selection of lesson observation as a research tool, accompanied by semi-structured interviews of the teachers being observed, are the most dependable available collection of empirical methods to discover possible answers to my research questions. They also require me to be ‘in the field’, observing and meeting with real people. These devices enable me to ascertain most reliably what each of these teachers has perceived and understood from the training and their subsequent teaching experiences, recognising that there will be many reasons why they will not all have moved in a similar developmental direction, nor at the same speed. The grammar ‘test’ has been introduced to provide some evidence about their developing ‘declarative’ knowledge (i.e. their raw knowledge of word classes); a necessary background to this study.

4.7. Research Design, in outline

To provide data that answers the core and supplementary research questions, the following research design has been constructed. Eight volunteer primary teachers – five female and three male - were recruited to the programme. They all agreed to be ‘tested’ about their knowledge of grammar before the actual research programme began and then to be ‘retested’ at its conclusion. The teachers also agreed to be interviewed on three occasions; once at the beginning of the project, before any training had been conducted, once after approximately nine months into its operation and, finally, at the project’s conclusion, after fifteen months of participation.

All eight teachers then submitted to training events designed and presented by myself, alongside their school colleagues, intended to increase their knowledge about teaching grammar for the purposes of improving writing, based on a meaning-orientated approach, influenced by the functional tradition. These participant teachers then paid increased attention to teaching grammar expected to be a component of the teaching of writing in their curricula. They were observed teaching in at least 3 lessons with ‘substantial’ grammar content, over a period of fifteen months

This research design (see table 2) is situated in the interpretivist paradigm, which becomes the template and binding driver for the different stages of ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects, already explored. The decision to adopt an interpretivist paradigm fashions the sorts of thinking in this project, its approaches, methods and analysis of data.

What subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in the context of writing

	Sample Size	Sample Type	Data? Collection	Research instrument	Data analysis
What are teachers' personal epistemologies of grammar in the context	8 teachers	Convenience sample	Initial interview Procedural interview End of project	Semi structured interview schedule Semi-structured	Inductive coding Inductive coding Inductive

of writing?			interview	interview Semi- structured interview	coding
How does the grammar knowledge of primary teachers influence how they teach grammar in the context of writing?	8 teachers	Convenience sample	Lesson observations 3 per teacher over 4 terms (24 lessons)	Observation schedule Video recording of lessons	Inductive coding Analysis of pedagogic knowledge
What pedagogical and subject knowledge barriers do teachers experience when attempting to teach grammar in the context of writing?	c40 teachers from 5 schools 8 'focus' teachers	Convenience sample Convenience sample	Grammar test – pre/post training Lesson observations	Grammar test Video recording Observation schedule	Statistical analysis of pre and post research grammar test Inductive coding
What subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in primary schools in the context of writing?	8 teachers 8 teachers	Convenience sample Convenience sample	Lesson observation Initial interview Procedural interview End of project interview	Observation schedule Semi-structured interviews	Inductive coding Inductive coding

Table 2. Research design

4.8. Sample of participant teachers

At a meeting of headteachers of primary schools in a partnership group in a small town in the East Midlands, I requested their help in the recruitment of eight volunteer teachers, teaching children in Years 5 and 6 to participate in this project. Eight teachers - five female and three male - volunteered to take part.

They ranged in experience from a newly qualified teacher in the first year of teaching to a Key Stage 2 leader, with seven years' practice, and in age from 23 years to 50 years. (See table 5, page 139)

The type of sample of teachers who participated in this research is classified as a 'non-probability' sort, known as a 'convenience sample', or 'accidental or opportunity' sampling (Cohen *et al*, 2011:155). A convenience sample is one that comprises people who happen to be available and who were prepared to take part; they are not randomly or systematically selected. In this instance they were eight teachers who volunteered from four primary schools, all in a shared locality. The schools were approached and asked to supply two or more teachers responsible for Years 5 and 6. A weakness of the 'convenience sample' is that it cannot act as representative of the whole population, although there was never an intention or possibility of this sample adopting that role, as it depended on volunteers. All but one of the teachers were in their twenties and thirties, with varying length of teaching experience. As it happened, all eight teachers were of white Caucasian heritage.

Whilst there was no scientific selection of participants, these individuals resemble many other primary teachers nationally in that six of the group had received very limited or no grammar teaching in their own schooldays, university or teacher training courses. In many INSET sessions I have conducted, sometimes involving more than 100 teachers, I always ask those present whether or not they have received grammar teaching or training in their own backgrounds, and they overwhelming respond in the negative. Two teachers in this study had received some grammar instruction as part of their modern languages training. None of them were familiar in any respect with the selected model of grammar underpinning this project, so in that sense they started from the same position. The acquaintanceship with the grammar of other languages as a way of accessing learning in English grammar is occasionally mentioned by some teachers as their only formal linguistic background.

One of the reasons for recruiting eight teachers was that I expected some attrition, that is, the withdrawal of a few people, and I hoped to finish the project with an acceptably credible number. Two of the teachers did, in fact, leave the

project for reasons totally unconnected with it, but I was able to interview both of them twice, which yielded some helpful data, even though I was unable to gain the same fuller picture of their experiences as I obtained from their colleagues who remained to the project's conclusion. The other six maintained their enthusiasm about and their committed participation in the study throughout. Eight teachers was the number selected in the first instance because I believed that it was a number I could manage. Bryman (2001:93) states, 'a sample size represents a compromise between the constraints of time and cost, the need for precision and a variety of other considerations'. Even with eight teachers I would have a minimum of 24 interviews to conduct, and I anticipated hours of transcribing, which turned out to be so. I was also conducting classroom lesson observations, all quite close to each other at different stages of the project, which required careful arranging and took up a lot of time to plan, shoot, view and analyse. More participants would have taken up time that I could not realistically have dedicated to the project.

4.9. Grammar test

An early activity of this research was concerned with discovering what the eight volunteer primary teachers knew and thought about grammar, and how they taught it as an element of their teaching of writing. It was also necessary to discover if the teachers in my study had made personal progress in their own knowledge and understanding of grammar in the context of writing as a result of their participation in the project. Therefore, to have some raw data at the commencement of the project for comparative purposes at its conclusion was essential.

To begin this process, I devised a short grammar 'test' seeking their knowledge of some of the more straightforward, fundamental aspects of language learning. My research questions included the discovery of the personal epistemologies experienced by these teachers as they passed through this training and learning process. Other research questions related to exploring teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge. Early answers to these enquiries would be partly supplied as a result of administering this test. I also wanted to discover if their ability to recognise the different parts of the metalanguage and the functions they were performing were at all improved at the end of the process compared to when it began. To this end, a 50 question test (Appendix 10) was

devised which included knowledge of word classes, phrases and clauses and other related matters, such as ‘the passive voice’, in the context of a passage from Philip Pullman’s novel for children: *The Firework Maker’s Daughter*.

In fact, all the teachers of the four schools in which these participants taught at the beginning of the research were prepared to submit to the test preceding the training in their school, allowing me to discover how close the scores of the participating teachers were relative to the results of their colleagues. Unfortunately, it was not possible to retest the whole original sample at the conclusion of the project, as some teachers had changed their schools, and it was more difficult to arrange a follow-up retesting situation with those teachers. Some teachers also found the test to be uncomfortable and were reluctant to be tested again. All the participant teachers, however, were prepared to be retested. The results and implications of these tests are discussed in a later chapter.

The first test was administered to 47 primary teachers in all, including the 8 project teachers. The other 39 teachers taught in schools alongside the participant group, in the original four schools in which the participant teachers worked, at the commencement of the training intervention. This was a useful first guide to assessing teacher knowledge of grammar at the outset. The maximum possible score was 50.

	Mean score	Range	Standard deviation
Result of 47 primary teachers (including 8 project teachers)	22.74	10 - 36	7.98
Result of 8 project teachers – before training	24.37	18 - 36	5.47
Result of 7 final project teachers – before training	22.71	18-27	3.49
Result of 7 project teachers – conclusion of project	31.29	23-39	6.54

Table 3 - Grammar ‘test’ results – 50 questions

The same test was administered to seven of the remaining teachers before the final interview, to gauge whether their own grammar knowledge had improved

as a result of both the training interventions they had experienced and their own teaching in a period of over a year. The mean score of the participant group was 31.29, an improvement of 5 marks. The range also improved: at the end of the project it was 23-39 marks, having been 18-27 in the first round of testing. The scores of the final seven teachers who took both tests indicated clearly that they had made progress in their learning of some parts of grammar, improving their mean score nearly 10 points. The teachers who were most comfortable teaching grammar and explored the issues of their pupils' language growth with the greatest intensity made the biggest improvements.

4.10. Outline of the research project

Before the grammar test was administered and the commencement of the training programme, the eight participant teachers were interviewed for the first time (see appendix 6 for question pro forma). These interviews were structured in a manner which would allow me to track their developing epistemologies and their linguistic, subject and pedagogical knowledges over time. I was interested to discover their grammar learning backgrounds, how they had been taught in their own school days, and how the linguistic matter they might have learned contributed to the way they planned and taught their language-based lessons.

After experiencing a half day training session conducted by myself, based on a meaning—orientated approach, influenced by the functional tradition, the eight teachers were encouraged to employ their new grammar knowledge with their pupils, whilst developing their own grammar epistemologies. Lesson observations, recorded on camera, were carried out in all eight classrooms during this stage. The second phase of the research involved discovering, through interview, what changes had taken place in their own attitudes and knowledge of grammar over the previous nine months since the training intervention, and how they had integrated those changed understandings into their planning and teaching, in the context of teaching writing (appendix 7 second interview questions). These second phase interviews were conducted during a period when recorded lesson observations were taking place in most classrooms. The final phase was designed to discover to what degree these teachers had integrated the teaching of grammar into their programmes for teaching writing, and if these teachers were able to report on any discernible improvements that might have taken place in pupils' writing. These interviews

(appendix 8, third interview questions) were once again conducted at the same time as classroom observations were being recorded with the remaining six teachers (two participants having left the project).

4.10.1. Semi-structured interviews

Uwe Flick, (Kvale, 2007) claims that ‘interviews are one of the major approaches in collecting data in qualitative research’. The interview, according to Cohen *et al* (2011:409), indicates an attitude to people which characterises them as more than ‘simply manipulable and data as somehow external to the individual’ to ‘regarding knowledge as generated by humans, often through conversations’. Yet, whilst Kvale suggests an interview is a conversation to meet the purposes of the interviewer, requiring advanced listening and questioning skills, Wellington (2000:72) goes further in claiming an interview is ‘rather more than a conversation with a purpose’. Kvale (2007:7) calls the qualitative research interview ‘a construction site for knowledge’.

Oppenheim (1992:65) makes a strong case for the primacy of the interview as the most effective research skill. He, too, stresses the necessity of developed interpersonal skills – ‘putting the respondent at ease, asking questions in an interested manner, noting the responses without upsetting the conversational flow, giving support without introducing bias’ - to gain the most productive outcomes. When taken seriously and carefully prepared for, he continues, ‘interviewing is a task of daunting complexity’.

Whilst there is no absolute agreement about the actual number of types of interview, some researchers asserting six, others eight or more (LeCompte and Priessle, 1993; Lincoln and Guba , 1985; Oppenheim, 1992), Wellington (2000:75) maintains there are three commonly recognised major sorts of interview, although there are many sub-divisions of each, stretching along a continuum. They are: the structured interview, the semi-structured interview and the unstructured interview. The first is really little more than a ‘face to face questionnaire’ (Wellington, 2000:75), where the interviewer has total control and asks only a range of fixed questions without deviation or embellishment. Unstructured interviews are more like guided conversations, which might veer in any unforeseen direction, possibly missing the focus of the exercise. Cohen *et al* (2011:412) insist on ‘fitness for purpose’ in selecting interview type: ‘the more one wishes to acquire unique, non-standardized, personalized information

about how humans view the world, the more one veers towards qualitative, open-ended, unstructured interviewing'. Opie (2004:118) states that 'the semi-structured interview will... impose an overall shape to the interview and help prevent aimless rambling'. I selected the semi-structured interview format for all the interviews with my participants, as they required a shared structure and questions common to all respondents, but still allowed a large degree of personal flexibility. So, separate matters raised by individual interviewees could be pursued and developed, whilst not losing sight of the core matters possible to be discovered.

All the interviewees allowed me to record the interviews on an unobtrusive audio recorder, not intimidated by its use. On one occasion the recorder developed a small problem, which meant I had to attempt to make notes as the interviewee was talking to me. I found it almost impossible to listen, write notes, wonder about the next question and all the other myriad of mental activities that interviewing demanded. It was a great relief when, after a second attempt, I was able to put the recorder back into working order, which helped to maintain the flow of natural conversation. I believe that the teachers found the experience to be positive, and within the boundaries of what Cohen *et al* call a 'social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data collection exercise' (2011:421).

The interviews were conducted in quiet, secluded spaces in the schools, beyond the hearing of other members of the school community. Confidentiality in this area, as well as the recorded lesson observations, was given as an assurance at the beginning of the project, and scrupulously adhered to. This promise fulfilled the requirement of 'informed consent' (Kvale, 2007). All the interviews were conducted with good humour and in a friendly spirit, and more than one of the teachers commented that they found the interviews a useful activity, enabling them to think back and evaluate their own teaching knowledge and practices.

The questions were open-ended, all requiring a developed, personal answer. In the first round of interviews I became more skilled at concentrating on the core research questions of the project and aligning the interview questions up with those guides, so that the answers were contributing relevantly to the

programme (Opie, 2004:115). All the teachers recognised how important their assistance was in supporting the study and willingly talked openly and at length.

The sorts of questions changed considerably as the research period unfolded. In the first interview I was seeking the teachers' background in respect to their own language learning. I wanted to discover their attitudes about the effectiveness of grammar to support writing, and the sorts of practices which took place to do with the teaching of grammar across their schools. In the second round I was exploring how well they had been able to assimilate the training into their work, how they had changed as teachers of grammar as a consequence of the training and the sorts of difficulties that they might have encountered. I was also interested in their changed personal epistemologies in respect of grammar generally. By the third interview I probed how far they thought they might have advanced along the personal epistemological trajectory of the sort outlined by Perry (1970), how their views of the nature and teaching of grammar might have changed. I sought their reflections on their own abilities as teachers and wider considerations about such philosophical issues as, 'who is in charge of grammar?'

All through this process I was keen to maintain the importance of the research questions, and they established the shape of the interview schedules. Whereas the participants were unsure and apprehensive at the beginning of this process, they responded with so much more confidence and assurance at its end. There was still much that most of them wanted to learn, but the majority had acquired a broader understanding of the whole topic, enabling them to rethink why grammar might be of use in their lessons, and in the sort of grammar they could most effectively teach. This meant that whilst the earlier interviews depended greatly on biography, the later ones were more reflective and wide-ranging. In the earliest interviews the teachers talked about grammar, as if it was at some distance from their work and their lives. At the end of the project they had become much more involved in the nature of language, and how it became a bigger presence in their classrooms.

The very first interview took nearly an hour to conduct, becoming rambling and woolly. I learned a number of important lessons about maintaining a clear focus, about the optimal length of time for an interview, to prevent tedium, and to keep

the research questions foregrounded. Subsequent interviews were between twenty and thirty minutes; enabling them to be sharper and more purposeful, with less digression. Teachers were happier to contribute half an hour of their time more readily, whereas an hour is too much to demand from professional people, usually arranged at the end of a school day. Another problem with the long interview is that it takes a considerable time to transcribe. I conducted all my transcriptions by myself, as a condition of my promise of confidentiality, and soon learned that transcribing five minutes of talk can take nearly an hour. I had 23 interviews to transcribe, all longer than seventeen minutes.

I have every reason to believe that the interviewees trusted me and were pleased to talk about their experiences. The interviewees seemed to be candid in their responses and provided honest and useful data. Because most of them were personally keen to improve their own teaching practices in respect of grammar, they were willing to openly discuss the issues that had concerned them, as well as their successes in the classroom. Kitwood (1997) explains that: 'if the interviewer does his (sic) job well (establishes rapport, asks questions in an acceptable manner, etc) and if the respondent is sincere and well motivated, accurate data may be obtained'. I believe those positive criteria applied to the interviews I conducted.

4.10.2. CPD training programme

After the teachers had taken the test and been interviewed for the first time, I conducted a series of training sessions in all four schools, with the whole staff. As most teachers were only aware of a prescriptive model of grammar, the programme I selected was based on the principles of functional approaches to grammar, incorporating rhetorical and contextualised descriptive grammars (see table 1, page 20). The emphasis was on developing classroom contextual situations for exploring and improving writing, in which writer choice and control were foregrounded; not accuracy and correctness.

The choice of this particular programme owed much to its terminology, with which many teachers had some cursory knowledge. National Curriculum documentation also specified pupil knowledge of terms such as the eight word classes, as well as phrases, clauses, sentences etc, in their published glossary. Whilst this research was taking place, the DfE published an amended and

improved glossary of grammatical terms (DfE 2014). This training, however, went beyond the mere parroting of a grammatical vocabulary, by demonstrating its functional potential in the making of meaning.

The grammar training was designed so that teachers would prepare for the sorts of reactions and difficulties their pupils would be likely to experience in encountering this work for the first time. Whilst they learned the definitions of grammatical components and were introduced to their functional qualities, they were invited to attempt writing in different contexts, for a range of purposes: to explore the potential of grammar in the writing process. From these small-scale practises, they were able to extrapolate model lessons to be developed with their own classes.

All the initial CPD sessions were of half a day's duration. Two of the schools requested further 'twilight' training sessions, driven by the questions teachers raised from engaging with a different, unfamiliar mode of language study. A few teachers contacted me through e-mail on occasions, but nothing regularly. The research teachers also took the opportunity to discuss the planning, content and teaching of their lessons with me after lesson observations had taken place, I often made recommendations about textual resources that

4.10.3. Lesson observations

As I was seeking to discover the personal epistemologies of the participant teachers over the period of this study, and attempting to gain some insight into their subject knowledge and how those factors affected their pedagogy, it was appropriate to conduct observation of their lessons. This ethnographic method places 'researchers in the middle of the center of the action', where they can see and hear what is taking place (Corbin and Strauss, 2015:41). They also suggest that the reason observations are 'so important' is that they make it possible for the researcher to confirm the claims being made by participants about their activities and practices. People sometimes say they are doing one thing, yet observation shows them to be undertaking something quite different. Observations provide an effective 'reality check' according to Robson, (2002:310), who states unequivocally that 'what people do may differ from what people say they do'.

Observation methods ‘are powerful tools for gaining insights into situations’ according to Cohen, et al,(2011:474) Observations are conducted in settings that already exist: they do not have to be contrived, according to Lichtman (2013:222). Pring warns that ‘to know what works requires careful observation’ (2000:33). Having spent twenty years as a schools’ inspector, I am familiar with the benefits and pitfalls of this form of data gathering, although when I was observing as an inspector my purpose and motivation was to make judgements on learning quality. As a researcher, my role was to gather data for the purposes of later analysis, with no judgement made about the activities observed. These practices are very unlike with wholly different outcomes. Cohen et al state that ‘observation is more than just looking’ (2011:456) It is also a systematic way of looking, and features a systematic way of noting people, events, behaviours and settings. Its main benefit is to witness first hand ‘live’ data ‘from naturally occurring social situations’ (Cohen et al, 2011:456). Observation allows the researcher to get up close to all that occurs in a specific environment: in this instance, primary classrooms.

Pring (2000:34) cites the innovation of Flanders (1970), who devised a detailed checklist, designed to ensure that researchers would be helped to focus on specific matters (as classrooms are busy, potentially distracting spaces), and that their observations could be replicated. This sort of employment of a strictly designed checklist, possibly making an observation every few seconds is known as ‘structured observation’ (Bryman, 2001:162). Pring points out that such a schedule leads to greater consistency when a number of observations might be made during the course of a research project.

My own observations were not so tightly organised, being known as ‘semi-structured observations’ (Cohen et al, 2011:457). This method is capable of maintaining a close focus on the teachers as they conducted their lessons, with notes relating to: what the teachers did; what they said and how they organised their lessons to bring about learning in grammar. Webb et al (1966) called such a model a ‘simple observation’; one in which the observer has no influence over the situation being observed. I adopted an observation schedule (see Appendix 9) which recorded when the teacher introduced a new topic or set a new task for the class. Each of these ‘sections’ of the lesson were related to the time it took place, the words that the teacher used to address the class, the manner of

the activity and the expectations that the teacher had of the outcomes of each task. All these features were recorded on a pro-forma document common to all the observations, on my laptop computer as they were happening and stored on a file on my main data base. I also walked around classrooms whilst pupils were working, looking at and listening to their endeavours, recording any matters or issues that arose (e.g. pupils' misunderstanding, or excelling with their achievements) on the same observation platform. Morrison (1993:80) claims that such a model of observation enables the researcher to gather data on 'the interactional setting' – 'e.g. the interactions that are taking place, formal, informal, planned or unplanned, verbal, non-verbal'.

'There are two principal types of observation', according to Cohen, *et al* (2011:296): 'participant observation and non-participant observation.' The former involves the researcher becoming fully involved in what is taking place, possibly to the extent where other participants are unaware of the researcher's ostensible purpose. I made the decision to establish an observer-as-non-participant role, as I was seeking to discover the qualities and skills of my volunteer teachers and any further intrusion into their lessons, beyond my presence in their classroom, would have invalidated the terms of my enquiry. Cohen *et al* (2011:457) define this role as 'not a member of the group, but who may participate a little or peripherally in the group's activities'.

Researchers warn that to undertake observation 'does not come independent of concepts and theories', according to Pring (2000:35). He claims that observations are 'filtered' through the 'understandings, preferences and beliefs of the observer'. 'Observations have their potential drawbacks', state Corbin and Strauss (2015: 41), because there is always the potential for the observer to 'give meaning' to a witnessed action-interaction which might not actually have occurred.

Fine pointed out that no ethnographer (or observer) can ever undertake their activities neutrally. In his '10 lies of ethnography' he describes very different sorts of observer and invites the reader to examine which identity most closely fits. He refers to 'lies' rather than 'myths' or 'dilemmas', because 'lies' 'capture better the assertion that we should be aware of the reality that we are shading

in our assumptions about the world' (1993:268). He cautions against accepting, without some questioning, the claims of:

the kindly ethnographer, the friendly ethnographer, the honest ethnographer, the precise ethnographer, the observant ethnographer, the unobtrusive ethnographer, the candid ethnographer, the chaste ethnographer, the fair ethnographer and the literary ethnographer.

Another drawback of classroom observation is the probability of the observer impacting on the lesson and changing it in some way. The question of whether it is the 'real world' that is being observed is raised by Pring (2000:35), or one that 'is interpreted through my own personal (and subjective) scheme of things?' Classroom observation also has ethical implications. Teachers are rightly concerned that their work is not misrepresented, particularly in a time when official inspection of their teaching is under greater and greater scrutiny. Luckily, all teachers welcomed me into their lessons, recognising that it was a condition of their participation in the project, after being reassured that all observations would be confidential. All the children were informed that the observation was focused on their teachers.

4.10.4. Lesson observations and digital technology

All but one of the teachers involved in this study were prepared to allow me to record their lessons on a digital camera. The reluctant teacher, nevertheless, allowed me to point the camera at a wall in the classroom whilst the lesson was in progress, resulting in an audio record of the lesson. This generosity on their part enabled me to capture the total lesson, and acted as a supplement to my observation schedule. There was no necessity to write detailed notes in the lesson itself as events and interactions could be checked against the lesson playback.

Despite the benefit of employing digital technology to support my observations, there were still problems that required attention. Firstly, merely by being present in the classroom the researcher has some sort of impact on what is taking place. To be accompanied by a tripod and camera changes the situation even more. Children are natural show-offs and there is a danger that they will 'play to the camera'. In fact, the teachers had briefed their classes about the potential presence of the camera and they took virtually no notice of it.

Another problem was to do with what actually is recorded. It is impossible to capture the view of the whole class, so decisions have to be taken about where to place the camera and who to film. In interactions between the teacher and particular students it is often not possible to keep the lens pointing at both parties. Decisions about its point of view have to be made all through the lesson. Finally, the technology is not always reliable and can break down or stop during filming. This event only happened once, but it necessitated my having to change recording strategies and meant that I needed a more detailed pro forma to capture the fullest picture of that lesson.

4.11. Ethics

'Research ethics', Blaxter *et al* (1996:146) point out, 'is about being clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research subjects or contacts'. From the beginning of my project I was aware of the importance of a wholly ethical approach to my research and every effort has been made to adhere to the codes of conduct attached to proper qualitative study. Lichtman (2013:51) suggests that 'ethical behaviour' represents a 'set of moral principles, rules or standards governing a person or a profession', which became a driving force. She also discusses the 'major principles' as being: 'Do no harm'; 'privacy and anonymity'; 'confidentiality'; 'informed consent', 'rapport and friendship'; 'intrusiveness'; 'data interpretation' and 'data ownership', which I explore in more detail related to my research below.

Part of the preparation of my study involved reading the Ethical Guidelines published by the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011), to familiarise myself with the issues that require assiduous attention in respect of correct research etiquette. BERA considers that 'all education research should be conducted with an ethic of respect for: The Person; Knowledge; Democratic Values; The Quality of Educational Research and Academic Freedom (2011: 4), and their guidelines steer the ethical considerations of all British educational research institutions. Despite my study being relatively small, it still has to adhere to the considerations shared by all such research. The project had potential problems with respect to: relationships with the participant teachers; the gathering of data; my presence in working classrooms; the interpretation of data and the reporting of the research. An awareness of these matters before the research gets underway, and a conscious effort to avoid any pitfalls, is likely

to lead to a more amicable, rigorous professional regard for the study by all its players.

Before permission was granted from the Ethics Committee of the University of Exeter, I drew up a contract with the schools, with the headteachers and teachers (Appendices 2,3 and 5), outlining as thoroughly as possible what the project was about, their own part in it and the rights they were at liberty to exercise.

Many schools have strict policies about not allowing the filming of children because of the fears about the material falling into the hands of paedophiles and for the protection of children who are at risk from estranged family members. In the six schools in which I conducted my research, I held serious conversations with the headteachers pledging that my filmed material would be viewed by nobody but myself and my supervisor. All filmed material recorded for this study would also be digitally wiped at the end of the process. I made the same pledge to the Ethical Committee at the University of Exeter when seeking their permission (Appendix 1).

4.11.1. Informed consent

The teachers and headteachers in the participating schools were made aware of the details of the research. The teachers involved in the process knew that they would be interviewed on three separate occasions through the course of the project, and that I would make three visits to their classrooms to observe grammar being taught, and I hoped to film those lessons. The other teachers in the research schools all agreed to ‘take the grammar test’ alongside their participant colleagues, despite being given permission to abstain from this activity if they wished. The headteachers readily agreed to my attendance in lessons, and I was able to register a clear CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) form in participating schools. These safeguards led to a situation where the participants were in a position to give, ‘informed consent’: a ‘subject’s right to freedom and self-determination’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011:77).

4.11.2. Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity relating to all written and recorded material was stressed throughout the preliminary period when approval was being sought, and all participants were being made fully aware of the relationship I wanted to

foster with them and the activities I wished to conduct. Teachers were assured that any interview data would not be attributed to them, and all information that they contributed, or events in which they participated, would be anonymously reported. Teachers who agreed to take the grammar test were assured that their individual scores would be known only to each of them and me.

Secondly, much of my research took place in school lessons, involving children learning. Most teachers agreed that not only could I observe them teaching, but they would allow me to record their lessons on digital camera technology. I had to be absolutely scrupulous in maintaining the confidentiality of any film I shot in classrooms, promising the schools that I would be the only viewer of the materials and it would all be wiped of content at the end of the project. One school had a strict, non-negotiable policy concerning the recording of children's images, so we agreed that the lesson observation would be recorded on sound only.

4.11.3. Data collection and storage

Most data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted by myself, and recorded – with the full permission of all the teachers – on a voice recorder. Once again, teachers were assured that immediately after the transcription of the interviews, all interview material would be deleted. I conducted the interview transcriptions myself.

Thirdly, I established a friendly and mutually trusting working relationship with eight particular volunteer teachers. Before they committed to the programme, they were all given spoken and written undertakings that any data accrued about them would be confidential to myself. All matters pertaining to each of them would not be identifiable. I wanted these teachers to be confident that I was not visiting lessons in any sort of inspectorial role, and judgements were not being made about their teaching ability. I was seeking to discover what degree of grammar knowledge they included in their English / literacy lessons; not how well they taught.

4.12. Data Interpretation and Reporting findings

All data obtained from this research was analyzed, as Lichtman (2013: 55) reminds us, 'in a manner that avoids misstatements, misinterpretation or fraudulent analysis'. It was intended to fairly represent what had been seen and

heard. No participant will be identified in the final thesis. I was presented with no controversial or difficult material.

4.13. Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

'Quality in qualitative research is something that we recognize when we see it, however, explaining what it is or how to achieve it is far more difficult' (Corbin & Strauss, 2015:341)

A number of important differences exist between the ways that positivist and interpretivist research methods are designed and conducted. Positivist research, called 'nomothetic' (Morrow, 2005:252) involves dealing with large numbers, focusing on standardised methods of obtaining knowledge from large samples, whilst qualitative research is 'idiographic', usually focusing on fewer participants, discovering categories of meaning from the data of the individuals being studied. Contrasting with quantitative research, which in its methodological design would include controlling mechanisms such as 'statistical manipulation', or 'sampling strategies' (Whickham & Woods, 2006, 690), qualitative researchers have to rely 'on evidence collected during the research process itself in order to effectively argue that any alternative explanations for a phenomenon are implausible'. A significant difference is that positivist researchers demand that only an 'objective' set of findings at the conclusion of their work is an acceptable outcome, whilst qualitative investigators rely on 'confirmability' as a comparable concern. Shenton (2004:63) informs us that although critics have been reluctant to 'accept the trustworthiness' of qualitative research for a long time, there are now frameworks for 'ensuring rigor' in this kind of work. Krefting (1991:214), however, reminds us that there are 'two issues' to bear in mind when discussing the assessment of qualitative research: 'models used to evaluate quantitative are seldom relevant to qualitative research' and not all qualitative research 'can be assessed with the same strategies'.

Recently it has become accepted by even positivist apologists that no research can ever be regarded as fully objective, because all research is designed by humans, therefore all research is subject to human error. Hammersley (1995:17) endorses this stand when he writes, 'we must recognise that absolute certainty is not available about anything.' The interpretivist researcher', writes

Wellington (2000:16), ‘accepts that the observer makes a difference to the observed and that reality is a human construct’. Nevertheless, there is still a requirement for any research to be reliable (capable of being replicated in whole or in part) and valid (is regarded as capable of performing the task it was assigned) before it can be regarded as acceptable. Yet, these terms, once seen as the gold standard of dependability, are no longer regarded as appropriate for categorising qualitative research findings. Mason (1996:145) states that traditional concepts are ‘premised on the assumption that methods of data generation can be conceptualized as tools, and can be standardized, neutral and non-biased’. Hammersley (1987:67) broadly agrees by remarking that a research account may be considered valid if ‘it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe’.

Morse *et al* (2002:2) advocate that validity and reliability are achieved only when ‘the researcher rigorously follows a number of verification strategies’ in the research process. They make a clear argument that ‘without rigor, research is worthless’, which results in a ‘great deal of attention’ to reliability and validity in all research methods’. Yet, Golafashani (2003) and Shenton (2004) explain that the manner in which the terms ‘reliable’ and ‘valid’ are understood in qualitative research differs markedly from the meaning they have for quantitative researchers

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest an alternative set of criteria to reliability and validity, more in keeping with qualitative research, leading to the establishment of what they term: Credibility (confidence in the truth of the findings); Transferability (demonstrating that findings have applicability in other contexts); Dependability (showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated) and Confirmability (indication of neutrality, or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and researcher bias, motivation or interest). Morrow (2005:251) claims ‘*credibility* in qualitative research is said to correspond to *internal validity* in quantitative approaches; *transferability* to *external validity* or *generalizability*; *dependability* to *reliability*, and *confirmability* to *objectivity*. But she warns that these parallel criteria do not accomplish the same goals as they lead to ‘different kinds of knowledge’ (2005:252).

In their paper relating how teachers' grammar knowledge impacts on their teaching of writing, Myhill *et al* (2013:83) indicate through a table directly influenced by Lincoln and Guba, how their methods and practices in a large scale project contribute to the overall 'trustworthiness' of their conclusions. Employing the same criteria, and others from Lincoln & Guba (1985), but pointing out that this research was conducted by myself, without the benefit of a team collaboration, I am able to claim that my study has the required academic credibility because of the following procedures that I employed:

CONCEPT	METHODS USED TO SECURE TRUSTWORTHINESS
Transferability: The extent to which findings can be generalised to other contexts with different participants and situations.	Adoption of appropriate, well recognised research methods. The collection of 3 interviews / observations per participant to achieve greater richness and descriptive depth. Constant comparison across cases during data analysis.
Dependability: The extent to which similar findings would be obtained if the study were repeated.	Triangulation of data through teacher interview, lesson observation and statistical data. In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated.
Confirmability: The extent to which the findings are neutral and free from researcher bias.	Open coding sought to code as much of the data as possible. Review of coding processes and coding labelling. Admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions.
Credibility: The extent to which findings seem believable.	The avoidance of over-generalisation or over-claiming in all reporting of data. Adoption of appropriate, well recognised research methods. Use of "reflective commentary".

Table 4 – Procedures to secure trustworthiness:

Other suggestions reflecting the more modern attitude to judging the validity of a research study include the following from Larkin *et al* (2006, 108):

- Owning one's own perspective, and reflecting on subjectivity and bias;
- Producing coherent connection between theory and method;

- Focusing on meaning;
- Accounting for, and sensitive to, context;
- Adopting an open-ended stance on data collection and analysis;
- Collecting and engaging with ‘rich’ data;
- Balancing description of data with interpretation of data etc.

Finally, Golafshani (2003:600) discusses the notion that the researcher is the ‘instrument’ in qualitative research. Those conducting quantitative research are usually referring ‘to research that is credible’, while the credibility of qualitative research ‘depends on the ability and effort of the researcher’. The terms ‘valid’ and ‘reliable’ are thought to be two separate categories in quantitative studies, whilst ‘these terms are not viewed separately in qualitative research’.

4.14. Analysis of data

Wellington (2000:134) states that ‘there is not one, single, correct way of doing’ data analysis. Every approach selected by a researcher will be unique, although well-defined ‘general principles and guidelines’ exist to support possible systematic and reflective analytical processes.

There are four stages of data analysis, suggests Wellington (2000:134): immersion; reflecting; taking apart/analysing data and recombining/synthesizing data, which formed the structure of my own analytic strategy. ‘Immersion’ involves becoming very familiar with the data: reading through the interview transcripts a number of times and ‘listening’ closely to the patterns and themes that might be discernible. It could lead to physical categorising, interacting with the transcripts by employing marker pens or placing codes into columns of related material. In the second stage it is necessary to ‘stand back from’ the initial codes allocated to single items of data and look for possible relationships and patterns (2000:135). Researchers, Wellington suggests, can become ‘too close’ to their material. The third stage is about ‘breaking down’ (the literal meaning of ‘analyse) the data into much smaller units; an exercise known as ‘open coding’ (Simon, 2011:2; Corbin & Strauss 2015:220) where identification of separate concepts, and tentative naming of categories takes place. This stage depends on the researcher engaged in a process called

'constant comparison', involving the continual comparison of each code with the current code, and new information compared 'with previously coded data, reframed, revised or refined coding labels' (Myhill *et al*, 2013:82). The final stage, designated 'axial coding', is about connections being made between categories and sub-categories; putting the data codes together in new ways.

The interview data was analysed inductively, using the data analysis software NVivo 10. Before coding I spent a long time 'immersing' myself in the interview transcripts. After thinking about the possible codes emerging from my reflections, I conducted a tentative coding exercise with one interview transcript, which I checked with my supervisor to determine how feasible this practice had been. Following advice about improving my coding skills, I then proceeded to code all twenty two interviews. The first set of eight interviews, conducted before the training, led to 40 separate codes being created. It did not take long to realise that a number of codes overlapped; 'grammar as back to basics', 'grammar as skills' and 'grammar as basic skills' were seen to be virtually the same and combined into a code called 'grammar as basic skills'. 'Grammar as a type of school' was, for instance, an example of a code rejected as an inappropriate category. As a result of this editing, I was left with 31 codes.

The same strategies were then employed to analytically code the second group of interviews. At the conclusion of this exercise I had created 38 codes, and these were once again checked for overlaps and relevance. Finally, the same procedures were used to code the last group of six interviews.

The fourth stage, involving axial coding, is to do with making deductions from the codes identified as data; a process where categories are related to their subcategories in a top down arrangement. Myhill (2013:80) advises that in this stage 'coders examine the open codes, looking for inter-relationships and links between the codes'. After spending some considerable time attempting to find a synthesising coherence to my codes, I looked back at my research questions and found an excellent fit. The 38 codes were clustered into four over-arching themes: personal epistemologies; subject knowledge; pedagogical knowledge and linguistic knowledge. Not surprisingly for a project exploring how teachers change and develop with new subject knowledge, the linguistic knowledge category featured most strongly.

4.15. Methodological limitations and constraints

Research studies can never be perfect. All must have some flaw or another, and they are likely to encounter more problems if they are qualitative studies, usually depending heavily on human participation. My own study was no exception.

It would have been reassuring to have conducted this research collaboratively, with at least one other colleague. Working alone is very daunting and leaves the researcher exposed. To have been able to analyse the interviews with another researcher, and agree on the legitimacy of the codes, would have brought another positive dimension to the process; two opinions can be much richer than one, enabling more discussion and supported practice which might have bestowed even more reliable ‘trustworthiness’.

Working with others would also have enabled the project to have recruited more teachers. Firstly, because the impact of the loss of two teachers part way through the research would have been lessened, and secondly because larger numbers would have contributed to the study being more representative of the larger teaching force. Realistically, working alone meant a restriction of eight teachers as considerable difficulty would have been encountered managing more participants, and the extra work of interviewing, transcribing and watching film of more classroom observations would have placed great strain on the project. Despite the research being conducted with a ‘convenience’ sample, I was lucky to have recruited teachers who were at very different learning positions, with different motivations to learn the new grammar.

I would have liked to have conducted the research over a longer period, enabling me to observe how all the teachers developed given more time. I would also have been able to see them all teach a Year group for at least one whole school year. As it was, they were able to teach one class with their new knowledge for two terms, and another class for only one term, which was a limited period in which to develop their skills. Although discernible change was evident to different degrees with all the teachers, it would have been more valuable to track their progress over four more months. The opportunity of observing more lessons would also have enabled me to discern the progress the teachers were making in respect of their own grammar knowledge and the

effect it was having on their pupils. Carrying out this research for a longer period could have made interviewing children a possibility; as I might have been able to trace the extent of their grammar learning through the space of a whole school year, not an option open to me with the arrangement I constructed.

I did practise some interviews before the actual research began, but I should have looked more carefully at how I responded to some answers. I should have developed a better understanding of how my responses and the questions that emerged from them could be construed as ‘leading’, thus making the participants’ answers invalid on some occasions.

Finally, I should have been more organised, disciplined and assiduous about keeping a log of the overall process. I made the recording of research more difficult to trace as a result of not keeping a systematic log. By the end I had started four separate sets of notes, and these were not easy to understand. They were also filled in too retrospectively, meaning that I had to apply myself more than necessary in recalling the events and decisions I encountered.

The most important consideration of the methods employed in this research was that those selected went a considerable way to answering the research questions at its heart. I was able to discover sufficient information that enabled me to know more certainly – What subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in primary schools in the context of writing?

Chapter 5 Analysis of interview data

Table 5: Profile of teachers at the beginning of research - anonymised

Name	Age at start of project	Teaching in Year	Number of years teaching	Position in school	Completed project
Tom	34	Year 6	7	KS 2 leader	No – 12 months
Dick	46	Year 5/4	4	ICT coordinator	Yes
Harry	26	Year 5	1	Class teacher	Yes
Miranda	23	Year 6	3	PSHE coordinator	Yes
Juliet	30	Year 6/5	0.5	Class teacher	Yes
Isabella	50	Year 5	6	Class teacher	No – 9 months
Portia	25	Year 5	4	Class teacher	Yes
Beatrice	29	Year 6	6	Literacy coordinator	Yes

This research began with eight volunteer participating teachers based in four primary schools. They were all interviewed at least twice, and the six remaining teachers at the conclusion of the project were interviewed a further third time. Evidence from their responses to interview questions and observation of lessons provided the data to answer the research questions:

What subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in the context of writing in primary schools?

And the supplementary questions

- a. **What are teachers' personal epistemologies of grammar in the context of writing?**
- b. **What pedagogical and subject knowledge barriers do teachers experience when attempting to teach grammar in the context of writing?**
- c. **How does the grammar knowledge of primary teachers influence how they teach grammar in the context of writing?**

5.1. Evidence from interviews

In the final stages of axial coding, at the point where connections are made between categories and sub-categories, four over-arching themes were identified, closely related to the research questions, which were: **subject knowledge**; **personal epistemologies**; **teacher pedagogy** and **pupil progress**. The theme **subject knowledge** refers to comments the teachers made about their knowledge of grammar, gained through their own school lessons, teacher training, teaching experiences or other grammar focuses. **Personal epistemology** was to do with the comments made by the participants in relation to how they have come to know what they now know, the sorts of stages through which their learning has passed to bring about their current beliefs and their ways of framing grammar teaching. **Teacher pedagogy** relates to the matters raised by the participating teachers to do with planning, organisation and procedures in their lessons designed to bring about the most effective learning for their pupils. **Pupil progress** concerned comments from the teachers about the positive changes they have perceived in their pupils' writing attainment, due to the increased grammar knowledge of their teachers.

The first interview was conducted before the teachers engaged with the CPD programme, and the second two interviews took place in the context of their teaching, following lesson observations. Thus the first interview offers insight into the teachers' thinking about grammar and teaching grammar at the commencement of the study, whilst the other two interviews are shaped by their

experiences in the classroom following the CPD programme. Accordingly, I will present the data from the initial interviews first, and report on the two subsequent interviews in a later section.

5.2. First theme - Subject Knowledge - 15 Codes

Gathered together in this theme, over the course of three interviews were 17 codes and these codes and their definitions are outlined in the table below. These themes were prominent in the earliest interviews, as most of the teachers involved in the programme lacked knowledge about the subject at that time. They readily admitted their shortcomings in relation to this theme.

CODES	DEFINITION
Awareness of subject knowledge problem	Teachers knowing that they have limited knowledge of grammar preventing effective teaching.
Grammar as word classes	References made by teachers to their new knowledge of word classes / expressing knowledge of grammar through word classes.
Grammar as sentence structuring	References made by teachers who have recognised the importance of sentence construction as a basis for effective grammar teaching.
Use of grammar publications	References made to the many sorts of resources that might be used by the research teachers in the learning and teaching of grammar.
Improvement of grammar knowledge	The instances when teachers acknowledge they have learned more about grammar.
Confidence in teaching grammar	Teachers expressing their increased confidence in teaching grammar.
Grammar as punctuation	References by teachers who believe that punctuation is a feature of grammar teaching.
Ashamed of lack of grammar knowledge	Teachers expressing their discomfort about knowing so little about grammar
No memory of school grammar	This code involves teachers thinking back to their own school days in an attempt to recall what they might have experienced in any grammar lessons when they were pupils.
Grammar and genre	References made by teachers to the relationship of grammar with different types of text.
Grammar as a component of ITE	Teachers recalling any possible references to the teaching of grammar in

	their teacher training.
Other sources of grammar acquisition	Teachers recalling learning grammar from other adults except their teachers.
Self-taught grammar knowledge	Teachers claiming that they have learnt about grammar by themselves.
Grammar learning through the study of modern foreign languages	Teachers who learned English grammar by studying modern foreign languages.
Grammar as spelling	Some teachers being confused about spelling as a feature of grammar.

Table 6: Summary of codes and definitions of the **Subject Knowledge** theme
– first interview

5.3. Second theme: Personal Epistemologies – 7 Codes

Gathered together in this theme, over the course of three interviews were 7 codes, defined and outlined in the table below. This theme was to do with the teachers' understanding of the position of grammar in the curriculum and how grammar is learned. Some teachers changed their minds about these matters over the course of the research.

CODES	DEFINITIONS
Grammar as rules and regulations	Teachers who think of grammar as a sort of gospel, composed of do's and don'ts..
Understanding of bigger grammar picture	Teachers who recognise that grammar is not about lots of separate bits, but is to be seen as an organising force through all language engagements.
Grammar teaching in context	Teachers who believe that grammar is to be found in real-life linguistic situations and who employ real texts as the basis of language use in their teaching.
Effects of grammar training	What differences the training sessions may have brought about for the participants.
Grammar as stand-alone study	Teachers who regard grammar as an objective 'out-there' phenomenon, decontextualised from real life.
Grammar as basic skills	Teachers regarding grammar as a set of separate components, such as spelling and times tables, on which all subsequent knowledge is based.
Continuing problems	Teachers mentioning any continuing difficulties about understanding particular details of the grammar programme.

Table 7: Summary of codes and definitions for the **Personal Epistemologies** theme – first interview

5.4. Third theme – Teacher pedagogy – 6 Codes

Gathered together in this theme, over the course of three interviews were 8 codes and these codes and their definitions are outlined in the table below. This theme was concerned with the ways in which grammar learning could be taught and what purposes it might serve.

CODES	DEFINITIONS
Pedagogical development	Teachers possessing clear approaches to the planning, teaching and assessment of grammar.
Grammar as a focus for testing	Teachers who believe that teaching grammar is mainly driven by the requirements for testing.
Purpose of grammar teaching	Teachers able to articulate a clear sense of why they are teaching grammar.
The place of grammar in the curriculum	Teachers who make reference to where and how they introduce opportunities for further grammar learning in their teaching programmes.
Grammar as a step towards greater power	Teachers who believe that learning grammar contributes to greater literacy competence and increased academic success.
Grammar as a basis of thought	Teachers aware that thinking is conducted in grammar conventions.

Table 8: Summary of codes and definitions for the **Teacher Pedagogy** theme – first interview

5.5. Fourth theme – Pupil progress – 6 codes

Gathered together in this theme, over the course of three interviews, were 6 codes and these codes and their definitions are outlined in the table below. This theme related to the perceptions of the teachers about the outcomes of the grammar learning and how they reacted to the grammar lessons.

Codes	Definitions
Grammar as enabler of writing improvement	Teachers who consider improvement in grammar knowledge improves writing ability.
Grammar as an obstacle to writing	Teachers who are fearful that grammar might make writing more difficult for pupils, hampering their creative imagination.

More able children	Teachers who have attempted more challenging work for pupils of greater linguistic ability than their peers.
Enjoyment of grammar	Evidence that teachers and / or their pupils enjoy learning about grammar.
Improved pupil attainment	Teachers identifying where and when their pupils have shown evidence that they have learned more about grammar and write better as a consequence.
Pupil difficulties	Teachers identifying problems that pupils continue to encounter even after grammar lessons.

Table 9: summary of codes and definitions for the **Pupil Progress** theme – first interview

5.6. Findings from the initial interviews in all four themes

5.6.1. First Theme - Subject knowledge – first interview

The following table shows the number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to a particular code in the first set of interviews conducted with 8 interviewees.

Codes – subject knowledge	Number of sources	Number of references
Awareness of subject knowledge problem	8	50
Grammar as sentence structuring	8	44
No memory of school grammar	8	27
Use of grammar publications	8	16
Grammar as punctuation	7	33
Grammar as word classes	7	27
Other sources of grammar acquisition	6	14
Grammar as component of ITE	6	10
Ashamed at lack of grammar knowledge	5	10
Forgotten grammar knowledge	4	7

Self-taught grammar knowledge	3	10
Grammar learning through foreign languages	2	7
Grammar as spelling	2	2
Improvement of grammar knowledge	0	0
Confidence in grammar teaching	0	0

Table 10: Number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to Subject Knowledge codes in the first interview

5.6.1.1. Awareness of subject knowledge problem

This code, to do with teachers' awareness of their limited knowledge of grammar, preventing them from designing and teaching grammar lessons capable of improving their pupils' writing, was mentioned most by all eight participants in the initial interviews. Such a reaction was to be expected at that stage of the programme as the teachers volunteered to participate because they knew so little about the subject. The teachers' responses in these interviews would be fundamental in providing answers to the central research question.

Tom knew the most grammar, having attended some local authority courses and read works by David Crystal, '*just to get myself in a place where I can more confidently talk about some aspects of grammar*'. A skilled grammar user in his own right, he nevertheless expressed concern that he lacked '*an awful lot of confidence*' in being able to '*break down language*', and '*explain all these different things that are going on*'. Another prepared teacher, Beatrice, felt that she was only teaching '*at a basic level*', and admitted, '*I'm still not sure what grammar is*'. Most of the other teachers were concerned that they knew too little about grammar to be effective in their planning and teaching. Harry rated his grammatical subject knowledge, as '*three*' on a ten point scale. Whilst claiming to be at 5 on a similar scale, Portia then admitted, '*but still there is a lot to learn*'. Miranda stated that she was '*nervous*' and '*worried*' about teaching grammar in a way that she hoped would improve writing, but she was '*very eager to know more*'.

Harry candidly admitted, '*I've not had any dedicated training to grammar. It's literally just been pick it up, on the job, asking other colleagues, reading a bit on the internet, trying to figure it out*', whilst Isabella claimed that it had been a long time since she '*went to school and learned all of that*'. She thought she needed '*to polish up things to be a bit more knowledgeable*'. Juliet, keen to acquire grammar knowledge to improve her pupils' writing, recognised that she needed the ability to '*see where they are trying to go, and what sort of grammar they are trying to use and how to help them "better it"!*'

Having been a local authority adviser and independent grammar consultant for over 25 years, I know that the sorts of responses made by these teachers mirrored the experiences of many of their colleagues across the country. Generations of children did not experience any specific learning focused on grammar and a proportion of those children have themselves become teachers, now recognising what was omitted in their own schooling. Any knowledge that most of the research teachers had obtained was piecemeal and lacking coherence, evident by the comments made by the teachers in this study. These teachers, who knew a few fragments of grammar, needed to develop their grammatical content knowledge to a greater extent before they could employ it, to bring about the sorts of lessons that would improve writing.

5.6.1.2. Grammar as sentence structuring

This code refers to the responses the participants mentioned to do with their understanding of the vital role of sentences in text construction. What they actually knew about sentences was limited and indicated that they needed more specific knowledge of this significant metalinguistic feature.

Dick was sure that grammar was '*the ability to construct a sentence correctly*', but when pressed about that assertion he could add little more. By '*correct*' he actually meant '*punctuated properly*'. Miranda was confused about connectives and the use of commas; she saw a sort of hierarchy to their use, suggesting that, '*for my lowest ability, it's (using commas) in a list; for my higher ability it's in a complex sentence*'. She mentioned the difference between what she termed '*short sentences or the longer, more descriptive sentences*', without indicating any understanding of the three sentence types, and their purpose and possible structures. Juliet described grammar as '*different word classes, and*

how to structure a sentence and, different tools', but knew little about that 'structuring'. She gave a confused explanation attempting to outline how she would teach sentences to her class. On arrival at her current school, Portia heard her colleagues referring to details of sentence construction about which she had no knowledge. She thought she was '*doing that OK, but then it was, like, no! You can do this better*'. Equal uncertainty was demonstrated by Isabella: asked how she planned lessons to teach sentence structuring, she responded: '*Well, we have sentence structure points – objectives - to fill*', but could go no further.

Once again, it is clear that the responses that led to this code are germane to the overall theme of Subject Knowledge. These teachers, like many of their generation, had only the haziest knowledge of the potential learning to be explored in sentence-focused work. Some had heard of the terms 'simple', 'compound' and 'complex', but the metalinguistic features of what constituted these sentence types was not known and failed to reach the children they taught. Consequently, the pupils' options for making decisions and exercising real choice in their writing, the most important outcomes of grammar learning, were limited.

5.2.1.3. No memory of school grammar

This code involved teachers recalling their own school days, attempting to remember any grammar lessons they experienced as pupils. Like most pupils in English schools from the mid 1960s, these teachers would have encountered little or no tuition about grammar. Their recollections of their own education confirmed the claims made through the whole of this study about the paucity of grammar subject knowledge teaching during their school days. The set of negative responses which constitute this code are yet further instances of evidence about the subject knowledge barriers experienced by these participants.

Miranda was quite sure that '*grammar was never focused*' and she '*can't remember any specific teaching of grammar*'. Juliet too could not: '*remember anything from school in terms of grammar*'. Isabella felt that she must have been '*taught things*', in respect to literacy, but '*how*' she was taught, she '*can't remember*'. Tom mentioned that he was never specifically expected to learn

about language, commenting that his class was '*just encouraged to write*', mostly lots of comprehension exercises. Harry was equally sure that he '*can't remember doing grammar at school*', although he recalled '*doing the magic "e"*'. When questioned about her possible early acquaintance with this topic, an equally adamant Portia stated that she did not '*remember anything specifically about grammar*'.

A few teachers conceded that they may have been taught something about grammar in the past, but had probably forgotten it subsequently. Isabella could not '*remember doing grammar exercises – but it (her learning) may have just gone completely*'. She recognised that '*we must have been taught things, but how we were taught*' she could not say.

A similar dilemma happened with Tom, who recognised that he '*obviously absorbed full stops and capital letters*', because he was using them fluently. He claimed to have '*played with grammar language by doing it, by writing it down*', but he thought much of what he learned was gleaned from his reading.

Harry described another sort of problem. He believed that he learned some things about language that he had forgotten until he came across them again: '*I couldn't remember what it was. As soon as I'd read it again...I knew what it was and everything.*' Nevertheless, he still couldn't remember '*any lessons, any instances...when I had a grammar lesson*', although he mentioned that his understanding of grammar seemed to have improved in Year 10 or 11.

Beatrice, a modern languages graduate, summed up the lack of grammar teaching:

'my generation, I think, – all my people at my age at university, not so much noticed on PGCE, but we definitely discussed it with the modern language side of it sort of thing, but we didn't have anything at school'.

5.6.1.4. Use of grammar publications

This code came about with references made to the many sorts of resources being used by the survey teachers to support their teaching of grammar. In some schools these were grammar-based textbooks, being followed as a whole-school scheme. Other sources were sites accessed on the internet, where there are massive numbers of explanatory pages and large numbers of exercises. Most of these resources contained examples of a traditional model of

grammar, incompatible with the ‘functional’ grammar thesis guiding this research. Because the participants had undeveloped grammar knowledge, they were unable to evaluate the accuracy or potential of these texts, leading to a situation where their grammar lessons were having only a minimum effect on the writing skills of their pupils. This code relates to the Subject Knowledge theme, as their lack of language knowledge set up a barrier to effective teaching, and meant they were dependent on such resources.

Dick related how he was teaching his class about adverbs using ‘*some resources that I take from the internet*’. Harry also asserted that ‘*in most days (I) probably go to Google*’. Asked about the reliability of the grammar information on the internet, Harry was uncertain: ‘*I don’t know...I honestly don’t know, but it’s a first place for a quick response*’. Juliet usually asked ‘*other adults, if they know*’, and, if not, ‘*it will be... books and the internet*.’

Isabella normally had ‘*a grammar book somewhere in the classroom*’, and would ‘*probably go and have a look at that*’. Arriving from another school, where there had been less attention to strategic teaching of writing, Portia found herself needing to know more about language and she ‘*went and researched quite a lot on the internet*’, to keep up with her colleagues. Asked whether she employed other sorts of resource, Portia responded that she ‘*used books sometimes*’, and announced that she had ‘*bought grammar books*’.

Tom and Beatrice, in different schools, claimed to rely on exercises and information from a National Literacy publication ‘Grammar for Writing’, unaware of the critical commentary pointing out its shaky scholarship (see Chapter 2). In their school Harry and Miranda had an imposed grammar scheme based on a grammar textbook. Harry was bothered that the scheme was ‘*quite prescriptive, actually*’, and gave little room for manoeuvre, whilst Miranda worried about its authenticity.

5.6.1.5. Grammar as punctuation

This code, which embraces the references made by teachers who believed punctuation to be an important feature of teaching grammar, is mentioned often in the earliest interviews, but not at all in interviews 2 and 3. Most of the teachers in the study were unaware of the bigger, abstract issues of grammar, and they felt more at home with the sort of ‘right or wrong’ aspects of language,

such as punctuation. Many people, asked what they understood by ‘grammar’, immediately select punctuation as one of its key features. For a few, the two terms are synonymous. This code illustrates another area in which poor Subject Knowledge was having an effect on the teaching of grammar.

Before the grammar training, Dick thought, *‘grammar was just punctuation’*. Juliet, Miranda and Portia thought that grammar was *‘punctuation and using the correct English language’*. The ‘grammar’ that Isabella learned when she went to school comprised *‘things like apostrophes – you know – and blending words and things like that’*. Harry also thought the topics of punctuation and grammar were synonymous when he lamented that it was *‘quite hard to engage them (his pupils) sometimes with grammar – we are going to look at commas’*.

What little memory these teachers had of any grammar lessons in their past usually included details of punctuation. Tom recollects, *‘the apostrophe and how it works’*, and he was fairly sure that they, *‘did some speech mark work’*. Those lessons did not seem to have been successful on every occasion, with Juliet complaining: *‘So looking at the punctuation and things I have not a clue about, or think about other than the full stop and the comma, and I’m still not sure about the comma!’*

Since 2015 primary teachers have had to respond to further pressure because of a new assessment regime, based on a traditional model of grammar, requiring children as young as 7 years of age to be tested on perfunctory grammar knowledge. Unaware of the proper relationship between grammar and punctuation, many teachers are inclined to give more attention to punctuation because they perceive it as a topic that carries high status in respect of ‘correct language use’. Dick exemplified this attitude when he lamented that *‘they (his pupils) should know how to use basic punctuation’*. Discussing the role of the question mark he goes even further, stating that *‘I want to make sure that they understand those rules’*. This same attitude was echoed by Portia when she reported: *‘We’ve started to use advanced punctuation; so things like semi-colons, colons, dashes and hyphens – there’s loads of things they need to know’*.

5.6.1.6. Grammar as word classes

This code deals with references made by teachers expressing their knowledge of grammar through the medium of word classes. Some people believe that grammar is all about word classes, as the traditional model of English was much concerned with labelling words. Many grammar lessons in the past were not developed beyond this limited, fundamental position. At the outset of this research, the participating teachers shared that same traditional view of grammar. Harry, explaining what 'grammar' meant to him, replied, '*it's the first thing that comes into my mind...nouns, verbs, adjectives,*' in a wholly typical way. Portia also stated: '*Grammar...I'd say grammar is sort of, how to structure sentences and word classes*'. Dick and Juliet were also just as specific with their understanding of the relationship of grammar and word classes, mentioning '*nouns, verbs, adjectives*'.

Beatrice had other notions about the purpose of word classes, when she explained the following:

'They (her pupils) need to understand the different word classes, so that they can start to look at the effect that the words have and how they can manipulate their sentences for effect'.

Tom hinted at the possibility of regarding word classes from a more functional point of view, beyond merely labelling words in groups.

'I would be much more excited if a child can use ... a word that we use as a noun or a verb happily in a sentence without necessarily knowing it's a noun or a verb, but they can explain why they used that word, and what the purpose around their thought process was.'

Miranda regarded the knowledge of what she termed the '*technical language*' as an essential requirement for her teaching: declaring, '*the first thing is actually knowing the words*'. Juliet believed that children need to learn the word classes in school, as she was staggered when as an adult student, she encountered the extent of the grammar vocabulary for the first time:

'I remember the first thing we did at uni was having to look at all these different names and I thought, "Wow! There's many more than what I thought"'.

The interview evidence indicated that an area of subject knowledge requiring attention in this research had to do with ensuring that the teachers were

confident about how to assign words to their appropriate classes depending on their function.

5.6.1.7. Other sources of grammar acquisition

This code is concerned with the learning of grammar from sources beyond formal schooling. We all pick up new linguistic knowledge from the world around us; sometimes accidentally, occasionally with deliberate intentions. This code was mentioned only in the first interviews.

Tom and Beatrice had parents who were teachers and Tom was '*impressed at the way they could talk about language*,' and remembered '*spending a lot of time with other teachers*,' from whom he '*learned about...all sorts of facets*.' Beatrice, less happily, partially recalled her '*parents constantly correcting*'. Her father '*loved talking about etymologies*', and '*we'd talk of things like that*'. Portia also owed some of her early knowledge to her mother, who '*used to point out things to me as we were going along*'.

Isabella mentioned '*some small books at home that my Mum used to have and they used to have pieces missing and you'd fill those in*'. She felt that her parents' regular Scrabble sessions contributed to her vocabulary. Helping with her homework was an important contribution Miranda's parents, particularly her father, made to her linguistic development: she remembered him helping '*my writing and my understanding of grammar*'. She used to '*sit and read the Times. Quite a lot of the time I would not know what it meant. We used to sit and, sort of, break it down*'.

Few of the participating teachers gained much grammar knowledge from the sources they cited.

5.6.1.8. Grammar as a component of ITE

This code, involving teachers recalling any possible references to tuition of grammar in their teacher training, and was mentioned only in the first interview. As hardly any teachers actually taught grammar in their lessons in the middle and later years of the twentieth century, few prospective teachers intending to teach secondary English and in primary schools were acquainted in their training with much, if any, information about grammar. The teachers involved in this research were offered, at best, only limited tuition of grammar; obtaining yet

another code to be included in the Subject Knowledge theme - yet another barrier to their teaching of language.

Miranda spoke for most of her colleagues when she stated flatly that '*I don't recall any input regarding grammar*'. Harry declared, '*we never had any real... grammar lessons*', whilst Portia stated, '*nothing specifically with grammar*' took place in her course. Juliet remembered that '*we did certain things...not a lot really*', and what she did encounter was formal, traditional material, mostly involving labelling of word classes.

Where any provisions of grammar did take place, they were moribund and negative. Beatrice recalled the content of her grammar tuition in the following manner: '*Yes, there was a grammar test at the beginning...It was just like circling the adverbs; that sort of thing.*'

5.6.1.9. Ashamed of lack of grammar knowledge

This code revealed teachers expressing their discomfort about knowing so little grammar, believing that they should have known more. No teachers, however, should have shouldered any blame for this linguistic ignorance, as they explained clearly that they were not taught much or any grammar at all through their schooling and higher education courses. Their feelings of guilt, however, did motivate them more determinedly to overcome the barriers caused by their lack of knowledge.

Whilst Tom stated that he wanted to be able '*to make sure that my children got the very best experience*', he also felt: '*a bit of a fraud because I don't have this rigorous taught knowledge of grammar*', and added, '*I don't quite trust what I do have*'. Miranda reflected the candour of some colleagues about this topic wondering, '*how I got by without specific grammar teaching*', and speculated on a primary teaching body that '*would really like training*' in grammar knowledge. Juliet explained that she was not taught language and felt that she '*missed out*' and now finds, '*writing really hard, because there's a big chunk I don't understand*'. She believed the subject to be '*really important*' and admitted '*it's something I need to work on*'.

Harry reported that there were occasions when he was '*teaching literacy without any real knowledge at all...and was kind of blagging*', whilst Juliet, commenting

on her lack of grammar knowledge, conceded that she ‘covered up a lot of it’, suggesting that she should have been ‘helped more...when (she) was younger.’ This concern was echoed by Miranda who revealed ‘it was probably quite worrying that I was conducting lessons with that type of subject knowledge.’

5.6.1.10. Self-taught grammar knowledge

This code, featured only in the first two interviews, was suggested by teachers claiming they had learned some of the issues of grammar, through their own efforts, before their participation in this project. It contributed in a small way to the Subject Knowledge theme.

Tom had read some recommended grammar texts by David Crystal, hoping to put himself ‘*in a place where (he) could more confidently talk about some aspects of grammar*’, and also purchased a set of books about ‘How Grammar Works’, through which he had skimmed.

Juliet, who felt strongly that she had not been taught well, was despairing about language learning. She professed that: ‘*everything that I've learned has been by myself, from going to university and – and also when I was a Teaching Assistant. Anything I needed to know I would look up and find out for myself*’. She claimed that at university she did a lot of reading to help her write in better sentences. She also consulted the internet for information, but insisted that she didn’t merely accept the first reference she found.

Portia believed that she ‘*was not teaching writing very well*’, causing her to ‘*research quite a lot*’. ‘*It was boring 'reading their work*’, as she was unsure how to teach ‘*sentence openers*’. So she referred to a number of texts to build a better base of knowledge. Miranda began reading about grammar when at university and was of the opinion that this study helped her understanding of grammar: ‘*particularly to improve my vocabulary choices as well*’.

5.6.1.11. Grammar learning through the study of modern foreign languages

This code was raised by two teachers who learned some English grammar by studying modern foreign languages. Ironically, lessons in modern foreign languages provided the only grammar teaching in considerable numbers of schools, but it would usually be based on the traditional model and serve the language being studied rather than improving English. Tom and Beatrice had

studied foreign languages: Beatrice to degree level. It might be expected that they had become familiar with language through this channel, but their specific experiences with grammar, even in that environment, were not extensive, linking this code only loosely to the Subject Knowledge theme.

Having studied French and German to GCSE, Tom was, however, unable to relate much of the learning he had experienced to his understanding of English grammar. His explanation of what he took from this process is confused: '*It was just things like...the idea of it, I mean, and some of it, with French perhaps has sorts of slightly less, I suppose, relevance to English – in the sense of beginning to get that idea about regular and irregular verbs*'.

Over time he benefitted more from his lessons: '*the idea of masculine and feminine, which became interesting*', although he found little material there that he could usefully use in his lessons in his own classroom.

Beatrice remembered some grammar learning at secondary school: '*Only through learning languages. So, most of my grammar learning came through learning French and German, not in English*'.

5.6.1.12. Grammar as spelling

This code was introduced by some teachers who were confused about spelling as a feature of grammar. It was only mentioned in the first interview, because by the time the teachers reached the next interviewing stage they were all aware that spelling is not a part of grammar, except where there is a link between spelling and morphology.

Harry, had vague memories '*of doing like ‘magic e’, you know, those spelling rules, watching the video*' in his early school days, and Isabella remembers much the same sorts of activity, including an "*a for apple*" exercise' around the class.

5.6.1.13. Summary of Subject Knowledge theme

What related the recruited participants in this study at its commencement was a shared awareness that they all knew relatively little about grammar (their metalinguistic content knowledge). This code, the most mentioned by all the teachers in the first interviews, indicated their acute awareness of a lack of knowledge of the subject. It would not be accurate to claim that all eight

teachers knew nothing about grammar, because they could all demonstrate they possessed random examples of metalinguistic knowledge, but without any coherent overview. Their preparation for this course differed; ranging from a little preparation and some cursory reflection, to not having given it any real thought at all.

Another common feature of their responses concerned the different perceptions of what actually constitutes 'grammar'. There was little agreement between them about any sort of shared definition of the topic; some believing that grammar is about word classes, others that it includes sentence structuring, some even mentioning punctuation and a few believing that it embraced spelling. Most participants expressed their shame about not knowing what they felt they ought to, reflected in the sort of teaching they were providing.

Nobody could remember any significant grammar lessons from their own school days, according with other studies on this subject that claim the teaching of grammar died out in English schools until very recently. There were also little more than passing references to any provision of grammar teaching in their initial teacher training. Most of their language learning had been piecemeal, obtained from a number of disparate, possibly unreliable, sources.

These teachers were all involved in preparing their pupils aged 11, for a grammar test; a component of the government imposed assessment regime at the end of Key Stage 2. To meet the expectations of their senior managers, they had needed to supplement their knowledge with a large range of published materials and from sites on the internet. Yet, their lack of grammar knowledge meant they had no criteria through which to judge the reliability or usefulness of such resources.

This evidence from the interviews went some way to answering the research question about the 'pedagogical and subject knowledge' issues teachers experience when attempting to teach grammar. Due to their lack of subject knowledge before the programme, they were unable to relate grammar with any sort of improvement of writing. They were concerned that the government had introduced a test for their pupils, for which they were unable to fully prepare their classes. Barriers arose from working in school cultures which did not promote grammar knowledge across the school; barriers were caused by a lack

of resources with which teachers could feel comfortable, and barriers were set up through teachers having restricted confidence in their ability when attempting to teach grammar. These handicaps also impacted on the question about how primary teachers' grammar knowledge influenced the ways they taught grammar. The research teachers were not in control of their pedagogy and found themselves being driven by a set of decontextualised requirements imposed from beyond their schools by central government.

5.6.2. Second theme - Personal epistemologies theme - first interview

The following table (table 9) shows the number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to a particular code within the **Personal Epistemologies** theme in the first set of interviews conducted with 8 interviewees.

Codes – Personal epistemologies	No. of Sources	No. of references
Grammar as rules and regulations	7	23
Understanding of bigger grammar picture	7	7
Grammar teaching in context	5	8
Grammar as stand-alone study	5	11
Grammar as basic skills	5	8
Effects of grammar training	0	0
Continuing problems	0	0

Table 11: Number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to Personal Epistemologies codes in the first interview

5.6.2.1. Grammar as rules and regulations

This code is about teachers who think of grammar as a sort of gospel, composed of rule-governed 'do's and don'ts'. Over time, an image has developed in the wider populace about the definitive quality of grammar, which, to them, is unchallengeable. Little regard is given to the fact that grammar is, in fact, a human construct and any authority of 'rules and regulations' attached to it should only ever be regarded as an habitual, conventional agreed way of making meaning, without any specific authority. The position these teachers adopted at the beginning of the project is a vital piece of evidence in the process of observing their developing epistemologies.

Tom expressed a dilemma. He wished to be '*the best teacher of grammar that I can be*', to enable his pupils to perform well in the end of their Key Stage test,

but he did not want to adopt '*the style of overt teaching of grammar*' required by the government, which he described as '*a massive throwback to a kind of some sort of vision of the nineteen fifties*'. He articulated clearly how his personal epistemological view of grammar was not consistent with the official curriculum. He understood and disagreed with the concept of '*prescriptive*' grammar, but he had no alternative to offer.

Harry believed grammar was about '*using the language correctly*'. He was teaching a grammar scheme, with suggested lessons, which he regarded as '*quite prescriptive, actually*', yet he instinctively felt that his pupils should be involved in more than '*just learning the rules*'.

For some, there was a strong relationship between '*proper speaking*' and '*correct*' writing. Juliet claimed that '*they write like they speak*' and posited that, if their speaking was improved, it would '*improve their writing*'. Some participants were intimidated by the thought of what they regarded as an overwhelming number of rules. Isabella thought she was not '*very good at knowing the rules and regulations of grammar...in like a rule book way*', as '*some of them are so complicated*'. Yet, she also thought that grammar had gone '*by the by*' and she claimed '*there is an argument for improving children's grammar*', but did not know what that might be. She lauded the '*chalk and talk*' grammar teaching of a colleague, who '*came from Trinidad*', and, by implication, employed prescriptivist, traditional methods.

Beatrice was fascinated by '*all the rules and the fact that there are so many of them*', although she too made a link between '*the way children are speaking*' and the way she thought they ought to write. She was particularly unhappy when the children wrote '*was*' instead of '*were*', as in '*we was going*', and the omission of prepositions, which was a feature of the dialect spoken in her school. She looked forward to learning about the rules and regulations of grammar '*to experience and to learn how it's done properly, because I haven't experienced that myself, or been taught how to teach it*'.

5.6.2.2. Understanding of bigger grammar picture

This code has to do with teachers who might think of grammar as a collection of separate bits, not yet in a position to see it as an organising force through all language engagements. There was no expectation at the beginning of this

project that the participating teachers, or their colleagues, would have a clear position in respect of a wider knowledge of and understanding of the many roles grammar plays in their lives.

Harry spoke for other colleagues when he admitted: '*my lack of knowledge of grammar is probably my weakness because I don't see what the big picture is and where it fits into literacy and other subjects*'. He concluded that he perceived grammar: as '*little blocks, tick boxes that we have to do and they can use*'.' Portia displayed the same unease, describing grammar as '*hard*'. She regarded the subject as '*how to structure sentences and word classes*', emphasising its difficulty, and admitted, when questioned about the nature of grammar, that she was '*struggling with that one*'.

5.6.2.3. Grammar teaching in context

This code came about through the responses of teachers who recognise that grammar is to be found in real-life linguistic situations and who employ 'real texts' (as opposed to specially written grammar text books) to support their language teaching. This approach to teaching grammar differs greatly from the practices of traditional grammar teaching prevalent in the earlier part of the twentieth century, when students would be expected to deconstruct or parse specially written exercises illustrating specific metalanguage use.

Tom, who had thought about this topic before the project, suggested that '*in his ideal curriculum*' his grammar learning would '*come from what we are reading*'. He talked enthusiastically about pupils encountering '*interesting, exciting, evocative texts*', which would provide the materials of language study. He expected his children to be '*exposed to a lot of forms of language*', and have '*embraced and enjoyed*' them. And only then, he stated, '*would (they) start taking apart how it works*'.

Other teachers had little to report about their use of contextual framing, although one or two regarded it as an aspiration. Dick mentioned that '*they do say that children need to hear it in context*', but that was not how he taught. Harry insisted that '*sometimes we get them to look back through their own books*', to find examples of the grammar learning being addressed, but the main area of focus in his lessons was concerned with the rules of grammar viewed as separate units.

Isabella insisted that she embedded her grammar learning in the '*modelling*' she provided to assist her pupils' writing development, but she did not refer her class to a range of other texts in the world.

It was evident that these teachers did not, at the earliest stages of the research, understand the vital link between the subject matter and the 'context of writing', which was the core of the research.

5.6.2.4. Grammar as stand-alone study

This code concerns teachers who regard grammar as an objective 'out-there' phenomenon, decontextualised from real life, which can be regarded as separate units of leaning. Those who have learned any grammar in schools have usually perceived it as a self-sustaining, detached occurrence, best learned in separate small portions.

Harry, referring to the 'Back to Basics' programme taught every Monday in his school, had little doubt that its contents were discerned by his pupils as 'stand-alone' activities, regarded '*as something separate*'. He believed that '*they see it as literacy and then grammar as a separate*'. Miranda, working in the same school, was equally damning about the fixed programme in which her class was involved. Their school demanded regular practice grammar tests, confirming for the children that grammar was a separate entity.

Juliet, who had never taught grammar before, was worried because she sensed inevitability about teaching grammar in a stand-alone manner, as a scaffolded aid: '*I've never taught as a teacher in Year 6...until I do, I don't know which is the right way.*' Portia, on the other hand, had abandoned a stand-alone lesson structure: '*I don't think how it's taught at the moment, with sort of one-off lessons on it works*'. And she pointed out that colleagues working in the same year group no longer '*taught grammar, as such*', but incorporated grammar learning in a wider writing curriculum. Tom was strongly opposed to this decontextualised way of working, and outlined what he thought of it in a lengthy critique beginning:

'I don't necessarily agree that the style of overt teaching of grammar that government seems to insist upon is as important as they think it is'.

Yet, virtually every teacher in this research was observed teaching grammar as a stand-alone phenomenon.

5.6.2.5. Grammar as basic skills

This code is about those teachers who regard grammar as a collection of separate components, such as word classes. They see grammar as a necessary set of instructions which children should learn before writing, just as times tables are a necessary preliminary to making progress in mathematics.

Dick, at the pre-training phase, mentioned more than once that: '*we need to give them these core skills*', and, '*to be good at writing...you need to be good at core skills*'. Harry demonstrated that he thought in a similar way when he said: '*grammar is skills-based for me*'. Lamenting that her pupils' knowledge of connectives and commas was too flimsy, Miranda wondered how she could come '*to really embed the most basic of skills, to help us build on it*'. Isabella conceded that a few children '*know the basics*', but by no means all.

5.6.2.6. Summary of Personal Epistemology theme

The study participants, at the start of the project, thought of grammar as a rule-driven constant, overseen by an unknown authority. This is a customary stance of any learner being introduced to a subject about which they know little. Individuals 'regularly encounter new information and may approach the learning process quite differently depending on whether they view knowledge as a set of accumulated facts, or an integrated set of constructs, or whether they view themselves as passive receptors or active constructors of knowledge' (Hofer, 2002:3). They used the words 'proper' and 'correct' in their first interviews when referring to grammar, clearly believing it to be wholly authoritative. This was a typical starting position in terms of epistemological development, where those new to a subject regard it as immutable, bowing to the supposed knowledge of experts.

Nobody in the study was able to articulate a clear or coherent sense of the wider grammar landscape. They regularly viewed grammar as a set of disjointed bits and pieces, lacking any clear purpose. Just one teacher saw grammar in a 'functional' way, but only superficially.

At the pre-study stage, the role of grammar in everyday life was not apparent to the teachers. They had not been used to relating the sort of grammar teaching they presented to ‘real’ texts, those everyday resources not ostensibly constructed to teach grammar, available in any classroom. They were also unused to recognising how grammar was embedded in the world around them, leading to a belief that grammar was a ‘stand-alone’ activity. Grammar knowledge was regarded by most of these teachers as a ‘basic skill’, full of facts to be learned, and lacking in creative potential.

This theme contributes much to the supplementary research question concerning teachers’ personal epistemologies of grammar in the context of writing. The responses contained in these codes marked a starting point in their increasing and broadening knowledge about grammar. In the following interviews an interest will be to track whether a more coherent understanding of the topic comes about, and how far these teachers might move through a spectrum, from a ‘dualist’ to a ‘relativist’ position, as the theory suggests. They are also likely to alter their positions in relation to their epistemological stances at the outset, about matters such as acceptance, understanding and puzzlement.

5.6.3. Third theme – Teacher pedagogy – first interview

The following table (table10) shows the number of times that teachers’ responses were attributed to a particular code within the **Teacher Pedagogy** theme in the first set of interviews conducted with 8 interviewees.

Table 12 – number of times that teachers’ responses were attributed to Teacher Pedagogy codes in the first interview

Codes – Teacher pedagogy	No. of sources	No. of references
Pedagogical development	6	24
Grammar as a focus for testing	6	9
Purpose of grammar teaching	5	14
Place of grammar in the curriculum	5	7
Grammar as a basis of thought	1	1
Grammar as a step to greater power	1	2
Grammar and genre	0	0

5.6.3.1. Pedagogical development

This code touches on the degree to which teachers possess clear approaches to the planning, teaching and assessment of grammar as elements in the

improvement of writing. Before this project, these teachers employed a range of different approaches, mainly concerned with maintaining pupils' interest and engagement. Harry believed that his class was close to boredom whenever he taught grammar, and claimed it was '*quite hard sometimes to engage them*', despite his best efforts. Dick, also sensitive to the degree of interest his pupils displayed when anticipating grammar lessons, agreed that '*there is no point in just ploughing on, sticking to the scheme*'. He thought that primary pupils required more challenge, to counteract current practice: '*we do a lot of teacher-based writing, and what the children do is "magpie" the bits they like – and they change some of the words*'. He maintained that these ways would not '*set them up properly for guided writing*'.

Miranda wanted '*all children to be more engaged*', whilst critiquing the sort of resources her school adopted:

"Kung Fu" punctuation and things like that, which is fun, but I don't think it's that engaging for a Year 6 child.'

She worried that she did not feel that she was '*currently catering for all learners, in the way we're teaching*'. Beatrice alleged that she tried to make her grammar lessons '*as alive as possible*', so that her class did not '*see it as just 15 minutes at the start of literacy*'. Tom was equally determined '*to make the teaching fun*', and he particularly tried '*quite hard not to do "straight" grammar lessons*', involving, "*tidy box*" stuff.'

Isabella spoke for her colleagues when she remarked that '*the government's model...how they want it to be taught, I think it's quite unknown for us at the moment*', highlighting a vital training need.

5.6.3.2. Grammar as a focus for testing

This code has to do with teachers who believe that teaching grammar is mainly driven by the testing regime. Primary teachers felt anxious at the government announcement of grammar components in future KS 1 and KS 2 tests, and quickly sought resources and ways of working to fill the gaps in their knowledge. Some classes regularly sit practice tests, through Years 5 and 6. Most teachers involved in this research participated because they hoped it would improve their professional skills to enable improvement of test results.

Miranda believed the ‘*test*’ ‘should be based on ‘assessment over a period of time’ rather than ‘*slap, bang. Here’s a test – see what you know*’. Dick, on the other hand, summarised the concern shared by teachers of older pupils in primary schools when he asked, ‘*how can I help them, as a teacher, to remember that (word classes) next year for their SAT?*’. Tom had the same concerns, predicting that his class would ‘*have to identify a noun, a verb, an adjective and an adverb*’, so, he will have to ‘*make sure that they both understand all those words and can identify them in sentences*’.

Portia and Beatrice, teaching in Years 5 and 6, respectively, had already practised test situations. Portia recognised that such actions were ‘*test focused*’, but her pupils knew ‘*that they have to do a grammar test at the end of Year 6*’, and they had already ‘*done a practice grammar test*’. Beatrice had been using the practice tests to identify weaknesses in children’s grammar knowledge. In Year 6, she went on: ‘*we are also planning every week six to ten grammar questions, which are in the style of the test*’, regretting this strategy of ‘*teaching to the test*’.

5.6.3.3. Purpose of teaching grammar

This code has to do with the levels of understanding teachers demonstrate when attempting to articulate why they are teaching grammar. At the beginning of this research the participating teachers shared rather muddled perceptions of grammar, and they found it difficult to express precisely why they thought they were teaching it. Dick, for instance, related its purpose to his own previous experiences: *writing CVs, reading CVs, writing reports, doing administration things* was ‘*important*’, which ‘*had to be right*’. This pragmatic purpose was echoed by Harry, who struggled to come up with a detailed explanation: ‘*In the future they might have an interview and might have to fill out a CV*’. He stressed the need for good grammar knowledge because ‘*they might not be seen to, because they have used poor punctuation – these are just the basic things that I think they definitely need to know*’.

Isabella thought that grammar competence made children ‘*better writers*’, because it is ‘*looking at language in a different way*’. It is a subject that ‘*you can get interested in itself*’, and she believed that this interest could be ‘*a lifetime thing*’. The purpose of improving writing was also expressed by Tom, who

suggested a teacher might request: ‘*writing a sentence in which ‘this ‘happens’, and then work with the writer, ‘to explore how that works’*’. Tom, who saw beyond the limited uses of grammar expressed by his colleagues, also tried very hard ‘*to weave it in reading*’, exploring the possible ‘*intentions of the author*’ in an approach which acknowledged the functional purposes of a metalanguage.

5.6.3.4. The place of grammar in the curriculum

This code has to do with teachers who make reference to where and how opportunities for further grammar learning occur in their teaching programmes. It reveals the extent of teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge at the beginning of the project. They recognise that all language use takes place in grammatical patterns and conventions, and their teaching enabled them to seek occasions to connect their pupils to those patterns.

Portia decided that the current teaching methodology of ‘*one-off lessons...doesn’t work*’. Instead, teachers should be ‘*talking about it sort of everyday*’, like she does, as it ‘*makes them absorb the knowledge more*.’ Beatrice stated that ‘*it’s crucial*’, relating her reasons to the improvement of writing. She talked of ‘*a constant battle...trying to embed*’ effective grammar with pupils in Year 6 who have been taught little grammar in their previous five years of primary schooling.

Harry, challenged about the place of grammar in the curriculum, argued cautiously that ‘*they get a lot out of it*’, and ‘*big improvements can be seen in their writing*’, which could be just the expression of his inherited belief about the power of grammar, lacking a genuine authenticity. His uncertainty was demonstrated in the following: ‘*I haven’t yet gone that deep, into grammar. I don’t yet know how deep it goes in Year 6*’.

Whilst acknowledging the necessary role of grammar in the curriculum, Tom had difficulty describing what that might be, suggesting ‘*I think...there is a very passionate conversation to be had about what exactly children need to know to use language effectively*’, and ‘*what we might like them to know*’.

Isabella worried about the government's new grammar requirement, was fearful that '*if we are doing lists and rules and regulations...it will be as dull as ditchwater*'.

5.6.3.5. Grammar as a basis of thought

This code was only raised by one teacher, Tom. He understood that grammar had just as much to do with thinking as all the other linguistically based ways of making meaning. George Keith, an academic linguist, once declared at a conference that 'grammar is joined up thinking'. Tom made much the same point when he said, '*you know, we use language as a basis of thought, in my thinking anyway*'. And he went on: '*as we improve our understanding of language, we are – hopefully – improving our thinking skills as well and our ability to recompose what we are thinking*'.

5.6.3.6. Summary of pedagogy theme

Primary teachers face a difficult tension. They must prepare their pupils for the test they will all sit aged 11, but many of them are also aware that this single-minded approach is inadequate and fails their children in broad linguistic terms. These teachers have no guiding rationale with regard to the purposes of grammar teaching, or what position it occupies in the curriculum. A consequence of not being taught grammar at any point in their lives means that they have not had an opportunity to discuss and explore these matters to any searching degree. They have been informed of a link between grammar teaching and writing, but this attitude could be the result of inherited belief, without any real substance. Having been told that better grammar can lead to better writing, they are not acquainted with the sorts of strategies they might be planning and teaching to realise that goal. There is even difficulty about knowing what might constitute 'improvement in writing' in the first place.

So, as well as their lack of metalinguistic content knowledge, they are also limited in their declarative knowledge, the 'explicit knowledge of grammar in terms of morphology and syntax' (Myhill, 2011:249). These deficiencies also impact on their understanding of how to teach language to improve writing (metalinguistic pedagogical content knowledge), and when might be the optimum time to teach particular grammatical features (grammatical pedagogical content knowledge).

These pedagogical barriers present a significant block to their development as teachers of grammar aimed at improving writing. The lack of grammar knowledge had significant influence on the way these teachers were attempting to teach it at the beginning of the project. They could only teach in a restricted manner, lacking a clear rationale. Only one teacher had seriously given thought to the wider potential of learning grammar, suggesting that the others were participating in a programme whose worth they were unable to gauge.

5.6.4. Fourth theme – Pupil Progress - First interview

The following table (table 11) shows the number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to a particular code within the **Pupil Progress** theme in the first set of interviews conducted with 8 interviewees.

Codes	No. of sources	No. of references
Grammar as enabler of writing improvement	6	26
Grammar as an obstacle of learning	6	10
More able children	5	11
Enjoyment of grammar	4	8
Improved pupil attainment	0	0
Pupil difficulties	0	0

Table13: Number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to Pupil Progress codes in the first interview.

5.6.4.1. Grammar as enabler of writing improvement

This code was raised by teachers who consider improvement in grammar knowledge can bring about improvement in writing ability. They believe in a relationship between grammar and writing, but not in the traditional manner, associated with prescriptive grammar learning. Yet, whilst twenty six references linking grammar and improved writing were made by the teachers in their interview responses, nobody questioned this belief, or looked behind the claim.

Some teachers aimed to increase their pupils' understanding of the function of the words they are choosing, to concentrate on the effects such choices are likely to have on meaning in the composition. Tom claimed he would be much more excited: '*if a child ...used a word that we use as a verb or noun happily in a sentence without necessarily knowing it's a noun or a verb, but they can explain why they used that word, and what the purpose round their thought process was*'. He took this approach seriously, and reported that it came about

because he tried to ‘make sure’ his ‘grammar teaching...is about how they can use it in their writing to good effect’.

Dick wanted ‘to know what grammar is...and the best way to give the children confidence to use it’. Harry thought that knowing grammar had the power of ‘adding detail to sentences...at a higher level’. Miranda, less ambitiously, wanted ‘them to ...look back on their written work a week later and be able to know exactly what they meant today as they did the week before’. Juliet suggested that what was necessary for improvement, ‘always comes down to the individual and what they can do already’.

Strategically, Portia believed that real improvement could only come about if the lessons were not ‘one-off’, which only yielded ‘just O.K.’ results. She thought that ‘talking about it (grammar) all the time’ was the best way to achieve the embedding of aspects of grammar that can be seen ‘flowing through their work’.

5.6.4.2. Grammar as an obstacle to writing

This code was the concern of those teachers who are fearful that having to remember the details of grammar might make writing more difficult for pupils, hampering their creative imagination. A few teachers were partly sceptical about grammar lessons, because they felt that introducing specific grammar learning into their already busy classroom programmes would be too much for their pupils to manage, causing the loss of their natural fluency.

According to Isabella, ‘sometimes (grammar) overcomplicates’ and Harry agreed by uttering: ‘I think because there’s so much of it (grammar)...they find it hard to remember’, resulting in pupil writers forgetting ‘to actually write a sentence that makes sense’. Tom, too, believed that grammar can get in the way of writing, suggesting that writing was at ‘two levels’; one level involved ‘the most wonderful desire to create something’, whilst the other was about ‘technical accuracy....which can get in the way’.

5.6.4.3. More able children

This code was raised by teachers who have attempted more challenging work for pupils of greater linguistic ability than their peers. A variety of views were expressed about how more able pupils might be more effectively challenged. When questioned about provision for the more able Dick answered that he ‘tried

to encourage more independent learning; more independent thinking,’ but did not specify further.

Harry had different priorities with his more able pupils, as he tried ‘*to push those forward into why we use certain things*’. By this, I understand he not only wants his children to know grammatical terminology, but also to have an understanding of linguistic functions, but he was hampered in this approach by his own lack of knowledge: ‘*I try to think of ways to hook them, ways to engage them, but... it’s generally my lack of knowledge*’. Miranda was also aware that she had problems meeting pupils’ needs: ‘*I would like to see my higher ability children being taught grammar in a more engaging way*’.

Some teachers regarded learning language in a hierarchical manner, depending on the ability of the learner. So, Juliet mentioned: ‘*for some of the children at the top end we looked at a range of punctuation that they might use and in particular we focused on using semi-colons*’. Miranda similarly described how ‘*the higher ability learners were given a piece of writing that had older and more formal language*’. Some very critical comments were made by Tom about the ‘stepped approach’ to grammar learning practised by his colleagues: *I was thinking your bright children love it because, presumably, they are getting stickers...because it is brainless what they doing, and they are actually learning nothing. Your middle ability are struggling and hopefully being rewarded for any effort they are putting in. And your lower ability – well – hopefully you have differentiation, so they are achieving, because otherwise they are not getting it.*’

5.6.4.4. Enjoyment of grammar

This code touched on evidence that teachers and/or their pupils enjoy learning about grammar, although these responses could only be made later in the project. Harry admitted that he was ‘*interested in language*’, and he liked ‘*talking about it*’, but ‘*not to the point where (he) would like to study it*’. Miranda described a small problem she had identified involving ‘*fun*’ resources, which, nevertheless, might not lead to real engagement, and she claimed that she ‘*hadn’t got time to be wowed and engaging*’.

Tom, who attempted to make his ‘*grammar teaching fun*’, thought that ‘*once you have an experience of language just for fun, just for the joy of reading and*

exploring, it becomes more interesting to start taking it apart, to see how it fits together'. 'Knowing how to write....should be enjoyable', said Juliet.

Whilst only a few responses touched on these matters at the beginning of the project, before any training had taken place, these topics featured significantly in the second and third interviews.

5.6.4.5. Summary of pupil progress

At the beginning of this project it was not surprising that pupils had made limited progress in relating grammar to improved writing, as most of the volunteer teachers had agreed to participate because they were seeking ways of increasing their pupils' writing attainment. They trusted, seemingly without question, the notion that better knowledge of grammar would lead to better writing skills. This lack of a clear rationale for teaching grammar, even between teachers in the same school, led to yet another barrier. Until they really knew about and agreed with how they might plan, teach and assess this subject, their grammatical pedagogical content knowledge would be seriously hampered.

A few participants were concerned that learning grammar had the potential for suppressing natural rhythms and creativity, but those protests were few. Another barrier was a shared concern expressed by a few teachers seeking to make grammar lessons becoming engaging and fun, although, once again, there was a general unawareness how those outcomes might be encouraged. A more detailed assessment of this theme was likely to be a larger feature of the next stages of the study.

5.7. Subject knowledge theme - Findings from the second and third interviews

The following table (table12) shows the number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to a particular code within the **Subject Knowledge** theme in the second and third set of interviews conducted with 8 interviewees in the second round of interviews and 6 interviewees in the third round .

Codes in the Subject Knowledge theme – 2 nd and 3 rd interviews	No. of sources 2 nd interview	No. of references 2 nd interview	No. of sources 3 rd interview	No. of references 3 rd interview
Grammar as word classes	8	44	6	27

Awareness of subject knowledge problem	8	18	6	14
Grammar as sentence structuring	7	28	5	23
Improvement of grammar knowledge	7	28	6	46
Grammar and genre	7	9	1	1
Continuing problems with grammar	6	15	1	2
Confidence in grammar teaching	5	11	6	24
Grammar as punctuation	4	7	0	0
Use of grammar publications	3	5	6	7
Self-taught grammar knowledge	1	1	0	0
Ashamed at lack of grammar knowledge	1	1	3	4
Grammar learning through foreign languages	1	1	1	1
No memory of school grammar	0	0	1	1
Other sources of grammar acquisition	0	0	0	0
Grammar as a component of ITE	0	0	0	0
Grammar as spelling	0	0	0	0

Table 14 - Number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to the Subject Knowledge codes in the second and third interviews

NB – the underscore \mathbf{x}_2 at the end of a quotation indicates the comment was made in the second interview

- The underscore \mathbf{x}_3 at the end of a quotation indicates the comment was made in the third interview

5.7.1. Grammar as word classes

This code touches on what teachers know of word classes and indicates how important word classes became in their understanding of grammar. It was the most mentioned topic by all the participants during the second and third interviews, because the participating teachers had recently become familiar with this taxonomy. The teaching and learning of grammar can take place in a number of ways, but most teachers settled for learning about the eight word

classes of English, and exploring their functions in their operational contexts. The training programme was designed in that manner, so it was not surprising that the teachers adopted a similar approach.

A considerable distance existed between what most of these teachers knew about word classes in their first interviews, and what they had acquired by the ninth month, and, finally, by the fifteenth month of the study. All the teachers made some progress in their knowledge of word classes, but a few were seriously changed as thinkers about language because of their new knowledge. Harry, whose teaching was transformed by his participation in the project, declared that '*it's kind of like learning a hidden language within your own language in a strange sort of way – when I decode things I kind of decode the hidden*'₂.

Miranda was as enthusiastic '*learning what word classes mean*'₃, because it had been '*the fundamental improvement and reason why she had benefitted*'₃ from the programme. Her children, she added, are: '*not only better at using grammar to support their writing, but they have improved in their ability to recognise good writing as well*'₃. She cited occasions when pupils listened to each other's work being read aloud and they noticed more matters of interest since their metalinguistic induction.

Although familiar with word classes, Tom still appreciated studying them in greater detail: '*one of the things that has been very helpful for me has been to help me think about grammar in terms of word classes*'₂. His pupils also gained from the experience: '*by and large, we've helped them have a vocabulary to talk about sentences*'₂. Beatrice claimed that '*just the vocabulary has massively had an impact and, I think, identifying word classes because that's something that wasn't there before*'₂. She thought that her class was '*more conscious of exploring the sort of verb choices and the impact of them on a reader*'₂, as a result of their new knowledge. Juliet was pleased that her pupils could not only '*pick out the good words and phrases*'₂, and '*know what the role was – the purpose of the word*'₂, but she could hear them talking about word classes in their everyday conversation.

Even though he reported finding the course challenging at the second interview, Dick realised by the third that he had acquired a great deal more linguistic

understanding. So, after nine months Dick confessed: '*I struggle. I don't think I am up there yet*'². Six months later, whilst: '*still struggling to understand every word class within a phrase*'³, he, nevertheless, declared: '*I have to admit I have made a massive improvement*'³. Not every teacher was able to benefit fully from the programme; Isabella found the course challenging, and missed some of the training. Asked about which areas of grammar she would like to know more, she responded, '*I think the whole lot...How things are named – that's still not stuck in my head properly*'².

Most of the experiences with word classes were, however, very positive. Portia summarised much of what her colleagues had shared about the effect of the increased involvement she felt with her grammar learning:

*'it made me think more about different word classes. It gave me more knowledge to do things to pass on to the children. I used to mention sentence types when I was modelling, but, maybe, not the reason why we use different things in writing, and I have been doing more'*².

The outcome of this learning, and the difference it made on the writing of her pupils, was described succinctly by Beatrice:

*'They are now in control'*³.

5.7.2. Awareness of subject knowledge problem

This code featured in all the interviews of every teacher. They were aware that their limited knowledge of grammar prevented effective teaching. Some concerns were about their perceived lack of knowledge of very particular language features. So, Beatrice – who was capable of mature thinking about the broader matters of grammar – became concerned about teaching linguistic minutiae: '*I never know how to explain things like making the agreement with 'an' and 'a' with the article, like that sort of thing*'². Yet, Beatrice also recognised a larger view of grammar horizons in the following admission: '*you start thinking about one thing and then you find out something else. So, it's constant isn't it?*'².

Tom felt that he needed to increase his: '*understanding of the things, like the everyday things, like prepositions, for instance*'². But, he also worried about devising and teaching the next stages of grammar learning beyond the commonplace: '*I've felt more confidence and comfortable with the course – but what are the next steps here?*'² After some months of grammar tuition and

teaching, Harry also wondered about what next he needed to know: '*There's something...it's getting more technical and things now...I've got a good knowledge of what's going on with...but anything beyond that is stretching myself*'₂. Dick, too, felt that whilst he was '*a fair to middling*' teacher of grammar, '*quite clearly there are often things that I'm still lacking a bit of confidence*'₃. Juliet and Isabella, encountered far deeper problems, illustrated by Juliet's comments: '*Literacy in general, not just being specific to grammar, I find incredibly hard*'₃. By the end of the project, however, she was able to report that: '*I've learned a lot to be honest. And it's not just about the ins and outs of grammar, and things like that. It's taught me a lot about myself*'₃. Isabella found the challenge very difficult, encountering a predicament with the vocabulary of grammar: '*I think it's so complicated ...how things are named*'₂.

Asked why they had volunteered to participate in the project in the first place, Harry and Miranda, teaching in the same school, gave almost identical answers. Miranda replied, '*I didn't think my knowledge of grammar was particularly strong and it was becoming quite a large focus in our school*'₃. Harry's response was much the same: '*I had very little knowledge of anything beyond word classes, really – verbs, nouns and adjectives – but anything beyond that I was stretching myself*'₂.

Portia summed up the contrast, referred to by a few participants, between the superficial contents of grammar and the wider understanding of the subject expressed by some of the teachers, in the following:

*'My understanding of different things like word classes, sentence structures...all of that has developed a lot, but I don't think my understanding of what grammar actually is – I don't think I'd be able to tell you... If I was asked what it is, I don't think I could come up with a good answer'*₃.

5.7.3. Grammar as sentence structuring

This code features the responses made by teachers who have recognised the importance of sentence construction as the core of effective grammar teaching. This was an area of increased understanding on the part of teachers during the project, illustrated by Dick, who, asked what he had learned, said: '*it's about how we construct successful sentences*'₃. He added: '*I thought I knew what a simple sentence was: I don't think I did if I'm being totally honest*'₃.

He could recognise ‘the difference between compound and complex sentences, and what makes it “compound” and what makes it “complex”’³. Harry was also able to benefit from his new knowledge in his teaching: ‘*Before, I felt we were just skimming the surface... Now, when they are doing a piece of writing, I can stop them and say, “Right, have you used a complex sentence?..Have you used an adverbial phrase?”*³

Miranda reported a similar positive development in her own teaching, through ‘*talking of the ways that sentences are made and structured*’³. She now feels that she ‘*can discuss why a sentence is simple and they will understand because I am using a vocabulary that we both share*’³. However, not all her grammar teaching was going smoothly, although she claimed that, ‘*I feel my horizons have been broadened with grammar,*³’ it was ‘*not a straight and narrow subject to teach*’³. She continued: ‘*While I might increase my subject knowledge in phrases and verb phrases, that’s great. But then I think, “Oh goodness me, I’m still not one hundred percent on auxiliary verbs”*³. *There’s always something new to be focusing on*³. Harry was convinced his pupils had ‘*a deeper understanding of what they were writing*³’, despite his worries.

Asked about her own grammar improvement, Portia mentioned ‘*the different sentence structures*’³, which she felt had provided her pupils with ‘*more varied*’ writing skills, as a result of the ‘*choices that they make*³’. She went on, ‘*I think my understanding of different things, like word classes, sentence structures – all of those have developed a lot.*³’ This same learning was demonstrated by Beatrice, who had encouraged ‘*the children to actually explore different phrases and different clauses and using them in their writing and giving them ownership of what they are using it for and why*’³. This approach enabled her more able pupils, particularly, to ‘*fly with it*³,’ as it has helped them have a better understanding of basic sentence structure, ‘*because they’ve gone right back to simple sentences and what makes it, and just playing with them, realising that they don’t have to rush off into complex sentences right away, but to play and explore with the power that they’ve got*’³.

5.7.4. Improvement of grammar knowledge

This code, which indicated the acquisition of new knowledge about grammar, emerged in the second round of interviews, illustrating the changed progress

experienced by the participants. Most acknowledged that, after only nine months of training and practice, they had gained a tangible improvement of their grammar knowledge, which they evidenced in a number of ways, including feeling sufficiently secure to allow their pupils to ‘play’ with language. By the third interview this code had become a prominent area of response.

Harry made significant progress, becoming a wholly changed teacher of grammar by taking part in this programme. His knowledge gain can be plainly traced through his interview responses. In the third interview he recalled and admitted:

‘In our first interview I said what I didn’t know when I started teaching; what a noun was, an adjective...let alone when we started looking at sentence types and things like that....and I just thought, “What is that all about?” You know, I literally did not know’.³

In his second interview he was claiming:

I feel that my grammar teaching has been transformed, to be honest – like black and white....I feel I’ve got more knowledge in the last few months than in the last few years of teaching. ²

In the final interview, reviewing fifteen months of grammar learning and teaching, he announced that he had moved ‘massively’. He claimed: ‘*I feel now it has become one of my strongest subjects to teach*’³, and explained:

‘It’s like missed opportunities, really. Before when I used to teach – because I’m doing similar planning now that I did last year – and there’s things now that I’m picking up in a lesson that I wouldn’t have noticed last time. So, I’ll be reading a story, not only will we be picking out some good features of the story, we’ll also be picking out word classes and things like that with the children. So, I’ll stop and say what word class is that?’ ‘What kind of word class is that?’ ‘How is that used in that sentence?’³

Dick also claimed that he had ‘*a better understanding of what grammar is – or what I think grammar is*’². He continued: ‘*I think it’s a learning curve. I think it’s an on-going process...and just becoming more used to using it*’². His own development enabled his pupils to feel more comfortable with language: ‘*what’s great is that they are playing with their language, and that’s what they really enjoy*’³.

Miranda’s improvement was evident, for instance, ‘*if I’m marking a piece of work from their history unit,*’ where she, ‘*might comment on their use of complex*

*sentences, or their word order, or verb and tense agreement, more often than I would have done before*². Despite the concern of ‘finding engaging ways to teach’, she still believed her ‘subject knowledge had grown’³.

Portia thought her children ‘learned a lot from it’³ and she had, too. Her ‘knowledge had improved, I can impart that to them’³. Beatrice believed she was ‘finding different ways to explain to the children’², whereas before she ‘had a limited bank’² of explanations. Like some other colleagues in the project, she had improved so much that she wanted to take her learning further: ‘quite a few things’ had made her ‘want to explore a bit further, like the meaning of words and tracing words back to their roots’³.

5.7.5. Grammar and genre

This code concerned those teachers referring to the grammar components of different sorts of texts. Experienced teachers would be familiar with the grammar content of the National Literacy Strategy, associated with identification and construction of texts of different genre. Recently recruited teachers knew less about that initiative. This code identified those teachers who might have related the grammar features of the Strategy with the elements of the training programme of this research.

Beatrice quickly made the link by referring to: ‘*Things like information texts or non-chronological report...using the vocabulary*². She described the process as: ‘we tend to look at good models of whatever we are doing in persuasive writing ...we pick out features ...whether it is sentence patterns, word types..and then I expect to see that in their writing². A similar relationship was recognised by Tom, who stated: ‘*It depends on the text type*², and amplified his response: ‘*Obviously with instruction we are using “bossy” verbs at the front. Usually it will be about: is it formal, or informal? For non-fiction, it’s usually formal. Are we first person, or are we third person? Which tense are we writing in? We expect to do it this way because those are the rules of that kind of text type*².

Dick also combined the two approaches to grammar, acknowledging they are related: ‘before we do a text type we look at those sorts of features as part of the old kind of curriculum, if you like; we look at the features to be successful’². He continued: ‘A good example would be that we have done non-chronological

*reports recently. We've looked up what tense it is written in; we looked specifically at colon and semi-colons'*₂.

5.7.6 Continuing problems with grammar

This code gathered the mentions by teachers who still found particular details of the grammar programme causing difficulties for themselves or their pupils. Whilst all the teachers benefited from the training to some degree, some found certain details elusive. The greater bulk of misunderstanding occurred at the time of the second interviews; six months later, at the conclusion of the study, most of the teachers had become more secure. Some teachers experienced problems with very detailed features of grammar language, whilst others were troubled about wider-ranging issues. 'Problems' as understood here might refer to teachers failing to comprehend a feature of grammar (grammatical content knowledge), or difficulties with teaching it effectively (grammatical pedagogical content knowledge).

Juliet experienced considerable difficulties at the beginning of the course. A newly qualified teacher, teaching Year 6 children, she readily admitted literacy was not her favourite subject. '*I've had a really stressful year. It's been the hardest year, and at the point where you (the researcher) came in was nearly breaking point'*₂. She showed considerable resilience by continuing. Not only was learning and teaching grammar an extra burden on her classroom activities, she was being encouraged to think beyond the prescriptive model that offered the 'security' of 'rules'. Juliet's biggest challenge was '*the range you have in the class and how do you differentiate for that range'*₂.

Isabella thought learning grammar was testing: '*I think it's so complicated'*₂, and experienced difficulties in teaching it. She was confused about what constituted good grammar teaching. Dick identified other sorts of problems, and described the learning of grammar terms and content as his greatest predicament: '*I suppose that I am still unsure of adverbial phrases starting sentences; is it the 'where', 'when or 'how'?*'₂. He had difficulty answering challenging questions confidently, and stated: '*Yes. I'll be honest. We often read a sentence, it might be a complex sentence – normally it is a complex sentence - or compound, and I struggle sometimes to pick out the word classes'*₂. In his third interview, he admitted he still didn't know the rules'. He found infinite and finite verbs

problematic, and admitted he still did not, ‘know those, so there’s still lots to do....if I can’t understand them, I can’t expect the children to’³.

In her second interview Portia also mentioned there were some matters still to tackle, and she had ‘re-addressed’ understanding about verbs in her classroom, after some advice. She stated that she was comfortable with sentence types, but her class was ‘still not secure on all of the word classes’², determining it was something she ‘still needs to tackle’². This fundamental understanding also eluded Harry’s pupils. He reported that his Year 5 children found subordination to be difficult, so that they ‘were getting confused between is that a compound? Is that a complex?’². He mentioned he had ‘done quite a few sessions on that and that is something that is on-going’².

Not all the training was clear enough for all the teachers, however. Dick referred to the researcher’s explanation of a point of detail which left him, ‘completely befuddled’² and caused him to ‘Google it, to get it straight’² in his head.

Some teachers experienced problems deciding on priorities, because matters of grammar are so intertwined. Beatrice described some of the problems this situation presented, particularly with regard to a class that ‘had massive gaps in its learning’². How to tackle that circumstance presented difficulties for her:

‘So you want to start doing something – you do a bit of complex sentences, OK – they have not got into subordination. So you start to do some subordination, and then you realise they don’t know what adjectives are. So you have to go right back to the beginning. That’s been hard, but that’s always going to be difficult if you introduce things where there are things missing’².

5.7.7. Confidence with grammar teaching

This code was raised by teachers considering whether or not they had increased in confidence when teaching grammar. All participants in this project became more confident about planning, teaching and assessing the impact of grammar during the project, but to different degrees. The increase in subject knowledge by these teachers usually led to better relationships with their pupils in discourses about grammar.

Miranda spoke for most of her teacher colleagues when stating: ‘the ability to have a discussion with my children using the correct vocabulary is so much stronger,² making her feel more ‘confident than before’². She compared her

level of confidence prior to the training and her current situation, claiming: '*When I look back now, before the training began...I think it was probably quite worrying that I was conducting lessons with that type of subject knowledge*'₂.

Harry's development was similar: '*Just confidence now. Knowing that anything the children ask me I've got a good knowledge of what I'm talking about*'₂. He was pleased he had '*the confidence to say, "Let's stop and look at this in more detail"*'₃. He also believed, as a consequence of his new knowledge, his next year's lessons would contain, '*a massive grammar undertone to all of it*'₂.

Dick claimed he been made '*more aware and confident*'₂, reporting that, '*It's been amazing. I'm much more confident and I think that comes out in my teaching as well.*' As a consequence, '*the children are enjoying the lessons more*'₃.

Juliet's increased confidence was important to her. At university she had been diagnosed with dyslexia, describing it as '*a different way of working, not an excuse*'₃. She had not been a confident language user, and regarded grammar as '*just a set of rules*' she had to learn. She believed that had she known earlier about a lot of things to do with grammar in her life, generally, '*it would have been easier and more straightforward*'₃. Because of the training, she now felt more relaxed teaching grammar, and agreed that she had gained, '*more confidence to try, but I'm still not 100%*'₃. She saw grammar learning as '*an on-going thing. I don't think it's something that you can do just once*'₂. The real difficulty was '*the rest of the school day*'₂.

Beatrice, was '*a lot more confident about it*'₂, and had been particularly interested to see improvement in her class's response to more sophisticated discourses, where they were using '*a lot of terminology*' she would not have used with children before, but '*seeing how well they picked it up made me not afraid to use it and explore it with them*'₃.

5.7.8. Grammar as punctuation

This code relates to references by teachers who believe punctuation is a feature of grammar teaching. Whereas this code was mentioned a number of times in the first interviews, it received few mentions in the second round and none in the final round. This topic tended to be raised by the less confident teachers, who had a weaker grasp of grammar than their peers.

Isabella wanted her children to have a better understanding of the structure of sentences, and said, '*they have the tools, that will improve the content of what they do. Not just narrative writing, because I think it's gone through to punctuation and other things as well*'³. Miranda also believed that punctuation was an element of grammar learning, stating that '*they have definitely improved in their ability to use punctuation, speech punctuation – they are really confident on now. Commas they are more confident in*'². Juliet had also been '*thinking when to use punctuation, like semi-colons, because I always say if you can substitute it for a connective, you know – then you could put it in*'².

By the end of the project this group had come to realise that punctuation and grammar were different sorts of elements in writing development as punctuation no longer came up as a separate topic.

5.7.9. Use of grammar publications

This code notes the references made to the varied resources these teachers were employing to support the teaching and learning of grammar. Before the project began, teacher participants relied heavily on a range of grammar focused resources from varied sources. This coding indicated whether these teachers still depended quite so much on resources beyond those recommended in the training.

By the time of the third interview, after fifteen months, Dick was still uncomfortable teaching grammar without some external support. He obtained '*some ideas from some of the websites that are around for teachers*'³. He was not yet at a stage where he could, '*plan a lesson without some support from somewhere*'³. Indeed, almost all the participants used, and sometimes relied on, a resource from a range of sources, but they became employed in a more considered manner as the project went on. Harry readily admitted, '*looking through that 'Teaching Grammar Effectively'*', had been '*really helpful*'². This provided '*a good knowledge of what I am talking about. I'm not just blagging it or I don't have to do a quick Google search, or things like that to try and figure it out*'². Miranda also reported that the recommended text had '*been really useful*', and it could '*be often seen in our PPA room*'³, assisting lesson planning.

Juliet and Isabella mentioned texts they utilised to support their planning. Isabella experienced difficulties remembering the names of word classes and

other sentence features. She had ‘*bought some grammar books now*’₂, and ‘*if we don’t know something, we look it up and we find out about it*’₂. Nine months into project, Juliet reported that she ‘*looked on the internet*’₂, and called on ‘*different books to look in and people to talk to*’₂.

Beatrice and Portia, who taught in the same school at the beginning of the research, thought literacy consultant Pie Corbett’s ‘The New Grammar Book’ to be a helpful publication, because, Portia claimed, ‘*there are lots of games in there*’. Beatrice agreed, saying, ‘*those games are brilliant*’, and she had given copies ‘*to less confident staff*’ in her school, ‘*because it’s all there*’₃. More often, however, Portia conducted language lessons with her pupils through non-textbook texts, ‘*Just fiction books, just going through, picking out examples of sentence structures*’ because her pupils ‘*love that*’, picking out ‘*examples in their own books*’₃. Even though Beatrice ‘*makes most of it (her resources) myself*’, she still ‘*goes to Google*’ if she is ‘*ever stuck*’₂.

5.7.10. Self-taught grammar knowledge

This code, mentioned by only one teacher in the second set of interviews, and not at all in the third, was to do with teachers who had learned much about grammar through their own endeavours, rather than being taught what they knew. Beatrice attempted to explain how her previous perceptions about grammar had been changed by participating in the programme. She was ‘*never scared of grammar*’. It always really interested her: but she thought, ‘*everything I knew was from me learning it, like teaching myself it, or from my knowledge of using it in another language*’₂. She continued: ‘*I think now, and I always thought I was (confident with grammar) – I think now it’s just opened my eyes to how vast it is and there’s so much more*’₂.

5.7.11. Ashamed at lack of grammar knowledge

This code, recognising the discomfort of possessing limited knowledge about grammar, was mentioned by one teacher in the second and third interviews, and by two other teachers in the third round. Harry felt ashamed about the low level of knowledge he and the other teachers in his school possessed: ‘*We are teaching literacy every day, yet we don’t even know that a simple sentence only has one verb, or a clause has one process! We didn’t know*’₂. Harry’s admission continued to his third interview, when he recalled seeing a complex sentence on a classroom wall, and he thought: “*What is that all about?*” You

*know, I had no idea at all*³. During the training, Harry reflected: ‘I remember thinking, “I can’t remember what a verb is - how bad is that?.. Twenty years old , and I can’t remember what a verb is!”²

Miranda echoed Harry’s discomfort, relating: ‘When I look back now, before the training began, I think it was quite worrying that I was conducting lessons with that type of subject knowledge’³. Juliet had different problems, but still knew little about grammar. Had she known about her dyslexia earlier: ‘a lot of things in my life generally would have been easier and more straightforward’². ‘And I think that has a lot of effect on my confidence with things, because it’s hard as you get to be an adult and you find out these things, it’s harder to accept.³

5.7.12. Grammar learning through foreign languages

This code, raised by teachers who learned their grammar through studying modern foreign languages, was referred to only by Beatrice in the second set interviews, and not at all in the third. Beatrice reflected: ‘from my knowledge of using it in another language, that’s how I got most of my understanding of it.²

5.7.13. No memory of school grammar

This code, pointing out the lack of grammar knowledge in their own schooling, was mentioned by most of the participant teachers in the first set of interviews, but was raised only by Beatrice in later discussions. She claimed that her pupils are ‘more confident with’ grammar; ‘they are not afraid of it’³. This situation was so different from her own schooling: *I think that at school I probably would have been (confident and unafraid) if somebody had thrown it to me at 11*³.

5.7.14. Summary of subject knowledge section

The evidence of these interviews showed it was necessary to address subject knowledge issues in the training programme. This difficult barrier had to be crossed before the teachers could begin to settle into a more relaxed and comfortable relationship with the teaching of grammar. They needed a steady basis on which to build their grammatical content knowledge before they could step up to grammatical pedagogic content knowledge.

Compared with the situation at the beginning of this project, many positive developments took place during the later stages. All the participating teachers gained more subject knowledge about grammar (metalinguistic content knowledge) as a result of their involvement. The more involved and reflective

teachers made considerable progress in increasing their knowledge, including grammar more often in their planning and dealing with it in a focused way in their teaching. These teachers linked their grammar ideas more purposefully and focused on improving writing more overtly (grammatical content knowledge). They were able to link the different components of grammar into a bigger coherent whole.

Most of the teachers acquired increased confidence in their teaching of grammar (metalinguistic pedagogical content knowledge). More than twice as many references were made about this aspect of their work, from interview two to interview three, with a single mention in the first round. These responses mirrored the increase in subject knowledge claimed by these teachers, with 28 mentions recorded at the second interview, growing to 46 at the third interview; more than any other category at that point of the project.

A few teachers still showed caution, dealing only with single-issue matters in their lessons, not evidently linked to writing improvement goals. Whilst most teachers still sought the safety of a wide selection of resources, they had begun to use them with greater discrimination, recognising that not all sources were trustworthy.

Whilst the teachers still designed their lessons featuring most often word class and sentence knowledge, the numbers of references to grammar as punctuation or spelling declined in the second half of the project. This trend suggested that they understood what the main focuses of grammar learning to be metalinguistic knowledge.

The findings from this segment directly feed into answering the supplementary research question: ‘How does the grammar knowledge of primary teachers influence how they teach grammar in the context of writing?’ Increased knowledge appeared to bring about a more confident teaching stance, and, a few teachers reported, increased the levels of sophisticated discourses that took place between teachers and their pupils.

5.8. Personal epistemologies theme - Findings from the second and third interviews

The following table (table 13) shows the number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to a particular code within the **Personal**

Epistemologies theme in the second and third set of interviews conducted with 8 interviewees in the second round of interviews and 6 interviewees in the third round .

Codes in the Personal Epistemologies theme – 2 nd and 3 rd interviews	Number of sources 2 nd interview	Number of references 2 nd Interview	Number of sources 3 rd interview	Number of references 3 rd interview
Grammar as rules and regulations	8	20	4	12
Effects of grammar training	7	21	6	13
Grammar teaching in context	7	17	6	11
Understanding of the bigger grammar picture	6	21	6	37
Grammar as basic skills	3	6	1	1
The purpose of grammar	2	3	6	8

Table 15 - Number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to Personal Epistemologies codes in the second and third interviews

5.8.1 Grammar as rules and regulations

The responses in this code, concerning those teachers who think of grammar as a sort of gospel, composed of compulsory 'do's and don'ts', changed noticeably through the study. The teachers initially thought of grammar as a rule-based entity, but changed their positions as they learned more about the functional approach to language in context. They began to realise that specific 'rules' they originally believed to be absolute, could, after all, be challenged, although they also had to remain aware that the test their children would sit at the end of the key stage would be based on a prescriptive model mainly incompatible with the training provided.

Having given considerable thought to the topic, Tom described some of the realisations brought about as a consequence of his participation. By the second interview he had come to the conclusion that '*certain rules are correct or incorrect*'₂, mentioning apostrophes as an example of necessary correctness, whilst also asserting '*there are those other things that we allowed over time to become less significant – one of the things I have in mind is the split infinitive –*

*which we no longer regard as a key element in the language'*₂. His pupils had commented on the Scottish dialect of a peripatetic PE teacher they encountered every week, and his use of the word 'yous', which stimulated much discussion about the 'correctness' of such a word. Tom had reached the point when he was informing his pupils that he was '*not the arbiter of good language'*₂. He was '*not the master and controller of it'*₂, but the power and control of their writing rested with themselves.

Dick also argued that there are rules which must be observed, and '*if we are doing a particular text type, we try and learn the rules to be successful'*₃. Asked who he thought made the rules, Dick readily responded,: '*I guess we all do. I guess society. And it's important that we remember that – that we all take ownership of it'*₂, demonstrating how far his thinking had developed during the project. He concluded: '*where there are rules, there are now sometimes grey areas where they can be bent'*₂.

Other teachers asserted there were 'grey areas' in respect to rules of grammar. Harry stated that '*sometimes there are grey areas, and things that you really have to think about – and sometimes you are not sure'*₂. At the time of the second interview, nine months into the programme, Miranda also indicated that she was gradually changing her beliefs about grammar rules. In her second interview she reaffirmed that she still thought there was a '*right and wrong*' aspect to grammar, but when challenged about who might be responsible for monitoring language for its accuracy, she did not know. She went on: '*that's where I find it difficult...maybe it's not a case of right and wrong*', and concluded: '*It's a difficult question'*₂.

Juliet, who preferred the support of order in her life, discovered that grammar was far more open-ended than she had previously realised. She liked to live her life by rules, and was thrown off-balance by recognising: '*there's no definite right and wrong – it's up to you whether you think a comma should go there. Yes, it's a lot more open'*₂. As a Year 6 teacher, she was particularly aware of the preparation needed by her pupils for a test based on a traditional model of grammar. She suggested that children should learn grammar at a much earlier age: '*I think because in the new curriculum, though, it is so prescriptive, right by the end of Year 2 they need to know this...and, yes, they do need all these*

things' (rules of grammar)₂. Yet, as her own learning continued to grow in the period between the second and third interviews, she became more comfortable with the open-ended potential of the subject: '*I saw it as very much rules before – you can do this and you can do that! Now, I see it's open-ended and actually it's more interesting and not so tied down*'₃.

Beatrice remembered the controlling function of grammar when she was a pupil: it was '*taught as a controlling thing. That's the impression I had in school.*' She recalled that it was not, '*in English, but in learning languages – it was, 'this is wrong', 'this is wrong', 'this is wrong'*'. And she concluded: '*So, all the rules I was learning were just rules to get it right*'₂. She compared those experiences with the practices and strategies she currently employs: '*It wasn't a rule for a reason. It wasn't a 'if you use this it will create this effect on the reader' and that's what I am now trying to get the children to start to understand.*'₂ This new approach was changing the language learning culture in her classroom: '*They are starting to expand their noun phrases – they are really doing it for a reason, and they can tell me what that reason is*'₂.

After encouraging her pupils to pay more attention to the grammar of the classroom texts they had been reading, Portia's class began to question the 'hard and fast' rules they had been taught in previous classes. '*We've spoken about that when we've been reading,*' she explained, '*because a lot of them have been told 'you are not allowed to start a sentence with "and", you are not allowed to start with "because"*'. She went on: '*But then I've sort of turned that on its head, because you can*'₂. She too, had changed her mind about how to enable her children to 'break the rules'. Some pupils have been confused by their discoveries and her advice had been: '*so, you have to read it through and think, "does it work?"...when they are reading now it is those questions about what they are reading and the grammar behind it, and before there wasn't any of this*' She used to think that grammar '*was definite rules*', but now realised, '*that there is so much more to it.*'₃

5.8.2. Effects of grammar training

This code records any differences that may have been brought about through involvement with this project. It did not feature in the first round of interviews because there was nothing to report at that stage. All the teachers were affected in some way or another.

For Harry the effects have been significant; almost Damascene. Asked about his new knowledge, he answered: ‘Yes, it’s come a long way – especially the training we had on that day. It was massive. That was a real eye-opener₂’. He continued: ‘I feel that my grammar teaching’s transformed to be honest. Like black and white. I kind of feel, I’ve been doing it for longer now. I feel I’ve got more knowledge in the last nine months than in the last few years of teaching₂. His skills and knowledge had both grown. On the training day he heard ‘about the sentence, the clause having only one verb. That kind of threw me, because I thought I didn’t know that all. How can you not know that basic sort of knowledge?’₂ Harry referred to a ‘light-bulb moment’ when encountering identification of sentence types for the first time. He claimed ‘that he could see everything then’₃. From then on, ‘in the next lesson, I taught the kids that, and they seemed to get it as well. ‘Since then it’s just rolled and that was the moment I remembered’₃.

Tom, who had some metalinguistic content knowledge at the outset of the programme nevertheless agreed that he had learned much from this research. One especially useful feature had been to help him, ‘think about it in terms of word classes, in the beginning as a basis point’, but also, ‘just recognising and identifying different word classes, actually seeing how a knowledge of nouns then helps us into adjectives’₂. He acknowledged that his increased knowledge of word classes was contributing to an improved revision programme with his Year 6 pupils. They had been: ‘going back to those building blocks. He was challenging his pupils to ask: ‘do we understand what words are doing in a sentence? What role they have? How do they fit together? How do they move forward?’₂

Dick declared that he had become, ‘more confident and more aware₂’ as a result of his involvement and felt those qualities ‘come out in my teaching’₃. Since his training he has learned that: ‘knowledge of word classes, knowledge of how we construct sentences is becoming more and more important to the children with regards to their SAT testing’₃.

Miranda had been changed in another way. She was now ‘more willing to accept a challenge and to kind of delve in and understand’₃. Before being trained she had been timid talking about grammar: ‘Before I would have thought

*'if it's over my head, it's over the children's heads' – which is really ignorant'*³. She found comfort in the fact that the whole staff of her school had been trained together, and she discovered that her colleagues knew as little as she did. '*I don't think I would have felt that way if it hadn't been for the fact that as a school we were working ...where everyone is kind of finally admitting to the fact that we were are on a similar page'*³.

Juliet reflected that through the training she had not only gained in confidence, but began to understand that '*there actually aren't any particular rules...but it's how you use it and for what you do with the words'*². By this, I believe that Juliet began considering language as a functional phenomenon, not a rule-based 'out there' authority.

Portia thought the training had made her '*think more about different word classes'*² and she felt she had more knowledge '*to pass on to the children'*². She found the training '*really useful, because before then I used to mention sentence types when I was modelling (writing), but maybe not the reason why we use different things within writing and I have been doing that more'*². Portia began to notice language at work in many different circumstances in the world – '*you realise there is so much more to it'*² - much to the annoyance of her husband! '*Because I've been part of the project, I think it has made me more aware of things...I think it is just a case of being more aware of teaching grammar and including it in every lesson, rather than just a grammar lesson'*².

Like Miranda, Beatrice gained more confidence using an authentic grammar vocabulary with her children, and believed that it improved the effectiveness of her teaching: '*Just in terms of things to talk about - like extended noun phrases – I would never describe it like that with children before....the training has helped'*². She had also been able to '*take a step back and help the children focus on their writing'*², enabled by improved planning, '*offering more opportunities to practise sentence level work, and expanded simple sentences'*². Beatrice reported that she had '*never done anything like that before'*², and that her pupils '*had really enjoyed it...and got really competitive'*². According to her, '*the training had been brilliant'*², and, ultimately, she reflected, whilst '*never been scared of grammar'*², she felt that the training had given her '*more to draw on'*², and improve her research skills in language. '*Then that*

*helps me to build more confidence in teaching it to the children'*₂. She also experienced a profound insight into the ubiquity of grammar and thought: '*it's just opened my eyes to how vast it is and there is so much more'*₂.

5.8.3. Grammar teaching in context

This code came from teachers who believe that grammar is to be found in real-life linguistic situations and who employ real texts (as opposed to specially written textual grammatical examples) as the basis of language use in their teaching. Most teachers had not given much thought to this approach at the time of the first interview, but all showed a better understanding of this style of language study after the first nine months of the project. All the teachers were asked what they thought the expression 'in context' meant, after seeing it in operation during the training sessions. Beatrice offered the most comprehensive answer:

*'Applying grammar to things to make it real for them. And seeing it's real. I think that's what they are starting to do now. So, finding it in the books they are reading and by finding it in conversation...making it come alive so it's not just something to learn in a one-off lesson on a piece of paper, applying it to different books – not just in literacy, but in, for example, RE books as well'*₃.

She was not alone in determining to provide her grammar teaching in this manner. Dick described the procedure, as he understood it, which he had been using with his class: '*We are just doing poetry now and we are doing 'The Highwayman'. Trying to spot adverbials, even in poetry. It isn't just... in any kind of writing you can spot these things. It's always good to use examples with real texts. So, I'm trying to do that more and more'*₂. Dick had moved from teaching grammar '*as a lesson solely on a Monday morning, for like half an hour, or an hour, and we'd pick something to do like colons and semi-colons, and we'd do it then'*₂, to one where his grammar learning was incorporated in lessons in all subjects. He commented: '*It's the foundation on everything, really'*₂, which is long way from his views nine months earlier. Asked what he thought 'in context' meant, he replied: '*If we are doing a particular text type, we try to learn the rules to be successful with that text type and with that will be sentence composition that they have to follow'*₃. Portia had made a similar claim about the way her lessons had changed: '*because I've been part of the project I think it's made me more aware of things...I think it is just a case of being more aware of teaching grammar and including it in every lesson, rather than just in grammar lessons'*₃.

Miranda expressed a slightly different understanding of what ‘in context’ meant, but it was completely different from the sorts of lessons on grammar she had been teaching before the project began: *‘I will introduce it and then I might show an example of a text on the board, or an extract from a book, or something. We’ll pull it apart and the children will have a go on their own’*³. Slightly clearer, but much the same approach was described by Juliet, who touched on a tension which affected teachers of Year 6 pupils: *‘whatever you’re studying at that moment – whether it just be a particular text.... if you are studying that, you need to look for what opportunities there are within that. So that it’s got a context, rather than just being isolated on its own’*².

5.8.4. Understanding of the bigger grammar picture

This code involved those teachers who recognised that grammar is not about lots of separate components, to be dealt with in a piecemeal fashion, but who regard it as an organising force through all language engagements. All the teachers ‘grew’ in their understanding of grammar in some respect, ranging from realising that grammar was much bigger than they had previously been aware, to a more developed philosophical view of grammar and its part in the making of meaning. A discernible change of attitude and insight by most of the teachers took place from the second to the third interview.

When Dick discussed what grammar might be in his second interview, he was still relying on the security of grammar content: *‘I now have a better understanding of what grammar is – or what I think grammar is’*², and he went on to list a number of grammar ‘elements’, such as ‘word classes’. A further comment indicated that he was beginning to think of grammar in more abstract terms: *‘I suppose there are rules. There are rules for speech. There are now sometimes grey areas where they can be bent. There are rules for the punctuation at the end of sentences. That doesn’t have to be one specific...’*². By interview three, however, he sounded much more confident discussing the nature of language: *‘Who makes the rules of grammar? I guess we all do. I guess society has. And it’s important that we all remember that – that we all take ownership of it. And that we make sure we work together to make it successful’*³.

This same development could be seen in Harry’s responses from one interview to the next. At the start of the project he had regarded grammar as ‘*this is just*

*how it is*₂', believing that he was in no position to challenge the way it worked. By the second interview he was describing it as '*more confusing*'₂, depicting it as follows: '*I kind of see it as art, really, more of an art form. It isn't...I don't know – like a mass-style thing; this is what you do and that's how it is every single time. You can change it round and sometimes it doesn't make sense. It's more fluid than that, isn't it?*'₂ He then instanced yet further development in his third interview, which he would have never been able to express at the outset: '*It's kind of made me see it everywhere, really. It's kind of made me notice it in everything you do. If you are driving down the street and you see a sign or a lorry, you think, 'That's a wrong apostrophe!...Yes, there's just more of an awareness of it being in everything we do'*'₃.

Miranda held very strong views about grammar and its intrinsic correctness at the commencement of the programme and in the second interview repeated her certainty, stating: '*I still think there is right and wrong grammar*'₂. At that time, she was in no doubt that the 'arbiters' of grammar were '*the same people who set the test*'₂. She claimed that there was '*an inconsistency with grammar*'₂, and in her opinion '*that shouldn't happen*'₂: *But who are we to know? As teachers – because we are inevitably teaching to what requires the children to make progress*'₂. By this, I think she meant that teachers should not be concerned over arguments about language, but should be teaching grammar in a way that prepared their pupils for the definitive grammar test! Yet, six months later, in interview three, she admitted, '*there's more to it than I thought*'₂, and went on to explain her new understanding: '*I feel that my horizons have been broadened with grammar and it's not a straight and narrow subject to teach, and it kind of relates back to what I said earlier. I find it more and more difficult now to teach a lesson on compound sentences, or simple sentences, or a word class because you do have all these interlinking ideas then coming in*'₃.

Miranda concluded by demonstrating how she much she had been thinking about the subject, and the length of the intellectual journey she had made on this topic: '*Well, you know, the conversations and language we use today would not have been used twenty years ago, let alone a hundred years ago. And we are responsible for the way that language and grammar work. I really feel that now. That's why it's important to teach these...fundamentals of grammar to the children, because – who knows – in ten years' time, in twenty years' time how*

*people will perceive language and grammar then, and how they'll use it. It's quite scary; you don't really know'*³.

Juliet was excited by the growing realisation that grammar was 'open-ended', and did not, in fact, adhere to strict rules. This changed attitude enabled her to view grammar in a new light: '*Now I see it's open-ended and, actually, much more interesting and not so tied down. You should be able to have fun with it...children should enjoy*'³. Asked who she thought makes the rules of grammar, she replied – '*words!*'³. When Portia was asked that same question, she responded with: '*I don't think anybody makes the rules – I think everybody owns grammar*'³.

Beatrice reported how differently she regarded grammar, compared to her knowledge at the beginning of the project and touched on a number of issues. Firstly, she felt that she was able to exercise her new knowledge with the children in authentic grammar language: '*it's just in terms of actually explaining the language to them*'². She was also excited about learning new things, stimulating her to find out even more: '*I think now it's just opened my eyes how vast it is, and there's so much more!*'². She maintained that knowledge about grammar has to do with control; that it enables writers to make important decisions because they see this knowledge as power. '*If children have that understanding of it (grammar) and it's gone right the way through primary, their writing would just be, could just be phenomenal, because they could have such power*'². Asked who 'owns' grammar and language, she replied: '*the writer does – we use it for our own purposes to create the image we want in writing*'³.

5.8.5 Grammar as basic skills

This code was brought about by teachers regarding grammar as a set of separate components, just like spellings and times tables, on which all subsequent knowledge in the subject is based. Some participants thought of grammar as basic skills in the early part of the project. By the time they became familiar with the bigger grammar picture, they had a different view of the functions it played and realised its value went beyond reciting simple facts. The weaker teachers of grammar, however, were those who saw the subject as described above and struggled to place it in a wider linguistic landscape.

The greatest difficulties in this area were experienced by Isabella, who regarded grammar in a limited focus. Her confusion can be seen in her answers: '*I think the whole – how things are named, that's still not stuck in my head properly. And I think it's like a study. I think it's almost like me to study it. And so, when you (the researcher) came that made sense because you had someone who knows things*'₂. Pressed a little harder on what she understood by the subject, she responded in an equally confused manner: '*I think it's so complicated...I think there's...because you think the basics, for children, I think it's really simple, because you can go really in depth, can't you? So, for us, I've kept it quite simple for my class I've taught*'₂.

Miranda also needed a sense of security in her thinking about grammar, although she was prepared to challenge herself and tried teaching some areas that caused her discomfort. Nine months into the project, she still treated grammar as if it was about correctness: she wanted her pupils to realise that it is really important '*to use good grammar*' when they are writing; and '*to use good grammar*' when they are speaking. She wanted them to see grammar as '*a tool for future life*'₂. She continued, in the same manner: '*If you had conversations with the children, they would be able to home in on some of those key words and that key learning, those basic skills*'₂. At the end of the study, despite being more comfortable teaching grammar, she was still relying on a firm view of the subject: '*Yes, I feel far more confident, and, to be honest, learning what word classes mean has, for me, has been the fundamental improvement and reason why I feel that I have benefited from it. I mean, I will have known the basics. But without this training I wouldn't have known what a determiner was...*'₃.

Dick made huge progress in his understanding of grammar, but even he, in the early stages, showed a tendency to reduce his learning into a secure place when he claimed that, '*I think I knew the basics. I knew the verbs, the adverbs and the nouns. It's the things like the noun phrases and the front-loaded adverbials...*'₂.

5.8.6. Purpose of grammar teaching

This code concerns teachers attempting to articulate a clear rationale about why they are teaching grammar. For the first nine months of the project few of the participant teachers had thought much about the purpose of teaching grammar,

but more evidence existed of increased reflection at its conclusion, six months later.

Juliet was clear and focused in her response to the question of purpose: '*understanding of the language. Understanding how to use language properly and being confident with the language*'³. Harry echoed this view and responded: '*Improve speech. Improve writing. Writing for a purpose, writing for meaning. Understanding what they have written, understanding why they have written...Yes. Just that*'³. Dick had similar perceptions of grammar, although more veiled, supposing the purpose of grammar as providing '*the children the opportunities in life...to make sure these children are ready to move on*'³. He felt that grammar study '*gave the tools...to make sure that they can be successful in their lives*'³.

Beatrice outlined a number of improved accomplishments achieved by her pupils through grammar study and concluded by stating that her pupils were '*now just starting to have fun with it, which is what it ought to be about, because they are seeing they can manipulate their work*'³. She, ultimately, declared that the purpose of teaching grammar was: '*To give children power over their writing and to understand what it's all about*'³.

5.8.7. Personal epistemologies - summary

The experiences of most of the participating teachers accorded with the model of personal epistemology researched by Perry (1970) and others, which suggested that at the beginning of any learning process the learner is dependent on the more skilful teacher, and will regard the teacher as an unchallengeable authority. Passing from a starting state, known as 'dualism', where the world is 'seen as two boxes – right and wrong' (Moore,2002), learners progress through a number of stages (the actual number depending on which researcher we read), until they reach a final position, known as 'relativism', where they behave as more confident learners, acting independently, without reliance on others. The teachers in this study did not move across the whole extent of this spectrum, although a few moved a short distance.

At the outset, most of the eight teachers believed that grammar was in the hands of a greater authority, but through interactions with their pupils and some

thoughtful language opportunities, those participants mostly changed their perception of the subject. Nearly all the teachers recognised that more effective learning took place when their pupils were able to study 'real' texts; those constructed for making genuine meaning, not solely for grammar analysis. More children raised searching questions as they were encouraged to adopt an interrogative stance in relation to the texts they encountered, taking a greater interest in the ways meaning was made linguistically.

The relationship between increased subject knowledge and the adoption of changed attitudes about the nature of grammar was evident from many responses. Their involvement encouraged most of the teachers to rethink their long-standing beliefs that characterised grammar as a boring – possibly, a rather too academic - subject, that required distinct separate lessons, supported by dedicated resources. They mostly moved to positions that recognised grammar was not a phenomenon locked up in a box, but a collection of interactions constantly being exercised in the world.

In the first instance these teachers volunteered because they wanted a course that might improve their pupils' success in the grammar section of their end of key stage test. They were not aware of any alternatives to the prescriptivist model. Coming to terms with the notion that there are several grammars was a first step in adopting new, important attitudes to the study of grammar. In some ways, participation on the course provided benefits of new knowledge, but it, ironically, increased some teachers' stress levels because they were expected to ensure their pupils would be sufficiently equipped to do well in their prescriptivist grammar test, whilst they were also attempting to learn an apparently incompatible unknown model of grammar.

Some teachers encountered problems defining a purpose for grammar teaching. From the outset it was made clear that the learning of grammar in this study was a means to an end: improving writing. Yet, much of the visible purpose was about ensuring the transmission of grammatical content knowledge. Whilst the goal should have been improvement of writing, the criteria for achieving that outcome were only scantily understood.

This theme feeds naturally into answering the supplementary question relating to 'teachers' epistemologies of grammar in the context of writing'. They have to

embrace some uncomfortable new knowledge, leaving the security of their previous beliefs, often developed over the course of their lives. They require good evidence that what they need to know is worth their close attention.

5.9. Teacher pedagogy theme - Findings from the second and third interviews

The following table (table 14) shows the number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to a particular code within the **Teacher Pedagogy** theme in the second and third set of interviews conducted with 8 interviewees in the second round of interviews and 6 interviewees in the third round .

Codes in the theme – Teacher Pedagogy - 2 nd and 3 rd interviews	Number sources 2 nd interview	Number of references 2 nd interview	Number of sources 3 rd interview	Number of references 3 rd interview
Pedagogical development	8	41	4	22
Grammar as a focus for testing	6	10	5	14
The place of grammar in the curriculum	3	4	3	6
Grammar as a step to greater power	0	0	3	10

Table 16 - Number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to Teacher Pedagogy codes in the second and third interviews

5.9.1. Pedagogical development

This code is to do with teachers' approaches to the planning, teaching and assessment of grammar, as a result of their training and developing practice. This topic hardly featured in the first round of interviews, but became more important by the second phase, when all the participant teachers were changing their approaches to the teaching of grammar in some way because of what had been learned in the training and the subsequent support discussions.

An important consideration surfaced during the nine month period between the first and second interviews as these teachers were faced with two sorts of grammar, which had significance for their teaching. The government test is based on the traditional model of grammar, whilst the grammar being promoted through the training has its roots in a more open-ended, exploratory model influenced by Halliday's systemic functional grammar. Tom raised this

discrepancy: '*I fully support the idea that grammar is a running thread that should be there consistently and I fully support the idea that we should be doing it through our reading. We've done that, but we've done a lot of test prep as well because of the nature of the culture I work in*'₂.

He determined that the next cohort he taught would be subjected to a different teaching approach: '*definitely from September* (the new academic year), *grammar will be a very constant presence, without being a constant focus*'₂. Miranda perceived a similar problem with two sorts of grammar vying for attention in her work. One way of tackling this dilemma was to teach different approaches at different times of the year, so that before the test dates, for instance, the children would experience more of the traditional model, whereas at other times of the year they might spend increased time with the functional model. She stated that: '*you prioritise, I think and you probably tactically teach depending on the time of the year*'₃. She continued: '*I would be happy for the children to explore and be creative because I think that would really improve our grammar teaching here. But for a Year 6 teacher, with a cohort that needs to make progress...when you have got beyond that first half term in the New Year, I will be teaching to get them prepared for that test*'₂.

Juliet, who moved from a Year 6 class to a Year 5 class during the period of the project, also made comment on the division of the two 'grammars', recognising their differences: '*it was easier in a way with the Year 6, because you had to see the separate little sections when you are pushing for the SATs results. And now...they need to be able to use it when they are writing, but they also need to learn it as well*'₃.

She related how she had to change approach mid-way through a term. She discussed how they returned to tracking grammatical constructions in the texts being studied, enabling the class to '*get back to a little normality, because we spent time revising for the test*'₂.

A few teachers claimed they were already planning grammar learning in their lessons before the study began, but acknowledged the changed nature of those plans because of the new insights they had acquired through the training. Beatrice mentioned that she had: '*always tried to bring grammar into*

*lessons...that hasn't changed*₂', but she had '*discovered different ways to explain to the children...*'₂, and was now '*better prepared to deal with their misconceptions*'₂. She felt that she had improved '*in terms of actually planning in more opportunities for sentence-level work...expanded simple sentences, with all the phrases....I've never done anything like that before*'₂. Beatrice thought that her planning '*had become more focused on their needs*'₂.

Isabella and Beatrice both incorporated drama in their language lessons. Isabella explained: '*What we try and do is bring some drama into every unit if it's possible...and I think that's really benefited them*'₂. Beatrice employed drama to aid a cohort of boys in her class '*who just can't see it otherwise*'₂. She described the sequence: '*we usually split it over two lessons, but now I'm trying to get them to the stage where they can do drama and writing in the same lesson... normally we have been doing the drama the day before...and then the writing*'₂.

Both Miranda and Beatrice reported that the way they talked to their classes about grammar had taken on a more authentic scholarly tone. Miranda explained that: '*the ability to have a discussion with children using the correct vocabulary is so much stronger*'₂. This improvement also appeared in Beatrice's testimony, responding to a question about how her teaching had changed, she claimed: '*exploring grammar in different ways...different ways of teaching it...like a lot of the terminology I wouldn't have used with children before*'₂. After observing demonstration lessons by the researcher, she became even more ambitious in teaching grammar: '*seeing how well they picked it up made me not afraid to use it and explore it with them. Then seeing that they just rise to the challenge and they are using it in their own language, their writing is so much stronger*'₃.

Harry also believed his lessons were more demanding and effective because he was capable of saying, '*let's just stop and look at this in more detail*'₃. This increased confidence has enabled him to decide if his pupils do not understand something, he can: '*jump in and take the lesson in a different direction, because I have got the confidence to know they don't know this yet. Let's take it back a step*'₃.

Dick was concerned that grammar units appeared too infrequently in the curriculum. He stated that maths teaching comes round in a regular way, but, '*I don't think in English – I haven't seen it yet – that it's on a repetitive timetable*'₂. He pointed out that pupils might encounter it '*at the beginning of Year 5, but might not visit it again until some way through Year 6*'₂. He thought for some pupils, that interval was too long.

Tom, Miranda and Isabella all introduced the notion of embedding grammar in the wider curriculum, as an effective approach. Tom talked of a '*running thread of grammar*'₂ that '*should be there consistently*'₂. He specifically referred to guided reading and booktalk sessions as sites of potential grammar practice. Miranda explained how she included a grammar element in her teaching across all the subjects: '*I use it in a cross-curricular approach far more often than I would have done before. In my marking it's probably a little bit more evident; if I'm marking a piece of work from the history unit, I might comment on their use of complex sentences, or their word order, or their verb and tense agreement*'₂. Isabella also saw the cross-curricular potential when she remarked: '*I think we are trying to do it across the board now...if you have the opportunity to bring it up somewhere else you do*'₂, although she did concede that '*I still don't think that's strong enough yet*'₂.

Miranda raised a particular issue which gave her concern in respect of her pedagogy. She was uneasy about the ways in which grammar was presented to the children and worried that they could become bored with repetition of the same resources and teaching methods: '*I still struggle with finding engaging ways to teach. The children enjoy using texts...but then my fear is that that is the only way I can find to engage...although my subject knowledge has improved a little bit, I'm still struggling with that teaching and learning element now*'₃.

5.9.2. Grammar as a focus for testing

This code has to do with teachers who believe that teaching grammar is mainly driven by the requirements for testing. The teachers in this study shared different motives for studying grammar: they all knew that their pupils would be expected to sit a grammar test within the next eighteen months, and the extra knowledge they gained through the training programme would be likely to

improve their marks, but most of the adults also recognised there was considerably more about grammar than merely being tested on it.

Tom expressed this dichotomy eloquently in the following: '*There are some aspects of grammar teaching that we could actually change for the better. Young people's understanding and the use of language. The problem is that, certainly from the primary perspective, it all comes down to how they are tested in their understanding of it - and so we need them to tick the box, underline a word in a sentence, fill in the blank – because that is how they will be expected to regurgitate knowledge*'₂.

He regretted that he and his colleagues attempted to '*try to keep it fun...keep it interesting...keep some games involved in it*'₂, but, ultimately they '*care a lot about revision and tick boxes and practise ticking the boxes*'₂.

Sharing Tom's view, Miranda stated that '*there's so much more to grammar than what is currently in the test*'₂. And she continued: '*We could be teaching things in Year 6 that the children would never have in that grammar paper, because they are probably beyond that point by the time they reach Year 6, or they will be, I think, eventually*'₂. Miranda's knowledge had certainly improved and she reported that '*it's totally different now in this school*'₂ a year after the programme began, because she and her colleagues were '*so much more confident...and the staff and the children more reflective*'₂. Yet, by the time of her third interview, she was still in two minds about the relative value of the functional model of grammar: '*we need to let these children leave this school with knowledge that of a 4B. It's all progress for us and I want to teach what is to that test, and I want the children to be able to tell me the answers that will be in the test. That's the only time I have had reservations, because some of the stuff we have looked at, albeit interesting stuff, hasn't been what I believe we will see in the test*'₃.

In fact, most of the teachers experienced the tension created by the two aims of language learning. Juliet was just as torn as her colleagues '*There's two different elements to it. There's the teaching within my literacy lessons and children's understanding of how to make a sentence sound good, and different ways of turning it around, and experimenting with the language and the*

*punctuation and things like that. And then there's been what I have to do in preparation for the SATs test, which are two different things'*₂.

All the schools in which these teachers taught operated some form of regular internal assessment system. Dick mentioned that '*we test every term, every six weeks'*₃, and continued: '*I'll be interested to see what improvement they have made, because we've done a lot this term'*₃. Harry reported, '*we've just used a grammar test this morning, using the Rising Stars one'*₃. He added: '*they've come out really well'*₃. Beatrice also touched on an internal testing regime: '*it's assessment week this week; we've got Big Write tomorrow, so they've got assessment pieces every couple of weeks anyway'*₃.

Miranda summed up the responses of her colleagues to this code in the following submission: '*My views on grammar are that I now think it's far more important than I did before. My views on grammar teaching, as a Year 6 teacher, is that you teach to the test – and I don't think that's great'*₂.

5.9.3. The place of grammar in the curriculum

This code is about where and how teachers introduce opportunities for further grammar learning in their teaching programmes. Few teachers had spent any time thinking about this matter as there was an expectation, by the government and their senior managers, that grammar teaching would take place in their schools, whatever. A few individuals had wondered about the position grammar might enjoy in schools.

Juliet was not sure when and where grammar teaching might take place, indicating a problem with grammatical pedagogical content knowledge. Asked what the main problems associated with the subject might be, she answered: '*when to teach it'*₃. She also suffered confusion about; '*the bits that perhaps need or could be taught separately, and then how to drop it in without it taking over'*₃.

Portia was more comfortable with teaching grammar and explained the following rationale, believing grammar to be: "*important because when you are... teaching writing I think that having that knowledge behind what they are doing, why they are using certain words – I think that's interesting myself'*₂.

Miranda had more pragmatic reasons for its inclusion in the whole curriculum, and stated she wanted her pupils '*to think that it's really important to use good*

grammar when you are writing. And I want them to see it as a tool for the future'. She continued: '*Grammar – spelling, punctuation and grammar – is something that these Year 6s are assessed on. And something that they will have a level and that we will be judged on as a school. Therefore, we have got to provide an education for children that will get them to learn and get them to be confident, but will also provide us with data that is reflective of our teaching it'*³.

Dick believed that '*teachers across the board at this level don't understand grammar*'³, and he regretted that his school did not take it more seriously. He vainly hoped that, as a result of the training, the school in which he was teaching, alongside Tom, would '*come up with a whole-school philosophy on grammar*'³. He was moving to a new school in a short while, and would be '*quite keen to instil grammar in my new school, because I think it is important*'³.

5.9.4. Grammar as a step to greater power

This code has to do with teachers who believe that learning grammar contributes to greater literacy competence leading to increased academic success. It was not mentioned during the second interviews, but three teachers referred to it in the third round. Beatrice most clearly recognised that high levels of grammatical ability encouraged a more powerful, independent relationship with the wider world. Some of her pupils' accomplishments included going: '*right back to simple sentences and what makes it – and just playing with them realising that they don't have to rush off into complex sentences straight away, but to play and explore with the power that they have got*'³. She continued: '*They can articulate their ideas and get them down on paper. They are confident, they are enjoying it more because they can see the control they've got*'³. Beatrice believed the reason for this authority came about '*because they are seeing that they can manipulate their work: "Can I put this here?" or "Can I put this here?"*'³. She reasoned that her pupils '*were enjoying it; they are happy with that and they are understanding it*'³, resulting in '*the power it gives them in their writing*'³.

Harry and Tom made comments which generally accorded with Beatrice's point of view. Harry realised the power grammar knowledge bestowed on many of his pupils: '*if you know why you are writing it, when you come to write something, and you want to write at a higher level – to know how to write at a higher level*'

*they need to know how and why they are writing'*³. Dick referred to the control that his pupils were acquiring, enabling them to manipulate meanings: 'So, it is taking a simple sentence...and there is a place for simple sentences...but it's how we turn them into compound and complex; how we can start them in different ways. And my children learn about words, those words in a sentence they can move around...when they see that, it's like a light-bulb moment. It comes on and they go, "Wow! I didn't think about that'"³.

5.9.5. Summary teacher pedagogy theme

All the teachers in this study changed some part of their grammar teaching as a result of their involvement: a few changed significantly for the better, displaying evident increased metalinguistic pedagogical content knowledge.

This mostly positive outcome was tempered by a number of testing problems the group had to face. The first difficulty has been touched on elsewhere in this analysis, and concerned the dilemma of which grammar to teach. Before the project, these teachers knew of only one model of grammar, and most volunteered in the belief that they would be 'improving' that view of the subject, despite all the explanations provided as an introduction to the programme. Most of the group were attracted to the 'functional' approach, but deliberately taught the prescriptivist, traditional model as a prelude to practice tests and in the weeks preceding the actual national test. They were aware that teaching the traditional mode was concerned with teachers instructing their pupils undisputed facts, whilst adopting the 'functional' approach encouraged an exploratory relationship with language, but the pressure of gaining acceptable results caused some resistance to a dedicated interest in the programme they had opted to join.

Another difficulty arose in respect of where grammar should be included in the curriculum. Inevitably, grammar learning was taught separately, as a discrete subject, in the earliest months of the project, but some teachers were unsure where to include it in their broader planning. One bonus from the project was a more analytical approach to texts being read, enabling them to call on their grammar knowledge when critiquing textual material.

5.10 Pupil Progress theme – Findings from the second and third interviews

The following table (table 15) shows the number of teachers who made a response in each code (number of sources column) and how many times each code was mentioned (number of references column) in the second set of interviews conducted with 8 interviewees.

Codes in the theme – Pupil Progress 2nd & 3rd interviews	Number of sources 2nd interview	Number of references 2nd interview	Number of sources 3rd interview	Number of references 3rd interview
Grammar as an enabler of writing improvement	7	30	6	31
Improved pupil attainment	7	29	5	21
Enjoyment of grammar	7	22	5	19
Pupil difficulties	7	13	2	3
More able children	6	12	5	6
Grammar as an obstacle to writing	2	2	0	0

Table 17 - Number of times that teachers' responses were attributed to Pupil Progress codes in the second and third interviews

5.10.1. Grammar as an enabler of writing improvement

This code reflects the beliefs of some teachers who consider improvement in grammar knowledge leads to improvement of writing ability. It was a code with limited currency at the beginning of the project, but responses grew in the second and third round of interviews. The participants were not urged to follow a particular plan or use the same resources, so the levels and criteria of success could only be adjudged by the individual teachers. There was a possibility that the teachers reported what they thought the researcher wanted to hear, to represent the research in a favourable light. All the teachers reported evidence of a positive change of some sort in the children's writing, and in the reading abilities of a few.

Isabella struggled most with the new training, but still noted that her pupils made a small improvement in their writing skills, after only nine months of

participation, although her report lacked detail. She claimed: ‘Once you start teaching them something they say, “I can do that”². More specifically, ‘we talked about starting sentences with “ing” words. So we used that and they started to put it in their writing because they could see it was a different way of doing it’². She had a strong impression that their attitude to writing had also improved: ‘we have got children who were tentative writers and not enthusiastic about it, and are much happier now. And they’ve enjoyed it, which is good’².

Miranda was occasionally sceptical about the value of the training, yet, was able to identify improvements made by her classes, as a result of her own new learning. She had witnessed improvement in her pupils’ writing skills; ‘when I started the training this was all new and very daunting, but it’s been very beneficial because the children now – we challenge them and we build from their prior knowledge – but they actually apply what they have learnt’³. Not only were her pupils displaying improvement in their writing abilities, but she also noted that ‘actually they have ‘improved on their ability to recognise good writing, as well’³. She explained this claim in the following example: ‘they’ll say things like, “I’ve got lots of different structures,” “my tense is correct,” “I know what my adverbs are doing here – they are in the right place,” and things like that’³.

Having made good progress himself in his grammar learning, Dick believed that his new knowledge provided an important positive effect on his pupils, and shared the following comments about their writing growth: ‘We are seeing an improvement in their competence as writers. We’ve got some boys who are very reluctant writers, but if you make it interesting...the children’s grammar, we are seeing an improvement in writing...their levels have gone up. Their progress to next summer is good’³.

Dick was a Year 5 teacher at the beginning of the project, and taught his then class grammar for six months. At the start of the next school year he sent on that class to the Year 6 teacher (Tom), who commented that those children ‘were in a much better position “grammar-wise” than any class’³, previously passed to him.

Being an enthusiast for the grammar programme, Harry transmitted a lot of his passion to his classes. At his second interview he reported that some of his

children: ‘*were good writers, any way, and they could write really well and at a high level. But I now think they can go back through their work and actually realise what they are writing, and when they are starting to write they are a bit more conscious of what they are writing now, rather than just writing because it sounds good*’².

During his third interview he went even further in his observations: ‘*I think it’s just a deeper understanding of what they are writing, what they are reading*’³. And he went on to explain: ‘*Before, I felt we were just skimming the surface of what we were doing. Now, when they are doing a piece of writing, I can stop them and ask, “Right, have you used a complex sentence? Have you used an adjective? Have you used an adverbial phrase?”*³.

Importantly for Harry, he was able to teach some fundamental matters, such as using full stops correctly, through a broader grammar programme. Beatrice, also an already successful teacher, evidently thrived even more on the new knowledge she acquired through this project. She made particular reference to just one aspect of the programme: ‘*the phrases and clauses were the main things that I realised could improve their writing, but they needed to understand them, not just me telling them. And because they now understand them they are using a much wider variety of them*’³, and she reported that ‘control’ was becoming discernible in the work of her pupils:

‘*This year group in particular...have such poor sentence structure...So, by going right back to basics with this year group...the lower able group are now understanding what is a sentence. And they can articulate their ideas and get them down on paper. They are confident, they are enjoying it more because they can see the control they’ve got*’³.

She repeated her focus on ‘control’ a number of times during the second and third interviews, making it clear why she thinks it is so important: ‘*it’s about control – one of the biggest things that has come out of this is that there are so many other ways in which you can do it. Once the children understand what they need and why they need it, they can manipulate it*’². Portia, too, stated that her children were improving in much the same way: ‘*It’s more varied sentence structure; it’s just the choices that they make, I think. They are more aware of, ‘Oh, that doesn’t sound right’*².

5.10.2. Improved pupil attainment

This code, closely related to the previous one, was mentioned by teachers identifying the evidence that their pupils have learned more about grammar and write better as a consequence. Whilst the previous code explored the extent of progress made by studying grammar, this code identified the actual areas of progress of the young people affected by the research. It was only possible to address this matter in the second and third interviews, when it featured often.

Miranda noticed more sophisticated conversation about the improved accuracy of grammar and language between both teacher and pupils, and the pupils with each other: '*I feel that in terms of the children talking to each other there's been a bit of improvement, because the children, after some input from an adult, are able to talk and identify something like a phrase together*'³. She was also confidently able to pinpoint some particular features of language that she believed had gained from studying the content of the programme: '*I definitely think they have got a better understanding of punctuation and grammar. I think that has been reflected in their assessments*'³. She referred to the shared criteria all the pupils had available, allowing them to assess their own work: '*In Year 6 we can say, "Look at the front of your books, look at the criteria there. What do you think you have achieved?" And they are looking at things that say: nouns, pronouns, verbs, grammatically correct use and using correct tense – they get that and they didn't before*'³.

Tom also mentioned improved discussion resulting from grammar learning: '*we've helped them have a vocabulary to talk about sentences, so they have been more able to discuss*'². He approved of the direct approach to language, and raising the level of challenge in learning about language intrinsic to the grammar programme: '*being able to be very emphatic with the children...it's meant that, in a way, we have taken away some of the uncertainty that must have existed before*'². Tom questioned the beliefs that he once held about grammar, and felt that his changed approach had benefited his pupils. He shared a specific incident that demonstrated his pupils' progress:

*'it has allowed us to talk about a word, like 'magic', where – actually – we can use that word in different ways. It can have different functions depending on how it used in a sentence: 'It's describing the cat'. 'So, what is it?' 'It's an adjective, if it's describing the cat.' 'Brilliant!'*².

And he concluded: '*I have some children who are borderline Level 4. They have been able to describe to me in a proper, grown-up way – ‘well, it’s describing a noun, so, it’s an adjective’. That’s amazing and it’s not where we were last year’*².

Isabella also reported that positive change had resulted from the grammar programme conducted with her children. She reported an improvement with aided writing: '*we have got children who were tentative writers and not enthusiastic about it, and are much happier now...they are breaking things down, and they are looking more in detail because we have probably come at it from a different way*'². Similarly, Portia, was able to point to a situation where half her current class had been taught in the previous year by herself, and the other half by a colleague. Whilst Portia had followed the recommendations of the grammar programme, her colleague had not. Portia described the following situation: '*it’s very difficult to teach the whole class, actually. Because I’ve got half of the class, who were mine, who know a lot – and within their writing you can see it all the way. And then the other half, who I’ve not ever taught before; it’s quite a problem*'³.

Beatrice recounted a number of examples of pupil improvement as a result of the research programme, asserting: '*just giving them an understanding about how powerful word choices are...some of them are now starting to think about the order in the sentence, so where they go to make best impact. At least they are thinking more carefully, they are not just writing anything*'².

More specifically she argued that: '*Their vocabulary has increased dramatically*'², and continued, describing one area of their work: *we started off with the ‘adverb of the week’, explaining what adverbs were and what they could be used for. Now they are coming up with things, like the other day one of them was saying, ‘Oh, we could change this into an adverb and then it would create...’ Just hearing them having that conversation and knowing they have got control and seeing the difference...*². She was able to state that the '*difference in their work is huge, in terms of their sentence structure and their actual understanding*'³. And concluded positively: '*That the children have seen themselves improving sort of keeps me going and motivates me*'³.

5.10.3. Enjoyment of grammar

This code alludes to teachers' comments about whether they and / or their pupils enjoyed learning about grammar. There was universal interest in teaching the recommended programme, and all enjoyed participating, although not to the same degree. Virtually all the teachers commented on the enjoyment experienced by their pupils in their learning of grammar. These claims need to be regarded carefully, as most teachers represent their teaching positively, but the lesson observations confirmed that many children undoubtedly enjoyed those lessons.

Dick claimed his pupils, '*love it. They enjoy it – and they enjoy playing with it*'₂. He was a convert to grammar teaching himself, and believed his own favourable attitude to the subject impressed itself on his pupils: '*I am much more confident and I think that comes out in my teaching as well. The children are enjoying the lessons more*'₃. Some of his children wrote in their self-assessment reports: '*I love having fun with grammar*'₂. Dick explained: '*It's how the different sentence types are made and how you play about with those. I love the function of words as well. I love changing them around*'₃.

Similar professions were made by Harry, who became very committed to grammar teaching during the course of the project. He declared that: '*I feel now, after doing it, it has become one of my strongest subjects and probably one of my favourite subjects to teach now*'₃. He goes so far as to suggest that: '*I really do enjoy grammar...I can see myself becoming a bit of a specialist in a school*'₃. His pupils, '*love it. They do. They absolutely love it*'₂. He thinks this is because: '*they have more knowledge of what they are actually writing*'₂.

Isabella claimed that her class had '*really enjoyed*'₂ a range of different grammar-based activities. Her pupils were '*eager to learn*'₂, and her more able pupils were writing in a less '*flowery*'₂ manner. Portia was ready to volunteer that she enjoyed '*just all grammar*'₃, as she '*finds it really interesting*'₂. At the same time, she added that her pupils, '*love grammar. They love learning about it*'₂. She instanced an occasion when she missed grammar lessons for a couple of weeks, '*because we've been doing tests and things. And they have been dying for it, and they've just been, 'When are we going to do it?' And they really love it...*'₃.

Detecting the pleasure of learning grammar in her class was very motivating for Beatrice, who reported her pupils, '*really enjoyed it, so it makes you more enthusiastic*'₂. Much like Dick, she actively wanted her children to have fun with grammar: '*To give them that freedom. To give them choices and ...so they can understand it; it will make their writing stronger. And then they should be able to enjoy it, because they should be able to play around and have fun with it*'₂. She insisted that they were '*receptive...starting to make links and remembering back to things*'₂. In turn, Beatrice concluded, '*that sort of made you feel good*'₂.

5.10.4. Pupil difficulties

This code is to do with teachers identifying problems pupils continue to encounter, despite being taught grammar in their lessons. It was a code that was not mentioned in the first set of interviews, and only raised by one teacher in the third round, so it did not seem to be a substantial issue. The references to this code in the second set of interviews mostly reflected the early 'coming to terms' with the grammar programme which the teacher participants were experiencing at that time in the study. The majority of the concerns were about 'spotting' word classes, or a particular sort of clause, or something similar; mostly superficial issues.

A few teachers mentioned specific aspects of grammar that were causing some pupil difficulty. Tom was bothered that his pupils still struggled with clauses, and some of his pupils '*just continue to chain clauses together*'₂. '*And we have children who find it very difficult to recognise sometimes that they've actually written two main clauses, and we've got a comma that is trying to join them together – or worse – we don't have a comma joining them together*'₃.

Dick encountered writers who could not remember modal verbs and If he asked for an example, '*the lights go out and they can't remember*'₂.

Harry had pupils who, '*were getting confused between "Is that a compound or is it a complex?"*'₂. Whereas Miranda felt that, generally, '*we ask a lot of the children ...and I think they struggle*'₂. More specifically, she listed some of the children's problem areas: '*They have actually found it difficult to include adverbs, without prompts from myself, which has really surprised me*'₂. Juliet, on the other hand, was concerned that giving her pupils tasks or exercise which

were too open-ended caused them to be ‘completely stumped, so they don’t have a chance to play with the language’₂.

Beatrice, asked if her pupils were encountering difficulties, responded: ‘there are lots’₂, but explained further, pointing out that it was due to, ‘their massive gaps in the learning’₂ which caused most of the problems. She offered some detailed examples: ‘you want to start doing something – you do a bit of complex sentence. OK, they’ve not got any subordination. So, all right, you start to do some subordination, and then you realise that they don’t know what adjectives are! So, you go right back to the beginning’₂.

These difficulties diminished as the programme proceeded, as the pupils gained more knowledge about the building blocks of grammar.

5.10.5. More able children

This code was about responses from teachers who have attempted setting more challenging work for pupils of greater linguistic ability than their peers. More able pupils can often assimilate their grammar learning quicker and in greater detail than their classmates. They are also mostly capable of demonstrating their increased linguistic knowledge as features of the texts they then construct.

Miranda recognised that her more able pupils wrote in an enhanced manner, relative to their peers: ‘There’s definitely a sort of correspondence in terms of their writing level and their ability to grasp new concepts in grammar. So, my higher ability writers can pick up the concept a lot quicker...’₂.

Beatrice was of the same opinion, after perceiving her children writing: ‘I’ve always been interested in giving children the power in their writing and the children can do it and I think they can understand the differences. Definitely, the more able have been able to fly with it. But it’s also helped them have a better understanding of basic sentence structure...’₃.

This analysis was also uttered by Portia: ‘I’d say my more able take it on board a lot more...they don’t remember everything, but they try different things out’₃.

Tom had slightly different experiences to call on when answering the questions about more able writers: ‘some of my brightest are getting idiosyncratic; some of their writing styles – because they are getting much more playful, and are

*having fun with it. And it's OK.'*₂. He went on to report other distinguishing features of the more able writer: '*the bright children...just thumb the rules... They push at the rules that they know they can push at. They give it a little nudge and say, 'Can I push it this way?' 'Can I make it fun?' 'Can I make it funny?'*₂.

He believed that the more able have a subversive element, because, '*they can get away with it'*₂. They have the capacity to make their writing '*imaginative and creative even in quite dull-like instruction texts'*₂.

Harry outlined his strategy of differentiating writing tasks for different ability groups. *The 'highers' were pushed with the complex sentences, and they were trying. And the yellow table – they're my higher – and the oranges were trying to use complex sentences and put adverbials into those. My greens mainly did simples: a couple of compounds as well'*₂.

He continued by describing the same sort of observation already outlined by his colleagues: '*the ones with the highest ability...they grasp it and when they put it into practice it's accurate as well...They've all got the knowledge of it – but when they come to put it in their own practice they can put it in accurately and fluently'*₂.

Not all able pupils outshone their peers, however. Dick mentioned some activities in which the more able pupils were hampered by the grammar constraints he imposed. Many more able pupils readily wrote at length, and having to write to precise, focused, limited instructions irritated them: '*I got them to write a sentence using only 'a' words. They were confused and some of our higher ability children couldn't do it: they want to flow'*₂. He described setting the task of a 100 word book review for his class: '*They got to 100 words and some went to 150 and they didn't understand my criticism. "But I've done more, sir." "No. There are rules and you need to learn those rules in writing. 100 words to make it succinct." Some higher ability found that really tricky'*₂.

A few teachers pointed out that it was not necessarily their more able pupils who made the most progress during the course of the project. Dick, for instance, claimed: '*funnily enough, I find that initially it's normally the lower to middle ability that make the most progress, because they start from such a low*

baseline level, and this is new to them and they enjoy it’₃.

In her second interview, Portia was able to confirm this finding in her own classroom, when she said: ‘*within writing, I would say the middle ability have made the most progress’₂.* But she went on to qualify this claim in her third interview: ‘*I’d say my more able take it on board a lot more, but I would say...that all the class take it on board, but they might not...remember everything. But they try different things out – but they are not as aware as the more able’₃.*

5.10.6. Grammar as an obstacle to writing

This code was raised by teachers who feared learning grammar might make writing more difficult for pupils, hampering their creative imagination. Serious criticism has been made in the past suggesting that making pupils focus on grammar denies them the opportunity of writing interesting or engaging material. There was an expectation by the researcher that this matter would feature more prominently, but it was not so.

Only two teachers made any sort of reference to grammar obstructing writing. Dick, in the earlier days of the project, believed that paying close attention to grammar could be ‘*restrictive*’, but he did not expand that observation: ‘*we are now teaching it as a school. Certainly from my experience, and talking to other colleagues, we are now teaching grammar as it should be. But, interestingly, grammar can also be restrictive’₂.* At about the same time Beatrice added a little more detail in her consideration of the same issue: ‘*They are thinking more carefully, they are not just writing anything. That is hindering them as well, because some of them are spending too long thinking about, “Oh, I need a really powerful word for this”, so I think in some cases that it is hindering them’₂.*

5.10.7. Summary of pupil progress section

Without a common instrument of their pupils’ progress, it was necessary to discover from the teachers what they meant by ‘improvement in writing’, as understood in their own terms. These criteria covered a range of different writing issues, although some of the same outcomes recurred. Without any contact, the participants reported similar sorts of results.

Some teachers believed that knowing some grammar offered a vehicle for reluctant writers to become better engaged with writing. As a consequence of learning grammar terms, they were better able to articulate what they intended to write, and why they had made particular linguistic choices in their writing. Reluctant writers, often boys, became more motivated when they acquired ways to explain their ideas and intentions. The quality of talk about writing also improved, often conducted in a sophisticated grammar vocabulary.

Teachers reported that pupils were more secure with their understanding and knowledge of sentences, and how they might be used contextually to make clearer meaning. Other developing skills involved the growing ability to critique their own writing and that of others with authentic grammatical terms. Teachers and pupils enjoyed participating in grammar-focused activities, and there was a link between the enthusiasm and pleasure displayed by the teachers and the quality of grammar teaching. Those participants who were excited by the project sought richer resources and more creative lessons. This evidence of a developing metalinguistic pedagogical content knowledge was very strong.

Not all encounters were successful. Some worries about the restrictiveness of concentrating on grammar when writing were expressed, but they were few such instances. Almost all the teachers claimed that their more able pupils thrived when challenged with language-based tasks, but they were not the only group to take advantage of the new knowledge.

A hint of caution is necessary, however. Some good teaching was observed and recorded on camera. But not all the claims made by some teachers were quite as they framed them. Not all the work was sufficiently challenging and the articulation of grammar terms was often only possible with a lot of support and encouragement. Metalinguistic terms were not on the tips of many pupils' tongues, and they were not using the vocabulary in an applied way; at the conclusion of the project some pupils were still finding understanding of the relationship between parts of grammar difficult to articulate.

5.11. Summary of Chapter 5

The interviews yielded much useful data related to this project and tracked the changes, some considerable, through which the research teachers passed in their attitudes to grammar, their knowledge of grammar and their teaching of

grammar. Most of the teachers were enthusiastic to participate in the study and their interview answers suggested that they felt positive towards it throughout. They recognised that many misconceptions about grammar had been challenged through learning an alternative model, and the majority felt more secure in their interactions with their pupils; most reported greater confidence with the subject in the classroom. Whilst personal epistemologies had developed from a trusting, unquestioning position of most teachers, at the outset of the study, to an improved questioning stance, the fifteen month project was not sufficiently long enough to discover whether moving from the declarative to the procedural in their grammar teaching would eventually become a natural part of their planning and teaching. There was still uncertainty about the definition of ‘grammar’ at its conclusion, partly because these teachers had experienced so little learning about it in their lives before this research; preventing them enjoying the opportunity to discuss and consider the topic in greater depth as they grew older.

Chapter 6 – Case Studies

6.1 Case studies of 6 teachers who participated in this research:

6.1.1. Context

Six teachers each allowed the filming of three lessons they conducted over the course of the research project. This process was intended to enable the devising of 6 separate case studies, which offered an alternative way of exploring the research questions in six individual contexts. The following pages focus on issues and matters to do with increasing metalinguistic knowledge, to enable improved writing, and the teaching of grammar observed in lessons conducted at three, nine and fifteen months into the research programme.

All teachers' names have been anonymised. For the purposes of this study they are called:

Tom, Dick, Harry, Juliet, Miranda and Beatrice

6.2. Tom - Case Study

Tom was 34 years of age when the project began, and had been teaching for seven years. He was the Key Stage 2 manager in his primary school in a small east midlands town. His was the highest score on the word classes test, attaining 36 out of a possible 50. Unfortunately he left the study (and his school) without explanation before the research was completed, but it had been possible to interview him twice before his unexplained departure. In the first observation, Tom was teaching his Year 6 class of 29 pupils; on the second he was teaching a Year 5 class and in the third observation he was teaching a Year 5. Lesson observations took place on 5.2.14., 23.6.14 and 18.11.14.

6.2.1. First observation – 5.2.14.

Tom began this Year 6 lesson by stating that he would like to know from his pupils what prepositions are, and what they do, and after some pupil-to-pupil discussion received an answer – ‘they tell us positions’. Further offers of function supplied ideas about adding more detail ‘when something was taking place’. No obvious Learning Intention drove the lesson. The class task was to construct some simple sentences containing prepositional phrases. Reminding the class about the qualities of phrases, Tom said, *‘what is really key about phrases is that they have no processes’*.

On his screen he showed a still picture of a boy in bed from a book of mysterious illustrations, ‘The Mysteries of Harris Burdick’, requiring the pupils to, ‘compose a sentence that involves the verb “sleeping” and a prepositional phrase’, inspired by the picture.

While this exercise might have demonstrated and called on the children’s knowledge of word classes and sentences, at no time was there any exploration of what effects the inclusion of prepositions or prepositional phrases might have on the writing. He did encourage the pupils to talk about the sentences they wrote, but these explanations added little to further understanding of their work. And talk opportunities were restricted, being conducted mostly by the teacher. The lesson was filled with the following sorts of instruction:

Teacher: How much detail can you put in your prepositional phrase? He is ‘in his bed’, but how much detail can you give me about that? There should be a greater image there for me to see. I want a picture, because I’ve given you a picture. How much detail can you put in your prepositional phrase?

The teacher was actually focusing the pupils’ attention on noun phrases contained within prepositional phrases, as prepositional phrases can only commence with single prepositions. These requirements showed a misunderstanding on the teacher’s part, and missed a potentially interesting learning opportunity.

Pupils were then asked to write two sentences about the possible contents that we could not see of the room in the picture.

Teacher: I would like to hear a simple sentence. I’d like to get a sense of a single verb or process. Within it there might be lots of lots of lovely things happening in the sentence, but there will only be one process at the heart of it.

This sound advice reminded the pupils of the properties of simple sentences.

This exercise brought about the following sentences:

Pupil 1: Under the bed lived an abundance of dead rubber balls.

Pupil 2: In the corner of the room a huge dog's bed stood.

Beyond using a few examples of prepositions, and practising sentence types, there seemed little point to this lesson. The pace was very slow, the challenge was minimal and there was not much indication as to its overall purpose and whether that had been achieved.

6.2.2. Second observation – 23.6.14.

This lesson, with a Year 5 class was also about prepositions. The Learning Intention was to ‘understand prepositional phrases’. After the children held focused conversations about the nature of prepositions, a short animated PowerPoint program was employed to remind the children of their functions, defined by the teacher as: ‘words that tell us the position of one thing in relation to another’, with some examples: ‘under’, ‘beside’, ‘on’, ‘in’, ‘above’ and ‘behind’. Pupils were expected to fill in spaces in an unchallenging exercise: e.g. ‘The red fox stealthily crept the dark forest path’.

Tom then moved to sentence construction, designed to enhance the value of prepositions:

Teacher: The point today, then, is we are not just going to worry about prepositions; you are pretty good at knowing where to put prepositions and confident in recognising them. So, in that case, we have to think about how we make your writing pretty good. This means not just taking prepositions by itself....but we need the chunk of words that comes along with the preposition.

The same misunderstandings about noun phrases nested in prepositional phrases, seen in the first observation, were demonstrated once more. A writing task was then set, which paid most attention to prepositional phrases, but probed no further into the issues around prepositions. These tasks added nothing to what the children already knew. The same mystery picture (see 5.2.14.) was shown to the class and they were encouraged to write ‘the best, most interesting, exciting sentences’. Firstly, however, they had to:

Teacher: Write on your whiteboards a single sentence that contains at least one element of a preposition.

The lesson became even more incoherent as Tom asked the class to ‘underline for me the key prepositional word’ in their sentences’, and he went on, ‘it’s probably acting like a blob of glue sticking on bits’. Children offered a number of examples, and were then invited to think of a ‘really impressive word’ to include in the words alongside the preposition.

Teacher: if you are thinking of ‘big’, make it ‘enormous’.

The lesson concluded with pupils writing two sentences about the picture, with a few children asked to share their efforts with the whole class.

This lesson was mainly a collection of activities, with no exploration or reflection. Any class talk was to answer Tom’s restricted questions, allowing no room for challenge and further exploration. The task did not appear to be related to any particular text study. The pace was slow and the language learning was difficult to detect.

6.2.3. Third observation - 18.11.14.

This was designated as a ‘Booktalk’ lesson. Children at their desks were asked to read round the group two sentences each from a shared text, looking out for ‘those action words, those doing words’, to collect and share. From their reading the pupils were asked to make two lists:

Teacher: One of everyday verbs – the common everyday verbs we are used to, and the other of verbs which have taken time and effort to choose; the precise word.

In the sharing session, the following verbs were designated ‘common/everyday’: ‘see’, ‘jumped’, ‘ran’, ‘looking’, ‘knowing’ and ‘said’. Nobody had the word ‘was’, although some had ‘are’. Amongst the verbs deemed more exotic, were: ‘trembled’, ‘mooched’ (which caused a short discussion), ‘glancing’, and ‘exclaimed’.

The sentence, ‘He went into the classroom and sat on a comfy chair’, was presented by the teacher, who asked:

Teacher: What type of sentence is this?

After being given a wrong answer, another pupil volunteered:

Pupil 1: It's a compound, being joined by an 'and'.

Teacher: OK. Can you explain any more than that?

Pupil 1: It's two sentences joined together with an 'and'.

Teacher: You are quite right. A compound sentence is made of two equally weighted chunks, joined by one connecting word that actually makes it one new separate sentence.

Pupils were given the task of discovering examples of compound sentences in the books they were studying. When the examples that had been discovered were shared, Tom was not always secure with his knowledge.

Teacher: Who's got a great example, then, of a compound sentence? Where we've got two sentences which both make sense by themselves, and split them both into separate sentences.

Pupil 1: She held her head and screamed and screamed.

Teacher: OK. We've got a repetition. So, we've got a bit more than two.

There was a long pause whilst he considered the response – but he was unable to explain it. He showed similar hesitation with other examples that did not equate to the 'perfect grammar' examples of the text book exercises which had regularly supported his teaching in the past.

Tom concluded the lesson by advising that 'spotting verbs in sentences is key if we are going to find out how sentences are working'. He adopted an approach which regarded textual material as a bank of language bits, to be discovered and then merged. It paid no attention to the idea of the whole text, but is seen as some sort of loose federation of words, or phrases. The meaning being yielded through the choices and control exercised by the authors is wholly disregarded.

6.2.4. Personal epistemology

From the evidence of Tom's interviews, it could be reasonably assumed that he had given considerable thought to the teaching of grammar. He had very strong feelings about the sorts of adverse demands the government tests made on his pupils, and yet much of his teaching was very controlling, and he expressed clear views about the necessity for accurate punctuation. No exploration or analytical probing of grammar was employed to aid language learning, and

most of the teaching was delivered by the teacher. He experiences, as do many of his colleagues involved in the research, mixed feelings about grammar. In his first interview he said:

'to me, grammar is some sort of very, sort of formal knowledge and understanding of language, and how language connects and the sort of categorisation of it. I think that for me is grammar – yes, that's what it is.'

In his second interview Tom revealed that having learned more about word classes he had come to realise that they are more than just for 'recognising and defining', yet his lessons do not develop much further than simple recognition and identification. He also claims that he moved into a position whereby he believes that grammar is 'continual knowledge as opposed to a series of individual particulates', yet these beliefs were not evident in his lessons.

He illustrated the dilemma facing all the teachers of Year 6 classes:

'I fully support the idea that grammar is a running thread that should be there consistently. I fully support that we should be finding it through our reading. We've done that, but we've done an awful lot of test prep as well, because of the nature of the circumstances I work in.'

Epistemologically, Tom's stance, after fifteen months of participation in the research remained 'absolutist', although he identifies himself in a more multiplicity position. His lessons still resemble the sorts of model familiar with teachers of more traditional grammar beliefs. Tom is torn between his requirement to teach what he calls 'tick-box' grammar, as preparation for the national testing, and his recognition that 'language is a living, changing beast, that just refuses ever to be chained down permanently'. His stance in regard to grammar teaching is mostly positive, but he lacked the language knowledge necessary to enter into full discussions with his pupils on the subject.

6.2.5. Subject knowledge

Tom was already familiar with word classes before his involvement in the project, evidenced by his high score in the word class test. He mentioned that his understanding of the relationship between different word classes had been increased as a result of the training. He felt he had gained more confidence as

a result of his increased knowledge in most features, although he admitted he still wanted more support with some areas, such as prepositions.

He raised an important matter, shared by most of the research teachers about ‘where to go next’. He recognised that pupils needed a vocabulary that enabled a shared discourse to take place between pupils and teachers, but Tom was uncertain about the next stage of language learning. Having acquired the vocabulary, how could teachers set up lessons that provided writing progression and maintained pupil interest? He instinctively identified a metalinguistic stage, but was not able to make the relationship between grammar and a metalanguage.

6.3. Dick - Case Study

When the project began, Dick was 46 years old. He had been teaching for four years, and been an administrator in industry before teacher training. At the first observation he was teaching a Year 5 class of 27 pupils. The second observation was with a Year 6 class, shortly after their SAT test, and the final observation was with a Year 4 class. Dick’s grammar word class test score was 18 out of a possible 50 – the lowest score of all the participant teachers. From the start he showed much eagerness to learn and was prepared to try out new ideas. Observations were conducted on 5.2.14., 23.6.14. and 18.11.14.

6.3.1. First observation - 5.2.14.

The Learning Objective was ‘to look at ways we can improve our sentences with different openers’. The lesson was tightly focused on that objective. First, Dick showed a short extract of film involving a boy cycling to a graveyard; the genre being explored was ‘ghost stories’. The children were asked to think of a collection of words appropriate to the genre and these were collected: e.g. ‘mysterious’, ‘frightening’, ‘scared’ and ‘dread’.

The task was to write a short narrative of the event in six simple sentences, which had to begin differently. (The more able group were allowed to use a mix of sentence types.) The teacher asked for examples of a simple sentence: ‘the child entered the churchyard’ being the one selected. The class was invited to add an ‘ed’ word at the beginning of a sentence, although the teacher was unaware that it was a participle, acting as an adjective. Nevertheless, the class

came up with a number of good alternatives: ‘terrified’, ‘petrified’, ‘worried’ etc. They were then asked to start a second sentence with an ‘ly’ word.

Teacher: An ‘ly’ word. What is that usually? What do we call an ‘ly’ word?

Pupil 1: An adverb.

Teacher: Excellent. And what does an ‘ly’ word usually describe?

Pupil 1: A verb or a process word.

Teacher: So, what’s your sentence?

Pupil 1: ‘Cautiously, the boy entered the churchyard’.

Then he went round the room, challenging every child to offer a different ‘ly’ adverb.

At the sharing time, Dick demonstrated how the children could take more control of their writing, but he also encouraged them to engage in the practice of using too many adjectives for their own sake:

Pupil 1: ‘Strangely, as he arrived he looked at the tombstones’.

Teacher: What were the tombstones like?

Pupil 1: Creepy.

Teacher: So, add ‘creepy’. Don’t miss the opportunity to use an adjective. (Another name) what do you have?

Pupil 2: ‘Nervously he walked through the churchyard and thought he saw a figure and he looked back...’.

Teacher: Stop...stop! You’ve gone too far, you haven’t kept it under control.

At which point the teacher broke the sentence down into its simple sentence units.

Dick was still only about three months into the project, but already he was picking up new devices that could lead to improvement in his children’s writing, although he was still making reference to more traditional approaches. His knowledge was growing, but it was still a mixture of former beliefs and more recently learned information, without much discrimination between the two.

The final third of the lesson was given to exploring the possibility of using ‘ing’ words. Attempting to establish that the pupils understood what ‘ing’ words might be, he asked the class what ‘sort’ of words they were, and was twice disappointed before a pupil volunteered they were ‘verbs’. But, at this stage he knew too little about verbs to explain participles, or the ‘noun form of the verb’, or even finite and non-finite forms. Yet despite these shortcomings, Dick achieved his aim of supporting his children to make small improvements in their writing by increasing the choices of words the might use to start sentences.

6.3.2. Second observation - 23.6.14.

This lesson, conducted with a Year 6 class, was driven by exactly the same learning objectives as the previous observation, but this particular topic was new to this class. The lesson took place some four months after its predecessor. Dick’s decision to virtually replicate the previous lesson, albeit with another class, could have been evidence that he was still unsure of how to apply his new knowledge in ways of improving pupils’ writing. He had a limited repertoire of ‘improving’ devices.

Once again, the lesson began with a film, and the pupils were expected to write the plot in five sentences. The teacher shared with the pupils that they would be exploring ‘ing’, ‘ed’ and ‘ly’ endings of words that could be used to start sentences. Before the children began writing they shared a selection of words ending in ‘ing’. Having collected the list, the teacher then asked:

Teacher: What are all these? When we talk of our word classes, what are all these?

(Receiving no answer, the teacher instructs the class to discuss possibilities.)

Pupil 1: Verbs or processes.

Teacher: That’s right – verbs or processes. So we are starting a sentence with a verb or process.

Dick had still not got beyond the inherited belief that ‘ing’ endings signify verbs; and he either does not know, or has yet not learned to distinguish between, finite and non-finite verbs, or that the non-finite form can act as a noun or adjective..

A further confusion arose moments later. The teacher asked for a sentence beginning with an ‘ing word, leading to the following exchange:

Pupil 1: ‘Trying to open the door, Alma was frustrated that it was stuck.’

Teacher: (writing it on the board) Right, a bit of punctuation is needed here, because without knowing it, you have created an adverbial phrase; an adverbial opener. So, what punctuation do we put (name)?

Pupil 1: A comma.

Teacher: Of course, after ‘door’.

This interaction indicates there has been significant misunderstanding about adverbials, adverbial phrases, phrases generally and complex sentences.

As in the previous lesson, Dick spent a few minutes exploring the words with ‘ly’ endings (which the class knew were called ‘adverbs’) and ‘ed’ words. A short time was spent discussing with the class whether words that ended in ‘ed’ could only be in the past tense. The class produced some accurate and interesting examples of sentence openers: e.g. ‘Desperately, Alma carefully climbed the old bookshelf’; ‘Confused by the doll, Alma reached for the dog.’ These examples showed that Dick had achieved a good degree of success in his learning intentions, but errors and misunderstandings to do with the metalanguage diminished the quality of the learning.

Dick mentioned more than once that the lesson was designed to improve the pupils’ writing, but no reference was made as to why a writer might want to begin a sentence with an adverbial. No connection was made with different sorts of meaning that might be available considering the order of sentence components.

6.3.3. Third observation - 18.11.14.

This lesson was conducted with a Year 4 class, which had been learning focused grammar for three months. The learning objective was to construct what the teacher called ‘sandwich sentences’: ‘they are actually sentences with an embedded clause’. Dick showed great enthusiasm for his work, but much of what took place was muddled and lacked coherence, and the class was not well-motivated. For instance, he began the lesson seeking information about simple sentences:

Teacher: You can't do a clause unless you know what a simple sentence is in the first place. What does a simple sentence have? What does it have to have?

Pupil: One verb.

Teacher: That's right. You can have more than one noun, but it definitely, definitely can only have one verb or process. A verb is a doing word.

Despite exploring in the training that verbs were much more complex than elementary 'doing words', Dick continued defining them in an unhelpful manner.

Minutes later, Dick participated in the following exchange, having written an example of a simple sentence: 'James Bond is a famous spy' (the class reader was a spy story).

Teacher: This is an interesting one, this one. What is the main subject (name)? The main noun?

Pupil 1: James Bond?

Teacher: Yes, James Bond. James Bond is the main subject. What's interesting about this sentence is: where's the verb? Talk to your partner where the verb is. (pause) Who's brave enough to tell me what the verb is? We'll start off by asking (name).

Pupil 2: 'Spy'.

Teacher: No. Unfortunately, 'Spy' is the name of something; it's a noun. A verb is a doing word. There are two nouns in this sentence. Two subjects. (Calling on another pupil)

Pupil 3: 'Famous'?

This approach is typical of Dick's lessons. He is committed and keen to introduce grammar into his work, but he regularly includes details which are either not valid ('There are two nouns in this sentence. Two subjects'), or unhelpful to pupils' learning ('A verb is a doing word'). The children show similar signs of partial knowledge. Following the quoted extract, the pupils proceeded to guess their way to identifying the verb in this sentence. They lacked the understanding that might have enabled them to discriminate the word class of individual words by working out their contextual functions.

For the next few minutes Dick told the class a number of facts about the verb ‘to be’, promising they will learn more about it later in the year. This lack of focus was confusing. He then moved on to ‘embedded clauses’, asking the children to suggest what they might be. Nobody knew, so Dick shared a definition: ‘an embedded clause adds information to a sentence’. Once again, there was evidence of insecure, misguided teaching. The children were unfamiliar with the term ‘clause’ and they would also need to be taught or reminded about complex sentences, about which there was no mention. He offered an example of a ‘sandwich sentence’: ‘The ferocious dog, who was trying to scare away the burglars, barked noisily through the hole in the fence’. Similar examples were then constructed by the whole class working together. It was evident that many pupils did not understand the activity. Finally, the teacher advocated and justified the increased use of ‘sandwich sentences’ by stating: ‘I prefer cheese and pickle, rather than just cheese’, which I understood to be a metaphor referring to the increased richness of language by the employment of embedded clauses.

This was a muddled lesson, without a coherent core, yet with various scraps of the metalanguage being forced together in inappropriate ways. The children did not discernibly improve their writing skills as a result of this teaching.

6.3.4. Personal epistemology

Dick was very keen to join the study and did his best to introduce focused grammar teaching into his lessons because he believed that it could improve children’s writing. Epistemologically, he attempted to plan lessons that related to the texts his class was reading. He taught what he believed to be dedicated decontextualised ‘starters’, with the ostensible goal of improving writing.

He began his involvement with this study believing grammar to be:

‘the ability to construct a sentence correctly. That’s how I read grammar. So, we’re looking at, I suppose, the word choices, the language and how we structure the language.’ (First interview)

Whilst this statement foregrounds an emphasis on grammar to do with accuracy and correctness, he might also be seeing it as a means of involving linguistic choices.

Asked, in his third interview, what he had learned about grammar during the course of the study, he replied:

'something I've learned over the couple of years working in this study is that knowledge of word classes, knowledge of how we construct sentences is becoming more and more important to the children, with regards to their SATs testing.'

This assessment of his development would appear to indicate that Dick had not acquired a changed epistemological position during the period of the research. He gave the impression that grammar was learned in a constrained, pragmatic manner. To a great extent, he seemed to be teaching grammar because he was obliged to; it was difficult to discover any further rationale.

Like other teachers in this programme, Dick demonstrated clear paradoxical difficulties. The first two lessons were designed to relate grammar knowledge within writing tasks related to texts the classes were studying, but the exercises the pupils were expected to undertake were 'stand-alone', without any exploration of the effects achieved by the different sentence openers within the main study text. No discussion designed to compare the achieved effect or appropriate outcomes was initiated.

The third lesson observed illustrated even greater confusion. Dick believed that teaching grammar is desirable and that it should contribute to the improvement of his pupils' writing. Yet, his lesson was contained in an inflexible framework, without a real understanding of how what was being taught might bring about better writing. He claimed that he felt more confident about teaching grammar, but it would seem that he picked up some linguistic vocabulary, not all of it properly understood, and based most of his teaching around those features. Although he lost some of the 'fear' about teaching a metalanguage that he had expressed at the beginning of the study, he was not improving his pupils' writing.

6.3.5. Subject knowledge

Dick began the project with limited knowledge of grammar: 'I knew that my subject knowledge was quite weak'; partly indicated in his low word class test score. He quickly became interested in the sorts of writing variety that learning grammar enabled, such as the possibility of starting sentences in different ways,

(‘it’s how we turn simple sentences into compound and complex’) or what he called his ‘green words’; ‘those words in a sentence that we can move around’. He became mesmerised with certain grammatical terms, such as ‘adverbial phrases’. Asked what he had learned, he answered: ‘I would say it’s making sentences more interesting by using the different aspects of grammar; the phrases at the beginning, the connectives we can use in the middle’, suggesting a superficial knowledge, at best. Asked about whether he was experiencing any difficulties or problems, he admitted that he ‘still didn’t know the rules’, and he cited the matters to do with ‘infinite and finite verbs’, as a particular obstacle.

His word class test score improved from 18 at the start to 30 at the project’s conclusion, which shows that at a superficial level, at least, his own knowledge had grown. The lesson observations, nevertheless, yielded evidence that on some occasions his new knowledge was not secure, not capable of improving his pupils’ writing attainment.

6.4. Harry - Case Study

At the beginning of the project Harry was 26 years of age, and had been teaching for fifteen months. The first two lessons observed were in a Year 5 class of 28 children in a primary school in the east midlands. The third lesson was in another primary school to which he had moved in the same area, where he also taught a Year 5 class of 27 pupils. At the outset of the research, Harry candidly admitted that he knew only the scantiest amount about teaching grammar: ‘I started teaching without any real knowledge of language at all’, he claimed in his third interview. In the preliminary grammar test conducted with all the project teachers on word classes, he scored 25 correct answers out of 50, which matched the mean. Before participating in the project he relied heavily on a grammar course book of decontextualised exercises, adopted by the whole school, from which he devised a stand-alone grammar lesson every Monday morning.

Observations were filmed on: 13.1.14. / 25.6.14. / 20.11.14.

6.4.1. First observation - 13.1.14.

The lesson was concerned with making different sorts of sentence and knowing the important differences between them. The learning intention was clear: ‘to

know how to construct different sentence types', discussed by the whole class before writing. Harry wrote on the board a possible word class skeleton structure of a simple sentence: determiner, noun, verb, preposition, determiner, noun. No explanation of what constituted a simple sentence was offered at that time. The pupils knew what these terms meant, having become familiar with them in the three months since their teacher had commenced participation in the research. He allowed a jokey sentence, ('The boy ran under the chair') because it complied with the word order and it made sense. This exercise was halted for a short discussion about the meaning and role of 'prepositions'. One child gave examples – 'under', 'through' 'across' – but the teacher pressed the class to provide an explanation of their function. He advised: 'remember all words are doing jobs'. One pupil proffered an explanation, 'knowing where the noun is', an answer which was accepted.

A discussion, in groups, followed about what qualified a sentence as 'simple', and Harry asked for ideas:

Teacher: Who thinks they can tell me what makes a sentence 'simple'?

Pupil 1: Is it a short sentence?

Teacher: No, that's not it...

Pupil 2: Is it a sentence about simple things?

Teacher: No, that's not it...

Pupil 3: Is it one that doesn't have an adjective?

Teacher: No, that's not it....I'll tell you...it's a sentence with only one – absolutely only one - finite verb. Who remembers what finite verbs are?

Pupil 1: Aren't they verbs that get finished?

This answer caused further interchange between Harry and his class. It is possible to see from these exchanges that Harry allows his pupils some room for them to express their immediate thoughts, but he also recognises where he has to intervene to continue making progress.

To consolidate their understanding, pupils were then invited to add adjectives and adverbs to the structured sentence they originally wrote, without changing its status from a simple sentence. Examples were shared with the whole class, and they were all accurate, suggesting that understanding had developed through their teaching sequence. However, references to phrases might have

offered another level of support. The final part of the lesson involved turning simple sentences into compound examples. More time might have been spent considering ‘co-ordinating connectives’, but more than half the class offered accurate examples. One sentence, ‘The shouting running boy tripped and smashed his face on the glass’, contained non-finite verbs acting as adjectives, which allowed Harry to explain further the concept of the ‘finite/non-finite’ verb before the lesson closed.

Harry had admitted in an interview that before taking part in the research he had ‘blagged’ his way through grammar lessons. In this lesson, however, the security of his grammar knowledge about simple and compound sentences allowed him to develop children’s grammatical understanding of a simple sentence, and to consolidate that through appropriate activities. He used relevant grammatical terminology, and tried to develop their thinking about non-finite verbs. What is less clear is the purpose of this lesson beyond grammatical identification and superficial understanding. Harry did not apply what the children had learned to any real textual context, and no rationale was touched upon demonstrating why simple or complex sentences might be more appropriate choices in writing.

6.4.2. Second observation - 25.6.14.

This lesson was about understanding adverbials: using them correctly in sentences and knowing what functions they perform. Even though the class had been encouraged to use adverbials in their writing, this lesson, requested by the pupils, not secure in this linguistic area, followed one on the previous day. Harry reminded the class of the examples of adverbials they had discovered in the opening of the narrative text, ‘Skellig’, e.g. ‘I found him in the garage on a Sunday afternoon.’, and ‘The others were in the house with Doctor Death..’ The class was asked again to consider in groups what ‘adverbials’ might be, inviting thinking and reasoning about the concept. Asked to explain what an adverbial might be, a boy suggested:

Pupil 1: It’s like adding on the five W’s on to the end of a verb.

Teacher: Right. OK. (name) is saying ‘Five W’s on the verb’. Who can expand on that?

Pupil 2: ‘He stretched sleepily on his way to work’.

Teacher: OK. What is the verb in that sentence?

Pupil 2: ‘stretched’.

Teacher: Right. What sort of word is ‘sleepily’?

Pupil 3: It’s an adverb; it’s telling us how the man stretched.

Teacher: Right. So, is there an adverbial in this sentence?

Pupil 2: Yes; it’s ‘on his way to work’.

Teacher: Right. It’s different from the adverb, because it’s more than one word. What job is that adverbial doing?

Pupil 2: It’s telling us where the man was going.

These interactions between teacher and pupils were characteristic of Harry’s style of teaching. His questions helped to expand their understanding and reasoning of adverbials.

Harry spent a little more time making the distinction between adverbs and adverbials, and, when invited, the children suggested that adverbials also ‘told us’ when, and where things happened. And, almost as an afterthought he added, ‘Adverbs usually tell us “how”.’ The pupils instigated a further discussion about whether adverbials tell us ‘why’, but they came to the conclusion that that was the purpose of the complex sentence.

These were unremarkable but solid instances of teaching, all conducted in authentic metalanguage. The teacher was more assured of his grammar knowledge than he had been six months previously, able to answer some testing questions and his class had established a solid word class background. Harry had purposefully learned much metalanguage independently, and generated high expectations that his pupils would use the vocabulary in a natural way.

The next task expected the pupils to identify adverbs on a worksheet Harry had written, which they completed successfully after a few minutes, ready to explain their insights. He then required them to find any adverbials on the same resource, which was also within their grasp. He offered the following challenge:

Teacher: Can you spot the adverbials (there are a couple), that give you further information about the verbs? Find the verbs, look at what extra information about those verbs – who, what or when, then you’ve got an adverbial.

In line with the staged approach of this lesson, the children were then set an exercise requiring them to add adverbs to verbs, followed by adverbials. A class discussion explored how many adverbials might be included in a sentence, and the children agreed it could be a great many, without any specific limit.

Teacher: Can you only have one adverbial in a sentence, or can you put loads in?

Pupil1: You can put loads in.

Teacher: Why can you put loads in?

Pupil 2: It will make the writing more descriptive.

Teacher: Why can I write loads of adverbials into a simple sentence?

Pupil 2: Because there aren't any more verbs in adverbials.

The pupils were strongly engaged with this work, and their development and reasoning can be seen in the following exchange, which could only happen in circumstances where the pupils are full participants. A boy asked:

Pupil 1: Do all the adverbials start with a preposition?

Teacher: I am sure that they do. Look at the examples you have got.

Pupil 1: I did; that's why I asked.

Teacher: Sometimes, adverbials are also called prepositional phrases.

You remember about phrases?

Pupil 1: Yes; they don't have verbs in them.

The final task was to undertake a short piece of writing which would include adverbs and adverbials which, from the evidence of their feedback, they handled skilfully.

The lesson had many useful learning moments, but even though the pupils were expected to produce a piece of writing demonstrating their new skills, the point of their learning was never made clear, and the relationship with noun phrases and prepositional phrases was not raised.

6.4.3. Third observation - 20.11.14.

Having taught grammar for nine months with a Year 5 class in one school, Harry moved to another school which had been 'failing', according to Ofsted. The children in his new Year 5 class were unfamiliar with grammar and its potential. Nevertheless, Harry's vastly improved linguistic knowledge enabled

him to plan and present lessons which were appropriate for this class and after three months the class had made rapid progress, able to explain language at work and paying closer attention to language in use. Harry had continued his own learning through resources he had come to trust.

The lesson being observed was about learning to use direct and reported speech:

Teacher: Something I picked up from your suspense writing was that you are not one hundred per cent accurate with your speech writing, your writing of speech. We are going to look at how to write speech: there are two different types of speech, so we can include it in your writing.

Whilst meeting the needs of the class at the simplest level, and becoming more adventurous with language learning, it is also possible that Harry's view of grammar still contains some focus on the correction of error and being accurate.

He began the lesson by showing a short animated video, in which the characters do not speak but express their feelings in other ways, which quickly engaged the pupils. Using screen grabs of separate incidents, Harry invited the class to fill in the 'dialogue' they had invented. This introduction was followed by the presentation of the rules of direct speech, and inviting the pupils to apply them to examples of speech they were offering, on the whiteboard. These features were to be the success criteria for the exercises later in the lesson.

The next section of the lesson was about reported speech:

Teacher: Who knows what reported speech is?

Pupil 1: It is written speech that doesn't have speech marks.

Teacher: Right. So what's the difference between direct and reported speech?

Pupil 2: You don't say in reported speech exactly what they said.

Teacher: That's right. You are just telling the reader that someone has said something.

And then he demonstrated how reported speech worked, with examples suggested by the children.

After watching the film again, the class was divided into three, each group responsible for retelling one part of the story they had just watched: the beginning, the middle and the end, containing both sorts of written speech.

One boy asked about ‘pronouns’, which Harry had drawn attention to in his instructions about creating reported speech.

Pupil 1: I’m not sure what pronouns are, sir.

Teacher: Who can help (name) out?

Pupil 2: They sort of do the job of nouns but don’t tell you who.

Teacher: That’s almost right. Give me an example.

Pupil 2: Well, instead of writing the ‘man’, we might put ‘him’ or ‘he’.

Teacher: That’s right. Do you understand now (name)? (Answered by a nod.)

This level of confident metalanguage shared in the classroom had built up in a short time.

Harry was very clear about the features of speech writing he wanted to see in the pupils’ stories: direct speech punctuation (already itemised) and a range of speech verbs. Then their piece of writing was to be transformed into reported speech. The class worked well during the next fifteen minutes.

The last section of the lesson was about pupils remembering to include all the features of direct speech. Harry wrote on the board an example he had seen in one child’s book: *‘Hey get off of me screamed the fluffy bird!* He challenged the class to identify what was wrong with the sentence.

Pupil 1: Does it need to add something like ‘quickly’ or ‘slowly’?

Teacher: It could have an adverb like that – although technically that’s not what’s wrong. It’s a nice added extra.

Pupil 2: Should there be a comma after ‘me’?

Teacher: That’s right

And then he went on to remind the class of ‘wrapping’ what was actually spoken with inverted commas, and inviting them to discover and correct similar mistakes in their own writing. In his final feedback he became aware of some children’s difficulty with reported speech, which he intended to address in the next lesson.

6.4.4. Personal epistemology

In the three month period between the start of this study and the first lesson observation, Harry regularly shared with his pupils that learning metalinguistic knowledge had the possibility of improving their writing. However, in the observed lessons there was limited focus on the relationship between grammar knowledge and better writing. The lessons on simple and compound sentences and adverbials were focused on correct identification with little discussion of their meaning-making effects in different texts; and the third lesson on direct speech might have led to improved accuracy in written work but not necessarily improved effectiveness. There may be a discrepancy here between Harry's espoused personal epistemology, that teaching grammar improves writing, and his classroom practice, suggesting an epistemological stance regarding grammar as concerned with identification and accuracy. Or Harry was interpreting the notion of 'contextual' in a different manner. In his second interview he claimed that 'they did a lot of spotting now', meaning that his pupils looked at grammatical features at work in a range of texts, but were not encouraged to explore how that closer linguistic attention could be used to enhance writing. Asked about what he hoped his pupils would achieve in the lesson on adverbials, he replied:

Knowing what an adverbial is; understanding how it's used, understanding why it's used; knowing that linking to parts of sentences – we've done quite a lot on sentences and different types of sentences.

Harry is keen that his pupils should improve their literacy skills, but he was only lightly alluding to the effects to which grammar can be put in writing. After his training Harry had dedicated himself to learning the metalanguage, without exploring the full benefits of such knowledge.

Since developing confidence in grammar knowledge, Harry reported that his reading had changed and he now:

tries "to decode it and I think, 'what is that?' and some times, there's this 'grey area', and I think 'what is that?'

Realising that the 'rules' can be broken has made him think differently about who might control the language. Epistemologically, this may represent a shift in stance, away from absolutist views to more relativist views which recognise that

grammar is not always a matter of right and wrong, but requires reasoning about the function grammatical structures are undertaking. Certainly, his pedagogical interventions are encouraging children to reason and think grammatically, witnessed, for example, when he asked them to consider what adverbials were and how they function.

6.4.5. Subject knowledge

As noted earlier, Harry began the study with grammar knowledge at the mean of the group and only 50% of the maximum score available, according to the test. During the study, his grammar knowledge increased, partly due to the training offered through the study but he also discovered a high level of support from a text ‘Teaching Grammar Effectively in the Primary School’. Over the course of fifteen months he claimed that his knowledge of grammar had improved ‘massively’, enabling him to teach a more extensive grammar curriculum.

In his second and third interviews he talked of his pleasure derived from grammar learning, and his increased interest in noticing much more about grammar in the world around him. His enthusiasm was reflected in the positive approach his pupils adopted to their grammar tasks and learning he devised for them. He believed that his confidence had increased as a result of his new knowledge, and he felt more equipped to engage with his classes, less troubled by any of the sorts of questions his pupils might raise. Certainly, in the lessons observed, Harry handled students’ questions well, and was able to lead them through questioning which prompted thinking to a more secure understanding. It is noticeable that the children themselves initiated grammatical questions, such as the student who asked in lesson 2 if all adverbials begin with a preposition. His score in the word class test at the conclusion of the study had risen from 25 to 39, out of a possible 50; a notable increase.

6.5. Juliet Case Study

At the beginning of the research project Juliet was 30 years old. She was in her Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year, although she had previously been a Teaching Assistant (TA) at the school before university teacher training. She was teaching a Year 6 class of 28 pupils in the first two lesson observation and a Year 5 class of 29 in the third observation.

Juliet admitted from the start that she knew only limited amounts of grammar from her past, but she wanted to know that,

'if I've seen someone's writing, I can see where they are trying to go, and what sort of grammar they are trying to use and how to help them 'better' it!'

Unfortunately, she added, this intention was hampered by the long time it took trying to work out what her pupils had written:

'I'll know that what they have written is not quite right, and it's that knowing how to help them change what they have written to improve their own work. And that's the bit that makes me nervous, and makes me worry that I am not helping them enough to move them on with their writing.'

Her teaching was characterised by this hesitation and lack of confidence in respect of grammar. At the time of the observation, three months into the study, she had not taught one single grammar-focused lesson, because of her nervousness. In the preliminary grammar test conducted with all the project teachers on word classes, she scored 23 correct answers out of 50, slightly below the mean.

These observations were conducted on: 20.1.14. / 7.7.14. / 8.1.15.

6.5.1. First observation - 20.1.14.

The learning objective of the lesson was: 'To plan a balanced argument'. The teacher had begun this topic in a previous lesson and certain success criteria had been identified: use bullet points; use notes; arguments for/against; include supporting evidence; sentence starters; conjunctions and exaggeration. The opportunity for attending to focused grammatical features existed, although – in the event – these features were not given any consideration. The lesson was almost exclusively devoted to matters of content, with no mention of language and style. The lesson was old-fashioned in its structure and attitude, very much teacher-driven, offering very little occasion for discussion or pupil discovery, much of it conducted in silence. Pupils were asked only closed questions, requiring short answers. The one specific reference to grammar was Juliet's reminder that all questions must end with a question mark.

The teacher ‘modelled’ writing for a large part of the lesson, referring only to issues of content in her explanations. Juliet demonstrated what an argument essay might contain, and then the pupils worked on small whiteboards in pairs, to construct their own versions (none moving far from the teacher original).

The lesson began with the construction of a suitable question as the essay’s title, likely to raise the interest of the reader (e.g. ‘School uniform: 20th or 21st century?’). Juliet then ‘modelled’ an introductory paragraph, followed by a section establishing contrasting points in paragraphs two and three. Finally, the class shared some of their essays on the visualiser and they were asked to comment on how well those versions had met the criteria.

It was difficult to determine if Juliet was frightened by the prospect of being observed whilst teaching grammar, so she avoided it, or whether she didn’t know how to explore the potential features of grammar through a specific text type. She was finding the teaching of a Year 6 class, with the demands of preparing for the Key Stage 2 test extremely stressful, although she had volunteered to participate in the research, and – offered the opportunity to withdraw – continued to participate. At this stage, about three months into the study she had not naturally integrated grammar learning in to her planning and teaching of writing.

6.5.2. Second observation - 7.7.14.

Juliet admitted before this lesson that her priority in most of the preceding months had been the preparation of her class for their Key Stage 2 test, and she had only recently turned her attention to teaching grammar in relation to writing improvement. The lesson was about selecting alternative openings of stories. Juliet had produced a poster, for the whole class to see, listing possible different openings:

Verb – ‘Sitting, the wolf...’

Adverb – ‘Suddenly, a chase...’

Prepositional phrase – ‘Next to the wood, the wolf...’

Simile – ‘As quiet as a mouse...’

Connective – Because he was frightened, the wolf..’

The first task was to think of alternatives to the word ‘sit’. Children offered: ‘slouch’, ‘cross-legged’, knelt’, ‘lounge’ and ‘crouch’. All ideas were accepted

without examination – the point being, Juliet explained, to alert the pupil to alternatives. The teacher then displayed a picture book, ‘I can stand on a stool’, in which virtually all the sentences began, ‘I can’. There was a general agreement that this repetition was boring, but no discussion was initiated about why it might have been constructed in this manner.

Pupils were then given a picture, copied from a picture book of a wolf looking at a pig, and they were invited to say what was happening. They mentioned that the wolf ‘looked scruffy’, that it was ‘looking at the pig’, ‘balancing on three legs’ and ‘had its tail between its legs’ etc. Much concentration was being devoted to the possible narrative and content, but nothing was said about the language.

Juliet turned the class’s attention to the language poster, and something of her uncertainty with grammar became evident. Having told the children what a verb is (and there was no realisation that the verb ‘sitting’ was a non-finite verb), and what an adverb was, she asked:

Teacher: What do you think a prepositional phrase is? (pause) You should be able to work them out just by looking. Think of all the work we have done this year.

Pupil 1: Is it where it’s connected to, like, an object?

Teacher: It might be ‘next to’; might be ‘under’; might be ‘over’; it might be ‘beside’. It’s where it is in relation to another thing.

Juliet then considered the *simile*. Having dealt with the different sentence openings, she had the opportunity to explore what the different effects might be achieved by changing alternatives. However, the pupils were merely asked to make their own openings to narratives, to do with the wolf picture, based on the above grammar list. In the class sharing session at the end of the lesson no further discussion or exploration took place; pupils merely read out their sentences and were rewarded with comments of ‘lovely’.

6.5.3. Third observation - 8.1.15.

The learning objectives of this lesson were never made clear, so it was difficult to ascertain what should have been its outcome. This lesson continued one which had been taught the previous day, involving a picture text about an African boy in an adventure. The children were expected to continue the story. ‘Success criteria’ had been agreed and were as follows:

- 1st person;
- include details to interest reader (e.g. brilliant sun / arms as good as new steel);
- remember reactions;
- individual target.

The teacher took nearly 15 minutes to write up a ‘modelled’ version she had composed on the flip chart. The pupils listened in silence, except for one intervention:

Teacher: He was there. Who am I talking about when I say ‘he’?

Samson. Samson is right at the front of his mind. He was there...I hardly ever (I should see people thinking about the language I am using). I hardly ever see him down here. Why today?

Pupil: Also you could write ‘seldom’ instead of ‘hardly ever’.

Teacher: Fantastic (name) Instead of saying, ‘I hardly ever see him there’. I shall write ‘I seldom saw him there’. (‘Seldom’ being one of the ‘improved’ words of the previous lesson).

This was a wholly controlled lesson, without any constructive or shared interaction or exploration. Even though this lesson took place some fifteen months after the project began, Juliet made no reference to the potential grammar matters and there was no evidence that she had participated in the training. Opportunities were missed to recognise the many adjectives included, and their effect. No attention was paid to the ‘voice’ of the piece, and the place of a first person narrator.

After watching and listening to the teacher, one group was assigned the task of virtually re-writing the modelled paragraphs, whilst more able children were given a little more independence, but not a great deal. The end of the lesson was occupied with reading some of the narratives, checking to what extent the ‘success criteria’ had been achieved.

6.5.4. Personal epistemology

After fifteen months of participation, Juliet was still reluctant, frightened or, possibly, not equipped to teach a lesson with a grammar focus, or significant language content. In her first interview, she expressed her confidence about

teaching grammar as ‘low’, and it did not grow through the subsequent period of the study. She stated openly:

‘it’s something that I know I need to work on, and it’s something I do work on, so that when I do my modelled writing, I work really hard on it.’

Yet, the modelling of writing she practised was not the most effective method of improving writing, and it indicated limited regard of grammar. By the end of the project her knowledge had not developed far, mainly because, as she explained:

‘This year I haven’t done a lot of grammar. I’ve just touched on little things’.

It would seem that Juliet was more comfortable with a literary focus, concentrating as she did on narrative and character.

Juliet had an obvious belief that knowledge was passed down from the teacher to her class, under firm control. She had identified particular matters in her programme that had to be dealt with, and anything else was a distraction from that approach. Because of inexperience and fear of losing control, she kept everything well-ordered and moved through the learning in small steps. There was no invitation to the pupils to become collaborators in this process; they constructed only ersatz copies of the original. Grammar was not being employed to improve writing; there was no choice and few options were available to the pupils.

Yet, there were a few positive changes in Juliet’s attitudes during the course of the study. At first she could only see her learning in grammar as an instrument for improving her pupils’ performance in the Key Stage 2 test.

I found before – I mean it was easier in a way with the Year 6, because you had to do the separate little sections when you are pushing for the SATs results.

At the study’s conclusion her interview showed she was much more aware of the ubiquity of grammar and was beginning to realise that studying it comprised more than just a set of exercises. She also claimed that as a result of taking part in the research:

‘I’ve learned a lot of be honest. And it’s not just about the ins and outs of grammar, and things like that. It’s taught me a lot about myself.’

6.5.5. Subject knowledge

It was apparent that Juliet made little progress improving her own subject knowledge at the beginning of the project. She, more than any other teacher in the study, was caught in a dilemma. She wanted to play a fuller part in the project, but felt obligated to teach the limited test syllabus, and she lacked the necessary teaching experience to address them both in some sort of compromise: ‘And that’s what I was trying to do previously – I was trying to do a bit of everything and they weren’t getting that grammar’.

Through interview it became clear that she resented not being taught language earlier in her life. Juliet was capable of sincere self-reflection. She conceded that, ‘more recently I have come to understand that I need to do more work’. Working with a Year 5 class, reduced the pressure on her and she had more space and time to catch upon the learning she had missed. In her second word class test she achieved a score of 28, from a possible 50: a small improvement.

6.6. Miranda - Case Study

At the beginning of the research period Miranda was 24 years of age and had been a teacher for 3 years. She taught more able Year 6 classes. Her reasons for joining the study were ‘to know how to embed the most basic skills’. She regarded ‘using the correct English language’ as one of the goals for her pupils. Miranda, who regretted receiving only a little grammar learning during her life before the project, scored 20 from a possible 50 on her word class test, just below the mean. The lesson observations were conducted on 24.1.14., 26.6.14. and 12.11.14.

6.6.1. First observation - 24.1.14.

The Learning Intention for this lesson was: ‘to understand past, present and future tenses’. The Success Criteria were to: ‘be sure the tenses of all the verbs in the sentence agreed’. The previous lesson had considered subject and verb relationships.

At the start of the lesson the class was invited to spend a few moments discussing the notion of past, present and future. After hearing their definitions, Miranda moved on, briefly, to instruction about finite and non-finite verbs.

On more than one occasion Miranda mentioned that learning grammar was intended to make the pupils better writers, but they did no writing of real

importance that might possibly have been improved, nor was any apparently planned. They were asked to write three sentences, one in the past, one in the present and one in the future – which they managed easily. The following dialogue was typical, demonstrating some missed opportunities for language learning, and some partial scraps of knowledge:

Teacher: OK. (name) let's have one.

Pupil 1: 'I walked to the shops.'

Teacher: 'I walked to the shops'. Past tense. Yes. (name)

Pupil 2: 'I am walking to the shops'.

Teacher: Present. (name)

Pupil 3: 'The baby will be going to bed'.

Teacher: Yes. Future. So, any of our verbs or processes that have a tense are called a 'finite verb'. If they don't they could be any time. We call them 'infinite'.

This interchange contains accurate information, and the pupils are knowledgeable about what is being asked, but the teacher reaction is constrained. More opportunities exist for developed teaching of finite verbs, such as all of the pupils' answers have alternatives, for instance.

More examples of verbs in different tenses then followed, and a long simple sentence was projected on to the whiteboard for the purpose of the identification of its tense. After further instruction, Miranda considered some verbs in the past, present and future tenses, but made no reference to the way that future tenses are constructed, nor any reference to modal verbs. After a quick diversion to mention some facts about sentence types, and a further few minutes listing ir/regular verbs in the past tense, the children were urged to begin their differentiated exercise in groups.

The most demanding task, for the most able group, was to construct a sentence containing three tenses. The best example was: 'Because of the rain that poured yesterday, I am travelling to school by car, but tomorrow I shall cycle'

There was evidence in the summary that a large proportion of the class had been made to think more about tenses, but any progress was through the vehicle of unconnected sentences and paragraphs. It was understandable,

after only a few months of teaching grammar, that Miranda moved cautiously in a decontextualised frame. So much in the lesson depended on the teacher, who did a good deal of talking, but offered only limited opportunity for exploration and discovery.

6.6.2. Second observation - 26.6.14.

After an introduction by the teacher, considering what adverbs and adverbial phrases ‘do’, the class spent a moment discussing what they had just heard. The Learning Intention was: ‘to understand adverbs and adverbial phrases’, which might have given a focus, but was unable to make clear what possible effect adverbs and adverbials could offer to sentence building. The first activity required pupils to write ‘your most creative, favourite adverb’. These were written on a post-it note, and collected for a display on the literacy wall, for future reference. All the suggestions were ‘ly’ adverbs, but no comment was made about that fact.

Justification for the lesson was explained in the following exchange:

Teacher: We are working quite hard on what, in your literacy? What unit?

Pupil 1: Historical narrative.

Teacher: Yes historical narrative. And what in that historical narrative do I have to keep stopping you all to say you need to improve?

Pupil 2: Adverbs.

Teacher: That’s right. Lots and lots of you were not supporting your writing, not supporting your processes with adverbs. And what did that mean when I was reading through your stories? What did I not see?

Pupil 3: How things were done.

Teacher: Exactly. We are always writing for the reader in Year 6.

These sorts of questions, to which the teacher already knew the answer were typical of the teaching style. Having dealt with adverbs, Miranda asked the groups to ‘guess what an adverbial phrase does to a sentence’. Pupils then counted the adverbs in a specially composed passage projected on the board. Next, she moved on to explain the purpose of adverbial phrases, mentioning how they differed from single word adverbs. They were attributed the function of indicating ‘where, when, why and how a process takes place’. Pupils were then

asked to add a variety of adverbial phrase to a given clause. Once again, Miranda found it safer to use custom-made materials as textual study material.

Much of the rest of the lesson was occupied with differentiated exercises dealing with adverbial phrases, carried out in groups decided by ability, which all the pupils dealt with successfully. Finally, after asking a series of questions to representatives from each group, Miranda required the pupils to write a text message of 160 characters giving a definition of a adverbial phrase. Many of the pupils had made some improvement in their understanding of adverbial phrases, which I was able to endorse. They were able to answer questions at the end of the lesson they could not have tackled earlier, but they were unattached to a bigger grammatical picture.

6.6.3. Third observation - 12.11.14.

Although the Learning Intention, 'to know the difference between finite and non-finite verbs', was clear enough, the lesson began with a number of important misunderstandings:

Teacher: What's a verb (name)?

Pupil 1: A doing word.

Teacher: Yes. That's fantastic. It's a doing word and we use them to describe what in the sentence (name)? What does the doing word or the action describe?

Pupil 2: The action describes how you are doing things.

Teacher: Not quite. If I want to say how I was doing a move, I would use an adverb wouldn't I? I am walking slowly. What is the job of the verb (name)?

Pupil 3: It tells you what it is doing.

Teacher: It tells you what it is doing. It's helping you to describe the....?

Pupil 4: Noun.

Teacher: Noun. Well done.

This exchange suggested that Miranda was unclear about the functions of some word classes, even after fifteen months of training in and teaching grammar. Miranda then asked the class to think about finite and non-finite verbs. She was secure about verbs in the past tense, and about infinitives preceded by 'to', but she was less knowledgeable about present participles. Miranda projected a

chart on to the digital board, with headings: ‘finite’ (by which she meant the past tense), ‘process’ (or present participle) and ‘infinite’ (by which she meant ‘infinitive). Spaces were left blank for the pupils to fill appropriately.

In earlier lessons no discussion was encouraged about when and where we might encounter these verb forms. All the exercises were self-contained, without any links being made with significant texts. The teaching was mostly directed by the teacher, telling the class whatever she wanted them to know. Exploration and problem solving did not feature.

The next stage of the lesson was built round a ‘class challenge’. The pupils were given the following instructions:

‘Write a four sentence paragraph about going home from school. You should stick to the following restrictions:

All 4 sentences should be simple

All 4 sentences should begin differently

All 4 sentences should have evidence of finite verbs and processes and should be underlined in a different colour.’

Having shared some outcomes from that task, about ten minutes from the end of the lesson, Miranda asked the children to refer to their shared class reader, ‘The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas’ by John Boyne, which they were to scan to identify finite verbs in the past tense, the process and the infinitive form. Whilst the class finally came into contact with a real text, serving a literary purpose, it became little more than a collection of grammatical bits and pieces to be identified and listed. There was never any notion in the instructions about suggesting what effects or accomplishments these grammatical features may have contributed to. A few verbs were shared with the rest of the class at the lesson’s conclusion, but no summary was made.

6.6.4. Personal epistemology

Miranda experienced difficulties learning grammar and learning about grammar. At the earliest stages of the project she had fixed ideas about grammar being a rule-based phenomenon and moved only slightly from that absolutist position throughout the study. Asked before the study began what the word ‘grammar’

meant to her, she replied: 'I think of punctuation, and I think of correct, using the correct English language. I think it includes dialect, where you're from, how it changes the way you speak'.

Answering a similar question at the conclusion of the research she responded:

'I find it more and more difficult now to teach a lesson on compound sentences, or simple sentences, or a word class because you do have all these interlinking ideas then coming in.'

She was still unaware of the bigger picture of grammar, and through what means she might make further progress with her class. Miranda expressed, in interview, her unease about how to teach her classes when they had achieved learning word classes, indicating a very narrow view of language growth.

Miranda's description of what was taking place in her lessons, and the position she started from in her teaching did not match the actual evidence from the filmed observations. She was comfortable and improving in her knowledge of word classes, but she was unable to venture beyond the security and authority of small, self-contained aspects.

She also experienced the challenge of teaching the recommended programme related to the research project, and was concerned her children might not succeed in the SPaG test unless she taught the more prescriptive alternative model on which the test was based:

'I have had reservations because some of the stuff we have looked at, albeit interesting stuff, hasn't been what I believe will be seen in the test'.

In the end, she stuck closely to the test requirements, without being able to find a satisfactory compromise that related both programmes.

6.6.5. Subject knowledge

Miranda made the least progress in her own word class learning, achieving only 23 marks out of a possible 50 on her second attempt, after fifteen months of involvement with the project; three marks more than on the first test. There was no doubt that she had 'broadened' her linguistic horizons, had improved her knowledge of word classes at a fundamental level and she had absorbed much new about language in the training, but not all of her new knowledge was secure and there was only a partial relationship in her lessons with grammar improving writing, even though she declared that was the bigger purpose of

teaching grammar. The lesson observation on finite and non-finite verbs showed only a superficial knowledge that might well have been inherited from the traditional approach of former times.

6.7. Beatrice Case study

Beatrice was 29 when she joined the project, and had been teaching for 6 years. She was a literacy co-ordinator in a primary school in the east midlands at the start of the study, but moved to another school in the same area as an assistant headteacher after one term. She scored 27 out of a possible 50 on her word class test, the second highest total. Observations took place on 3.3.14., 9.6.14. and 19.11.14.

6.7.1. First observation - 3.3.14.

Beatrice had been working with this class for only twelve weeks at the time of the first observation, and the children had not been taught any grammar before she became their teacher. They were not used to involving themselves in dialogue with the teacher, and she had to urge and encourage endlessly to gain any response. The Learning Intention was ‘to know how to use subordinate clauses in writing’.

After some pupil-to-pupil discussion about the nature of clauses, generally, and subordinate clauses in particular, Beatrice wrote on her board a subordinate clause from a picture book, ‘Way Home’ by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers:

Teacher: wrote – (‘As he stared longingly at the bright red car in the window...’) What? What’s going to happen? We still haven’t got a main verb. (Despite her lively engaging manner there was no response from the class.)

(She urged them to offer a range of possibilities – modelling possible examples)

‘Shane imagined himself a racing car driver?’....‘Shane imagined himself roaring down the track?’....‘Shane was filled with envy?’....Come on! (Another pause).

Pupil 1: Shane pictured himself driving round the race track.

Teacher: Excellent. Thank you, (name) What else did he do?.... ‘Shane hoped one day he would be able to own one?’ ‘Shane imagined driving away with a red one?’ Come on, Year 6, I need your help with this.

Eventually, she wrote two examples of her own. These pupils had not been acquainted with either the language of grammar or its workings, and this very diligent and skilled teacher had to struggle to gain any momentum. The text they were reading was engaging and popular, and all their writing tasks were related to it. This lesson was necessarily a one-off because the pupils were not yet sufficiently grounded in the features of grammar to consider its use more broadly.

Having gained confidence from the model written by the teacher, the pupils then worked in pairs devising their own main and subordinate clauses in complex sentences, and after a few minutes they were producing them easily. It was much like a plug being pulled and lots of clauses suddenly pouring out. They were given a writing task:

Teacher: Today, in your writing, you are going to make sure that you include some subordinate clauses. Not in every sentence. Why not?

Pupil 1: It would get boring.

Pupil 2: We might need other sorts of sentence.

Teacher: Good. Don't forget I still want those wonderful simple sentences you included in the last piece, with lots of adjective and adverbs. You can try opening your sentences with subordinate clauses, or ending sentences with them.

Beatrice modelled a short paragraph, helping the pupils focus on 'what we need to create in our readers' minds'. By this point of the lesson the pupils were fully involved and ideas raced around the room. With suggestions from the children, Beatrice built a paragraph containing three sorts of sentence. The pupils wrote their own versions until the end of the lesson.

Despite the progress made by these children in one lesson, there was, at that time, no relationship being made between the sorts of sentences being constructed and the possible range of meanings they might convey, but there was a keen sense offered by the teacher that the study of grammar had the possibility of enhancing writing..

6.7.2. Second observation - 9.6.14.

This class had experienced focused grammar lessons for six months and their confidence and readiness to participate were tangible when compared with the

first observation. This was a powerfully successful lesson, not ostensibly about grammar, but including sections where particular aspects of grammar were highlighted. The Learning Intention was ‘to know how to use drama to explore a setting’. The lesson was based on a text ‘Night of the Gargoyles’, by Eve Bunting. Study of the language of the text had taken place in previous lessons.

Approaching grammar from this direction was different from the strategies employed by other teachers in the study. Beatrice regarded the text as the starting point, not the decontextualised exercises that might or might not eventually have some link to it, which took place in many other classrooms. The language of the study text was an important consideration, but these pupils were being challenged to build on the original text, taking account of the important features of that original. Beatrice had moved on from instructing the class about word classes, to a position where they were adopting a much wider view of grammar.

Beatrice was keen to involve her pupils in writing vivid description, from the gargoyle’s point of view. She paired the children for a drama activity – ‘Guided Walk’ - in which, through describing scenes in pairs, with the listening partner pretending to be blind, they explored possible descriptive words, particularly verbs, on which the teacher focused. So, the people below the gargoyle might be ‘scurrying’, ‘swarming’ ‘careering’ and ‘dashing’. The breeze or wind in the towers might be ‘kissing the stones’, ‘swirling’ or ‘soaring’. Emphasis was given to noun phrases, to achieve a striking description. Much conversation resembled the following:

Teacher: Remember, we’ve spent a lot of time exploring ‘language for effect’.

Pupil 1: You might be hearing the wind.

Teacher: What might the wind be doing?

Pupil 1: It might be whistling.

Teacher: What else might the wind be doing?

Pupil 2: It could be more gentle, by ‘whispering’.

These interchanges indicated that the children were not just supplying words, but thinking also about the sorts of meaning and the atmosphere those words might be playing.

After reading a passage together written on the whiteboard, the class then continued with their writing, which required the inclusion of subordinate clauses, expected to improve effect. Two children shared their work towards the conclusion of the lesson and the other pupils identified words and phrases in those examples they thought were successful in conveying the desired atmosphere.

6.7.3. Third observation - 19.11.14.

The first concern of this lesson was to do with phrases. Beatrice had devised an exercise in which pupils had to identify the difference between phrases and clauses written out on tabs, explaining why they came to their conclusions. This exercises involved animated focused discussion.

One of the tabs had 'the snarling rabid Rottweiler' written on it, and Beatrice encouraged a whole class discussion about its status as either a phrase or clause. Eventually, with a focus on word function, teaching points were raised about finite verbs and functional shift.

Teacher: So, what helped you decide them, (name)? How did you decide which were phrases?

Pupil 1: Because the phrases have no verb.

Teacher: That's right, they have no verbs. Has anybody noticed anything about the clauses?

Pupil 2: The clauses all have finite verbs.

Having identified phrases in the opening exercise, Beatrice went on to teach the children different sorts of phrases. It was intended that this class would, in a later lesson, then teach the Year 2 pupils about phrases and clauses. She began with noun phrases; encouraging the pupils to suggest how they are formed and what they do. The pupils were secure on both matters: suggesting that they are built round a noun; they possibly contain a determiner and adjectives; all those features adding more information about the noun. They were asked to write a definition of a noun phrase, and give examples, suitable for a younger pupil.

Beatrice then moved on to prepositional phrases, which the pupils also knew about securely. The children were asked to include a number of prepositional

phrases in one sentence, such as: 'The boy kicked the ball over the fence, through the playground and across the field'.

In an interview following the lesson, Beatrice reported that learning about phrases had made a huge impact on her children's writing. As a consequence of learning those grammatical terms, she and her pupils shared greater precision in focusing on particular matters of language, and her pupils had been able to directly address some of their problems. The quality of their work, she claimed, had improved tangibly. Her involvement in the study had enabled her to gain the confidence to use the metalanguage, to good effect. The filmed observation confirmed these developments.

Whilst the rest of the class explored the types of phrases in a passage Beatrice had photocopied from their study text, she worked with a more able group exploring different types of subordinate clauses; of time; of place; of condition etc.

The lesson finished with pupils of all abilities, reading examples of phrases they had written, explaining what extra detail or effect had been added by the inclusion of different sorts of phrases.

6.7.4. Personal epistemology

Despite her modest claim that she knew little about grammar at the outset of this study, Beatrice took seriously her training and accumulated new learning with great enthusiasm. She was the teacher who most related her grammar programme to real texts, and bore out the claims she made about 'working in context'. Not only did she and her class read passages from texts, they explored language through drama activities.

Whist there were still elements of 'correctness' expected in her pupil's work, there was also less formal teaching instruction to her pupils than that seen in the classrooms of other teachers in the study. She was never content to know that her pupils had learned a particular term, but required her pupils to demonstrate its function and possibilities.

Beatrice referred sincerely in interview about the children being given the space to 'take control'. This goal was not possible in the beginning stages of her grammar teaching in a new school with formerly traditional instructional

teaching practices, but by the end of the project she had steered her children into a different, more open-ended approach.

She was aware that the core of grammar study was contained in the texts of the real world, interested in the language that had made them as they were. Her lessons regularly started at that realisation. She displayed an absolutist stance in the beginning of her relationship with new pupils, but that stance was changed as she and the pupils began to see the possibilities that grammar could bring about in improving writing.

In interview she said how surprised she was to find out how many grammars there are, and this discovery led her to more thoughtful and reflective stance in relation to the grammar being taught in her school.

6.7.5. Subject knowledge

Beatrice knew much about grammar, especially word classes, before being recruited to the project, but until it had been modelled for her, she was reluctant to use the 'technical' words with her classes. Becoming confident enough to use the authentic language of grammar, she felt, made a substantial difference to her pupils' understanding. She achieved a total of 38 marks in the second word class test; 11 more than when first tested. The area of learning she most valued was to do with the variety and flexibility of different sorts of phrases and clauses. It was typical of her teaching that she paid greater attention to collections of word classes, going beyond a continual focus on individual words practised by some of her peers.

Whilst responsible for Year 6 classes tested by SAT at the end of the school year, she, nevertheless, continued teaching the programme recommended in the study, seeking overlaps with the more traditional requirement where possible.

6.8. Conclusion

Most of the teachers participating in this programme learned much grammar through their involvement, mostly to do with word classes. The teaching grew more assured in most classrooms, but within a limited range of grammatical features. What many of them lacked, however, was the knowledge of how to develop that learning into broader teaching programmes, beyond a linguistic vocabulary. The lesson observations captured situations where teachers

thought they had planned lessons aimed at improving the writing skills of their pupils, but which, in actuality, fell short of that intention. Some of the teachers were prepared to try many of the suggestions I made to them, and employ the resources I helped them devise, but they were mostly very hesitant about developing those further.

One disappointment was that the majority of headteachers and their senior teams in the project schools were supportive of the research taking place, but showed no ambition in developing it beyond the volunteers in their schools, despite - in all instances – attending the training. Opportunities for addressing progression were not taken and the possibility of embedding grammar in the learning and writing of a range of subjects not realised. Two schools asked me to return for more training in ‘twilight’ sessions, and the headteacher of one of those schools recommended that his staff abandon the grammar textbook series taught through the whole school, but nothing more. Rather than being uninterested in the project, it is possible that the senior staff, growing up in a period when most people did not encounter grammar learning, were as nervous about teaching it as their subordinates, and did not want to engage with the subject fearing their own limited knowledge might be exposed. They also had the priority of ensuring that their Year 6 pupils succeeded in the KS 2 SPaG test, and would not be keen to see their eldest pupils too distracted from that goal.

Chapter 7 - Discussion

7.1. Introduction

Chapter 2 presented the details of a dispute that has taken place in the subject of English over many years, conducted by those with opposing views about whether or not teaching grammar in the curriculum resulted in improving the writing abilities of pupils (Clarke, 2010; Myhill, 2011; Wyse, 2001; Locke, 2010). In this entire dispute less attention has been directed towards linguistic research in primary schools. Most of the research in the primary sector has been carried out within a traditional model of grammar, not directed towards function and meaning, in what has been known as a ‘prescriptivist’ mode, relying, as it does, on a good deal of content knowledge.

Poulson *et al* (2001:271) state: ‘A growing body of research on teachers’ cognition, suggests that it is not only behaviour in the classroom which influences students’ learning, but also teachers’ knowledge (both formal and practical), values, beliefs, theories and thought processes which are important’. What teachers know about a subject, and how well they teach it, have a strong bearing on how successfully learners learn, but Shulman (1987) suggested that a further dimension is necessary to achieve even better learning. As well as ‘subject content knowledge’ (knowledge of an academic domain) and ‘pedagogical knowledge’ (knowledge of how to teach), he also believed that teachers needed to develop a further dimension which he termed ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ (knowledge of how to teach that domain), a quality he claimed that was unique to teachers. There should be no distance or academic barrier between the teacher and the pupil. In his reckoning primary teachers teaching grammar are not to be regarded as remote academic linguists, but teachers of grammar, close to their pupils, whose role is assessing, understanding and supplying what their pupils need to improve their grammar learning.

This research has been concerned with studying primary teachers’ grammar development in a ‘descriptivist’ framing. It does not repeat the argument of ‘whether or not’ grammar teaching should be imposed on primary school children, because that has now become a legislative requirement, but has explored how teacher subject knowledge, pedagogic knowledge and pedagogic

content knowledge might work together to bring about the capability of greater control and the choice of more options for primary school writers; arguably one of the main goals of learning grammar. The research is particularly concerned with exploring teacher knowledge of grammar; how a collection of teachers think about grammar and how the teaching and learning of grammar plays out in their classrooms. These areas of focus should give some insight into how teacher subject knowledge might be improved in the future.

All eight teachers featured in this project had limited experience of grammar in their backgrounds and, when the project began, most lacked confidence about teaching it. They volunteered to participate partly because new requirements from the Department of Education meant that their pupils would be examined on their grammar knowledge, in a high stakes national test (DfE, 2012), at the conclusion of their primary schooling. Tracing the development of these teachers' personal epistemologies, their growing grammar and linguistic knowledge and understanding, and their pedagogical progress over a period of 15 months has made it possible to gain an important insight into the demands on primary teachers in this recently changed, some think intimidating, educational setting and to assess what more subject knowledge, pedagogic knowledge and, especially, pedagogic content knowledge they need to fulfil their shared target of improving pupils' use of language, particularly in writing (Shulman, 1986).

What follows are a number of findings from this research which have implications for the teaching of grammar now and in the future. This chapter will bring together and discuss some of the data that has been discovered as a result of attempting to answer the research questions that have driven this project. It will report on the changing personal epistemologies that were observed in the research teachers as they learned more grammar subject knowledge and began to think more purposefully about the ways of teaching the subject. It will also try to reflect the current state of the teaching and learning of grammar in a few primary schools, which may be in common with practices taking place in other schools across the country.

7.2. Personal epistemologies

7.2.1. The development of personal epistemologies in the research teachers

Every one of us has a personal epistemology: a set of tacit assumptions to do with ‘the beliefs we hold about knowledge and knowing’ (Hofer, 2001:4); activated as we engage in learning or new knowing. We are all exposed to new ideas, theories and information from different sources every day (Rule & Bendixen, 2010:94) Those theories and beliefs are received and shaped epistemologically by the stances and attitudes we hold about any subject. No two epistemological responses can be the same, but they do fall into broad groupings. The way learners react and cope with that new knowledge directly touches on our cognitive responses. Perry (1970) constructed, through longitudinal research in the 1950s and 1960s, a developmental model, later extended and drawn out by others, (Hofer and Pintrich, 1997; Schommer, 1990) in which learners are positioned on a trajectory of four stages. These comprise a *dualist*, objectivist position, followed by a further three sections: *multiplicity*, *relativism* and, finally, *commitment in relativism*, where ‘knowledge is perceived as uncertain but can be validated in its context’ (Feucht and Bendixen, 2010:7). Learners can be stationed at different points within each section, or even across sections, which are not necessarily progressive.

The *dualist* position can embrace an extreme point of view, what Moore (2002:20) terms the ‘Garden of Eden’ set of beliefs, where reliance is placed on the ‘truth’ proclaimed by some authority figure. Those in this position might also acknowledge different perspectives or beliefs, ‘but they are simply wrong’. All the participating teachers entered this study at the *dualist* stage with regard to beliefs about grammar. In this position, new knowledge is accepted, without question or challenge. Most moved, at least to some degree, from the *dualist* to the *multiplicity* position, during the study, although to different extents. Those at the *multiplicity* stage are able to admit to a little uncertainty, what might be thought of as a ‘not yet known’ category. During the course of this project, a few teachers showed some movement within or between those four stages, but to different degrees. Such a variety of changed epistemological positions was fully in accord with Perry’s findings (1970), and subsequent research in this area: (Hofer 2001:4, Baxter-Magolda 1992, Urman & Roth 2010:8 and Feucht

& Bendixen 2010:6). **Miranda** and **Harry**, who taught in the same school and received exactly the same training, for instance, moved in different ways in their separate beliefs about grammar and how appropriate it was to teach in primary school. **Harry** embraced his new knowledge with enthusiasm and continued to explore it further independently, whilst **Miranda** was not as sure about the justification for teaching descriptive grammar to her Year 6 class, and based much of her teaching in the security of traditional grammar that she trusted. **Harry** quickly passed from the *dualist* position, whilst **Miranda** changed more hesitantly, bothered that her beliefs were under threat.

7.2.2. Epistemological stances towards grammar

At the beginning of the project, all the teacher participants believed that there is only one grammar; a traditional model, depicted as a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ set of rules about language use, when, in fact, Crystal tells us that ‘several types of grammar can be detected’ (2012:217), all performing different linguistic-related tasks, identified as ‘descriptive’ grammar; ‘theoretical’ grammar and ‘comparative’ grammar, to name a few from a long list. The particular, unique epistemological stances of these people in relation to grammar had been nurtured through their previous lives, from any grammar they may have encountered at school, or by interactions with parents, and many other sources, accepting what has been uttered, read or written without questioning. Asked in his first interview how many grammars there might be, **Harry** replied: ‘I don’t know; it’s a weird question’ and went on, ‘I thought, you know, the language is what it is.’ **Isabella** suggested there might ‘be loads’, but she was just guessing and had no idea what they were, and had never come across others. **Portia** had, ‘never thought of it before’, and **Laura**, later in the research, stated that ‘she was on a different path’ as a result of her new knowledge about the range of grammars.

Through the realisation that there could possibly be more than one grammar, all the research teachers began to think differently about the supposed unchallengeable authority of the traditional model, causing most of them to move into a different personal epistemological place. This new positioning in respect of grammar knowledge proved empowering for some, and changed the relationship with their classes with respect to their grammar teaching. Where a few teachers might have planned and taught didactic lessons in which grammar

was presented in a deficit role (i.e. grammar is all about correcting mistakes in writing), the *epistemic climate* (Bendixen and Rule, 2004) was changed to a more exploratory mode, with students often encouraged to become more active learners, as happened in **Portia's** lessons. In her first interview she admitted that her lessons were 'boring', but later lesson observations recorded a more open-ended, interactive atmosphere, in which pupils felt comfortable raising relevant questions. **Harry's** lessons also became more enlivened when he realised that he no longer needed to teach in the 'text book way', and the children began to play a larger part in the learning that was taking place. The claim by Brownlee, Berthelsen and Boulton-Lewis (2004:3) that personal epistemological beliefs can profoundly influence ways of teaching was borne out by some of these participants, who demonstrated that teachers with more relativist beliefs about knowing tended to teach lessons that 'facilitated', rather than transmitted knowledge.

Most of the teachers in this group began their involvement with the project in a dualist position, because they were aware of only one exclusively prescriptivist grammar model. **Tom** believed that there were alternative ways of teaching grammar that did not comply with the prescriptivist government-preferred model, but he was unable to resolve those differences in his own teaching, as he was unaware of the content and purpose of other grammars. **Harry**, like most of the group, thought of grammar as having to do with 'correctness'. When he volunteered for the project, he was teaching a published grammar scheme shared across the school, required by his senior management. He felt strongly that it was not the most engaging way to approach the subject, but he lacked knowledge of possible alternatives. Uncertainty about the 'rules and regulations' of grammar was how **Isabella** perceived the topic, and **Beatrice**, although 'fascinated' by what she had discovered about grammar, nevertheless, still saw it as 'always so many different rules', and stated that she wanted to 'teach it correctly'. Asked what grammar meant to her, **Miranda** responded, 'I think of correct, using the correct English language'. **Beatrice** understood grammar to be 'sort of like the glue that holds sentences together', whilst **Dick** was very clear: 'grammar is the ability to construct a sentence correctly', although later in the programme he also expressed a sense that it was a more complex topic than he had ever considered at the time of his recruitment.

As the research teachers had, at best, encountered only a little grammar tuition in their pasts, it was a reasonable assumption that they would all be situated in the *dualism* position at the beginning of the project. Charting their possible movements to and through other epistemological stages has been an important way of assessing their changing relationship with grammar during the course of this project. This empirical information is important. Johnston, Woodside-Jiron and Day (2001:223), in one of the very few epistemological studies focused on literacy, claimed that ‘teachers with different epistemologies will respond differently to children, organise instruction differently and represent children’s development differently’. Evidence from other subject epistemological studies (Hasweh, 2005 and Tsai, 2005) endorses the Johnston *et al* findings. Tsai demonstrates how ‘positivist’ teachers’ are more didactic and more focused on test scores, whilst ‘constructivist’ teachers establish exploratory classrooms, with more spoken discourses. Hasweh (1996) proposed that ‘constructivist’ teachers were likelier to detect student alternative conceptions, demonstrated a richer repertoire of teaching strategies and highly valued those teaching strategies compared with teachers holding more dualistic beliefs. Hofer (2001) sums up this situation: ‘Dualist and relativist epistemologies have obvious parallels with transmissive and constructivist views of teaching, and the nature of the classroom discourse which these views promote’.

The teacher is central in ‘the epistemic climate of the classroom’ and the epistemological development of students, according to Bendixen and Rule (2010:116). The teacher needs the power to assess where their students are in terms of their knowledge and knowing, as a starting point for their further epistemic development and to supply the necessary support that enables learners to grow as mature scrutinisers and sceptics of new knowledge. Perry (1970/1990) believed that personal epistemologies can be developed, although some students experience difficulties describing positions they might reach independently, sometimes at odds with their teachers. He and other researchers (Pintrich, 2002; Bendixen, 2002; Chandler *et al*, 1990) have made a series of suggestions likely to improve students’ assurance in these circumstances, including ‘discussing and journalising their feelings’ and providing ‘calculated incongruities’, which can contribute to readjustments of previously assured cognitive positions.

Having taken part in the project, the research teachers certainly regarded the nature of grammar differently from the beliefs they espoused at its start, and most changed their manner of teaching it at least a little, although not all had ventured far in their epistemological journey. Nevertheless, asked at the beginning of the study if they ‘noticed’ grammar ‘in the world’, **Portia** and **Harry** typified the responses of most of their colleagues, being unsure what the question meant. Yet, fifteen months later both teachers reported that they ‘noticed’ grammar everywhere they went; often to the annoyance of their partners. Such a changed understanding led to a quite different epistemological positioning. Given that they were involved for only fifteen months, had very little initial metalinguistic background to call on, whilst preparing children for tests and assessment, and teaching all the other subjects for which they were responsible, as well as working with children with limited grammatical knowledge, most showed evidence of new learning having some sort of impact on their professional development. Classroom atmospheres where grammar was being taught were less restrained, and much discussion was more open-ended and exploratory. There is still, however, more detailed research to be carried out in this area.

7.2.3. Epistemological dilemma

The project brought to light an epistemological dilemma for some teachers, who recognised very quickly that the ‘descriptive functional’ grammar they were being invited to teach in the project was at odds with the ‘prescriptivist’ approach required by the government (DfE, 2012) to enable pupils to be prepared for the Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG) national test. This caused the Year 6 teachers, particularly, to adopt a two-handed stance in regard to teaching grammar: on the one hand they taught the functional, descriptivist model introduced through training – with its ultimate aim of improving writing - for much of the school year. Yet, in the three months, or so, before the children were tested, they taught to the requirements of the test; drilling their pupils in sessions focused on possible questions and answers, at some distance from the descriptive model, with no pretence of ‘contextual’ settings, but occasionally with some embarrassment.

This situation illustrated how important recognising the presence of personal epistemologies can be. A few teachers were being required to teach in a

manner which was opposed in part, or whole, with their own changing epistemological stance, but others were concerned in the opposite direction. So, the traditional model suited those with the objectivist belief that grammar knowledge is accumulated material to be passed on in parcels of lessons, such as those of **Juliet** and **Isabella**, whilst other teachers, **Harry**, **Tom** and **Beatrice** had moved during the course of the project to a position where they thought of grammar knowledge as a human construct, less concerned with accuracy and more interested with meaning (Leech *et al*, 2006). **Beatrice** taught an accomplished second lesson, recorded on camera, in which she and her pupils spent much of the time exploring the use of atmosphere through adjectives and noun phrases, emulating the technique employed by the author of the text they were sharing, at some distance from the mostly one word responses of the SPaG..

The sort of compromise outlined above may not be beneficial for the pupils, who are presented with two opposing learning attitudes within the same subject area. The functional model can only be effective in an epistemological climate that regards grammar as an open-ended, problem-solving, exploratory programme, 'oriented to how meaning is made' in language, as it is employed in real life (French 2010:210). The prescriptivist model, by way of contrast, is rule-bound, presenting a closed view of language, stressing how it 'ought' to be used, often presented through exercises demonstrating only 'perfect' examples of English, allowing little recognition of creative alternatives (Leech *et al*, 2006:3).

Considerable numbers of teachers in primary schools across the country will probably not have had to deal with such a problem at the present time, as it was unlikely that they have been made aware of an alternative to the prescriptivist version of grammar that most would have naturally adopted as a result of the new regulations. If they were only aware of one model, that would be the model they adopted. As a consequence, we have a nation of primary school teachers and their pupils who have an epistemological understanding of grammar situated mostly in the dualist position. They may perceive only a limited view of the capabilities and potential of grammar, which they are likely to regard as a collection of rules, many of which instruct 'not to', rather than 'what might?'. Hofer (2001:278) points to the concerns of Kuhn and Weinstock (2002), who

'worry about whether current intellectual and classroom climates may inhibit the reasoned argumentation that fosters epistemological development'. Her concerns are particularly germane to the teaching of grammar. If we want pupils to learn the language in a comfortable open-ended setting, prepared to ask questions, posit theories and demonstrate the confidence to interact in genuine dialogic practices, then they need to be learning a version of grammar in epistemological positions that encourage those sorts of classroom practices.

7.3. Subject knowledge

7.3.1. Primary teachers have a limited shared understanding of grammar within and between schools;

One of the barriers to teaching grammar effectively is that primary teachers often work alone, without much opportunity to share and consult on matters in the curriculum with teachers of classes in their own and other years. Grammar is a subject that benefits from a consistent approach across the year groups in a school and could probably be improved if taught in a more collaborative manner. Different personal epistemologies, as seen in earlier sections, can lead to different ways of planning, teaching, resourcing and assessing. Some individuals might be teaching grammar in ways that are not known to their colleagues, possibly causing a barrier to further effective teaching, because staff may well be working to their own agendas, possibly without shared epistemological drivers.

'Teaching is,' according to Myhill *et al* (2012:144), 'a complex, multi-faceted and situated endeavour, which resists simplistic causal relationships between pedagogical activity and learning outcome'. An important feature that contributes to this complexity is the unique stance all teachers adopt in relation to their knowledge about and the approach to their teaching of any subject. It is not possible to teach successfully without a set of beliefs and values connected to the learning being attempted. This section will explore ways in which teachers of primary school children experience difficulties in articulating and expressing those beliefs in their endeavours to improve the literacy knowledge of their pupils in the subject 'grammar'. The teaching of grammar is an area of learning which can lend itself to polarised views, and the viewpoint an individual holds about it will influence greatly the manner in which it will be presented by a teacher to a class, and the degree of purpose a teacher might feel about

teaching it. ‘In these situations,’ Ahola states (2009:185), ‘a person has to decide which of the claims to believe, and on what grounds’.

A tangible difficulty faced by primary teachers is the lack of a secure definition of the word ‘grammar’. For most people the starting point for defining it is Hancock’s (2009:194) suggestion that ‘Grammar is error and error is grammar in the public mind’. Teachers who have not been taught grammar on a well-planned, progressive programme, or not at all in some extreme cases, will reach out most often for the popular conception of the word; a traditional, objectivist, rule-governed approach. They may also think of grammar (only known by the specification described above) as boring, and possibly a waste of time. These sorts of attitude might inhibit possible good learning.

In their first interviews, before any training had commenced, the teachers in this survey displayed a wide range of personal epistemologies with regard to teaching grammar. Most of them shared positive attitudes about learning it more securely, as they had so little experience in the past. They all believed the new knowledge would be a benefit for their children, although they were not always quite sure of what ‘improved grammar knowledge’ might be. **Beatrice** wanted to make grammar teaching ‘fun’, and to help children ‘really enjoy it’, whilst **Tom** wanted to be ‘the best teacher of grammar’.

At the beginning of the project they were all seeking different, rather limited learning outcomes from the training, very much particular to themselves. So, even those teaching in the same schools were not pursuing the same ends. Amongst the ‘grammar’ priorities they wanted to improve were: ‘better sentence structuring’; ‘more interesting use of connectives’; ‘improved vocabulary’; ‘embedding of basic skills’ and ‘use of punctuation’, as typical examples. This list suggested that they regarded grammar as a collection of separate exercises, and its practice an end in itself. There was no evidence that research teachers in the same schools were discussing their different or similar viewpoints in respect to what ‘grammar’ might mean with each other, or the priorities they might be pursuing together. There was also no evidence that schools were sharing their thinking about grammar and considering a definition that might stand at the centre of their grammar teaching.

Having no reliable definition of ‘grammar’ has caused cognitive problems, hampering effective teaching, but so too has been a lack of shared or consistent meaning of the word. Different people and organizations have understood the meaning of the word ‘grammar’ in different ways. During the past thirty years, or so, a large collection of booklets, acts of parliament and curriculum documents have interpreted the name of the subject slightly differently, but always based on a presumed prescriptivist core.

Myhill *et al* (2013:78) list the different ways ‘grammar’ was described and illustrated in government sponsored publications in 1990, 1995, 1999 and 2007, during which period the ‘official’ meaning of the word ‘grammar’ shifted a little in each subsequent publication. All these documents referred to a range of ‘very specific’ aspects of grammar, which teachers were supposed to know and their pupils to learn, whereas the non-statutory Literacy Strategy guidance of 1998 and 2001, comprised learning objectives year-on-year that were more explanatory, and turned out to be more influential. The ‘hard-edged’ traditional grammar of the former group of publications might have been more difficult for teachers to align to their own epistemological positions, whereas the guidance material of the Strategy would have seemed less threatening, not so likely to expose teachers’ lack of knowledge. It is understandable that teachers are confused about what ‘grammar’ might mean when confronted with such diversity. Teachers in this study were certainly unsure. **Portia** stated she could not explain what grammar was, even by her third interview, and **Juliet** and **Isabella** were equally confused about its meaning before the training, and – in a few instances – after some months of practice.

Shared epistemological understanding is also confounded because the actual word ‘grammar’ has, under the influence of a range of agencies, not always meant quite the same thing in different hands, and sometimes been replaced altogether. The LINC project (1990) did not refer to ‘grammar’, but made popular the term ‘knowledge about language’, with its slightly broader perspective about language than simply the sharp-edged ‘grammar’. Myhill (2005:78) expressed a preference of the phrase ‘knowledge about language’, explaining: ‘it implies a more liberal, learner-centred perspective than that suggested by the neo-conservative associations of the word “grammar”’.

Andrews (2007) refers to ‘Teacher Language Awareness’, whilst Harper and Rennie (2009) employ the terms ‘grammar’ and ‘knowledge about language’ interchangeably, adding further confusion. The Secretary of State for Education, on the other hand, through the sort of examples of grammatical minutiae he was insisting that pupils learn, such as the subjunctive and ‘writing a proper sentence’, left no room for doubt that his meaning of ‘Grammar’ was of the traditional, prescriptive kind. As Macken-Horarik commented: ‘Canonical (read traditional) understandings about language are no longer self-explanatory, even if they are taken for granted in national testing regimes (2009,57).

Andrews (2005:71) also raises yet another grammar terminological problem, making a distinction between ‘knowledge about language’ and ‘knowledge about grammar’. The latter he terms a ‘curriculum notion’ and a set of practices, whilst the former is described as an ‘abstraction’. Macken-Horarik (2009, 59) reminds us that Halliday pointed out that the ‘slippage’ between the grammar of texts and the grammar of exploring textual material, and he asks:

how does one keep apart the object language from the metalanguage –
the phenomenon itself from the theoretical study of that phenomenon?
(Halliday, 2002, 384)

He answered his question by proposing a new term – ‘grammatics – which would be about the language teachers use in their interventions and conversations with their pupils, with the intention of moving their writing forward, whilst ‘grammar’ retains its current meaning, relating to tools of language, which teachers use to understand what is going on in pupils’ writing. Such a difficult concept, Andrews claims, is almost impossible to teach to children of primary age. He substitutes the term ‘knowledge about language’ with ‘language awareness’ bringing about yet another complication of definition.

These are matters that need greater clarity, because teachers, such as those involved in the research, are unaware of the subtle changes of meaning the word ‘grammar’ (or its substitutes) can go through. These alternatives certainly need to be made more central to the teaching of grammar to prevent it becoming a subject that can be hijacked by different schools of thought, or it might not be serving the same purposes, or being addressed consistently in individual schools. **Tom** and **Dick** shared classes in Years 5 and 6, but had not considered issues such as progression of language knowledge. They were

more concerned about their separately identified priorities than establishing a collaborative progressive structure, which, in time, could affect grammar teaching across the school. Most teachers in this study were not really aware of how teaching of grammar was taking place in other classes – except to comment, as **Beatrice** did, that it had been avoided in earlier years, making extra demands on her grammar teaching in Year 6.

In the present situation most teachers will not come across these metalinguistic concepts, unless involved in research, or attending some sort of training and they will remain unaware of possible further dimensions to their understanding. The teachers of schools involved in this study did not share their definitions of grammar in their own institutions, nor in collaboration with other schools in their partnership. What personal epistemologies might be and how they play a part in teaching and learning were unknown concepts and certainly not explored to seek some sort of consensus about meanings, ways of teaching and assessment.

7.4. Barriers to effective teaching

7.4.1. How a limited knowledge of grammar is a barrier to effective teaching

An aspect of this research sought to discover any possible barriers to learning experienced by the participating primary teachers. It looked closely at the sorts of demands primary teachers are facing now they are obliged to prepare their children for high stakes testing in grammar, and any changes that might have take place in their teaching and pedagogy when introduced to a model of grammar with which they were not familiar. As the teachers involved in this study were not taught grammar in their own schooling, or higher education courses, this section focuses on how that lack of a grammar background has prevented them from conducting the most effective teaching of the subject.

Extensive research evidence exists to demonstrate that considerable numbers of specialist secondary teachers of English know very little about grammar, the most effective ways of teaching grammar and the metalinguistic background in which grammar is situated (Watson, 2012; Goodwyn, 2010). It was, therefore, no surprise that this study of non-specialist primary teachers confirmed that they too have a limited acquaintance with that subject, which could cause barriers to

their teaching of grammar. Research by Cajkler and Hislam (2002) and Myhill (2000/ 2014) discovered that student teachers in training had minimal linguistic experience, although teaching interventions in their teacher training programmes led, in some instances, to notable improvements (Cajkler and Hislam, 2002:175).

Teachers who have little or no academic background in learning grammar are unlikely to have developed concepts of language to reach back to in their own learning histories. They will be less at ease with the metalanguage than those who experienced it from childhood, and much of their planning will be about concepts, ideas and linguistic knowledge only a little in advance of their pupils' knowledge. **Harry** declared that he 'used to fear it, big time!' He went on: 'I was afraid of one of my high ability asking a probing question that I didn't know'. Their lessons are likely to be more formulaic, concentrating on declarative information which fails to encourage a broader view of language. **Miranda** stated: 'so I would say that although my subject knowledge has improved a little bit, I'm still struggling with that teaching and learning element now and, you know, still trying to create good and outstanding lessons in that subject area.' Another teacher who found teaching grammar difficult because she knew so little, was **Juliet**: 'that's what I was trying to do previously – was trying to do a bit of everything and they weren't getting that grammar'. Problems about 'when to teach' were also encountered by **Harry** and others: should it be a separate subject for study or an integrated element of broader linguistic study, possibly within other curriculum subjects?

Most teachers will, as students, have been taught in an English programme heavily weighted towards literature. Their instincts will be to seek the metalanguage of literature (e.g. metaphor, allegory and imagery) before acknowledging a grammar-based dimension of equal worth. **Miranda** reported: 'in all honesty, I've always been far more interested in literature, so I have to have something really engaging to make me interested' (in grammar).

Williamson and Hardman (1995:129) discovered that 99 student teachers displayed 'misconceptions' and the lack of a metalanguage 'for talking about and analysing language use'. Teachers lacking such attributes find reflecting on grammar and their teaching of it difficult. They are also unprepared for the

possible range of pupils' questions, unable to answer confidently about matters which might be of real interest, making a difference to the way those children perceive the subject. In this study **Isabella** and **Juliet** experienced trouble remembering the metalinguistic terms. Even after the teachers had been trained in a descriptive grammar, a few teachers were still informing their classes that 'verbs are doing words' (**Dick**) and that 'adjectives' were 'describing words' (**Isabella**). Only **Tom** and **Beatrice** could claim a working knowledge of grammar at the project's outset, and **Tom** had many misgivings about his detailed knowledge in his second interview. As Myhill *et al* state in 'Grammar Matters' (2013:77), 'Knowledge is not simply domain knowledge, but crucially involves knowing how to transform that knowledge purposefully to enable learners to master it', as Shulman (1988) had proposed.

Not being familiar with grammar, or continuing to teach inaccurate or misunderstood material, makes teachers vulnerable to what may seem easy solutions, possibly resulting in their pupils being misinformed. Teachers in such a position lack the necessary linguistic critical skills to critique and question the sorts of grammar textbooks that have continued to be published – sometimes re-issues of texts first written decades ago – often comprised mainly of exercises that have 'right or wrong' answers. These text books are sometimes used as the first level of support for teachers unsure of the subject, when more confident teachers would be likelier to invite the children into more active, collaborative, exploratory relationships. Myhill (2000) conducted a detailed analysis of many of the most common misconceptions about grammar to be found still extant in such texts. These texts are being taught as if they have real authority every school day. **Juliet**, **Isabella** and **Miranda** all mentioned in their interviews that they consulted text books that were not chosen for any particular content, worth or relevance, but merely because they were available in the school.

Most of the research teachers regularly consulted the internet when they required linguistic help, without having a sufficiently broad understanding of the subject to make an informed analytical critique of the material with which they were dealing. Not knowing the difference between prescriptive and descriptive grammar, they lacked the criteria to judge which sites best suited their needs.

The internet also carries a great amount of grammar as practised in the USA, which differs from the British approach in certain important respects.

Evidence from this study, however, suggests that qualified teachers are prepared to take some positive action in order to find out about how to teach quality grammar lessons. The volunteers in this study readily offered themselves for extra training, without any persuasion or cajoling, as they sincerely wanted to become more knowledgeable. These volunteers, along with all their other colleagues in five schools were prepared to participate in a grammar test, which was an uncomfortable experience for some. All the schools involved welcomed the training of a descriptive, functional model of grammar, offered as a gesture of gratitude for their participation, and they devoted teacher development time to learning the subject further. Not all the participants, however, willingly embraced the functional model central to the study, possibly because learning the components of grammar such as word classes and sentence characteristics (declarative knowledge), was as much as they could manage in one programme. So one of the barriers to learning grammar might be how little new knowledge these teachers could cope with or exploit, having to learn all they need to know from a standing start.

7.4.2. Declarative and procedural knowledge

There is much more to language study than merely paying attention to limited, separate parts, such as word classes and different sorts of sentences. Psychologists claim that knowledge is comprised of two interrelated, but, nevertheless separate knowledges: ‘declarative’ and ‘procedural’ (Suroso, 2010, ten Berge & Hezewijk, 1999). If a teacher regards straightforward grammar knowledge, as an end in itself, exemplified in the above section, without understanding its broader concerns and possibilities, or its metalinguistic relationships, then that knowledge is what Gombert (1992:3) termed ‘declarative’ (where facts and events can be ‘declared’), or ‘propositional knowledge’. An example might be naming and labelling grammatical items (e.g. to learn what ‘verbs’ do, or the features of a simple sentence). This sort of knowledge would be regarded as ‘declarative’: it is to do with knowing, but not yet applied in practice. Robinson (1989:524) describes declarative knowledge as ‘taxonomic and static’, not ‘to do with specific communicative goals, nor to

language use in real time'. It is the sort of knowledge which might be useful for filling in gaps in tests, or being successful at 'drills', but not usually of much use by itself unless brought to bear in real contexts.

Teachers who make the link between knowing grammatical facts and how to utilise them, and who make decisions about, control and reflect on what is known, possess what is termed 'procedural knowledge' (processes that 'proceed' through practice) (.Gombert,1992:3). In real life it might involve compiling noun phrases in an unusual way to create character, or knowing that a piece of writing deliberately challenges a traditional rule, for special effect. It will usually be necessary to learn about or practise isolated declarative matters, which will eventually accumulate to bring about the state of procedural learning, just as anybody would when developing a new skill in any learning area.

Procedural knowledge does not directly translate from declarative knowledge; most people know enough about their own language to communicate in it without having to think about the features that bring about understanding. Yet, to be a competent language user (procedural knowledge) it is necessary to accumulate declarative information. Gombert (1992:119) posits: 'We think that declarative metalinguistic knowledge precedes metalinguistic control and the application of this knowledge'. Similarly, declarative knowledge does not translate into procedural knowledge: pupils will very regularly be taught a grammar 'rule' or convention, but fail to include or misuse it in their speech or writing. Declarative knowledge is sometimes referred to as the 'what' of language, whilst procedural knowledge constitutes the 'how' (Ullman,2001:37: Suroso, 2010:56). These categories, however, are not polar opposites, and learners will be situated at different points between the two extreme categories, and possess differing personal epistemologies dependent on that position.

The concepts 'declarative' and 'procedural' share a relationship with Halliday's recommendation that a distinction should be made between 'grammar' and 'grammatics' (see page 268). Knowing the features and characteristics of the language, the 'grammar', resembles the 'declarative' condition. Learners may know much information about the language, but be unable to apply their knowledge to analysing and understanding how meaning is constructed through attention to particular patternings, juxtapositions and emphases. These features

of ‘grammatics’ learning would be equivalent to the ‘procedural’ knowledge explored above.

Those teachers who are more inclined to regard the learning of linguistic ‘facts’ as their biggest responsibility are likely to be situated within a wholly different personal epistemological place than those seeking to bring what has been learned into a larger, more sophisticated area of understanding. They will teach grammar differently: those favouring a declarative framing are probably more comfortable with a prescriptive approach; whereas those leaning towards procedural language knowledge in respect of teaching grammar will have more in common with a descriptive model. Burgess counselled his students:

to an approach that recognises grammar as a part of what we bring as users of the language to constructing and interpreting texts, yet does not regard it as the only thing that matters or as the sole component of effective use. (2000:7).

Teachers may well be taught, read up about or teach themselves the sorts of superficial grammar content such as knowing word classes or the characteristics of simple sentences, but the full effect of their teaching – particularly in respect of improving writing – is unlikely to be realised until they are aware of the procedural dimension of language knowledge, that enables reflection on language use, the capacity to discuss language in action with pupils and the shaping of a rationale for teaching grammar. As Myhill *et al* (2013:90) state: ‘declarative grammatical content knowledge alone is not sufficient to establish powerful contexts for learning about writing.’

The SPaG test, introduced for pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 manoeuvres teachers to adopt a declarative stance in their grammar teaching. As this project proceeded, a few teachers began to realise that they were experiencing difficulties deciding which approach they should continue, as, on the one hand, their pupils had to be prepared for the test, manifested in one approach, whilst, on the other hand, the teachers became interested in learning a richer alternative approach which challenged the declarative. Yet, the polar positions that the research teachers adopted were not the only options open to them. What they had not had time to consider or deal with during the limited fifteen month period of the study, when they learned much that was declarative, was that it might be possible to bridge two approaches of grammar, so that their

pupils would have sufficient declarative knowledge to succeed in the test, but continue their learning of language in the real world, through the development of their procedural knowledge. Unfortunately, most were unaware of the procedural dimension of language learning and this possible bridging was not considered.

Tom came closest to expressing a broader vision of the subject: ‘to me grammar is some kind of formal knowledge and understanding of language and how language connects and the sort of categorisation of it’. He was the only teacher to link grammar with thinking, although **Beatrice** wanted her students not just to write sentences, but also ‘to understand’ what sentences are and what role they are playing in language. **Harry**, on the other hand, at the start of the study was prepared to admit that he lacked an ‘over-arching’ view, with ‘no big picture; I just see it as little blocks’, and his teaching – although very good at times – was often ultimately locked into a declarative mode, which he had learned well. **Tom** and **Miranda** both wondered aloud ‘where to go next?’. They had run out of simple word and sentence-level activities, and worried that their pupils might have become bored with them. It was as if they had instinctively realised that the metalinguistic programme they were both pursuing was too narrow and some of what was being learned was for its own sake, not linked to the improvement of writing. Writing was increasingly varied and meeting more demanding goals by the end of the study in some classrooms, but mature links between grammar learning and writing development were not being articulated. What they needed to know was how the declarative became procedural: probably a sticking point for thousands of primary teachers.

Some teachers seemed to think that certain aspects of grammar were more challenging than others and evidence in their planning and interview answers indicated that they addressed their differentiation around this belief. It was not unusual to discover lower ability children being asked to write simple sentences, whilst their more able classmates could be expected to deal with complex sentences, as if, by definition, they were intrinsically more difficult. **Dick**, not untypically, described his way of working in this manner:

“With the lower ability you’ve got to give them a sentence and just get them to fill the word in. With the middle ability, you can give a bank of

words and they will write their own sentences and choose different ones. With the higher ability, you just say, ‘Go away and write your own sentences’. So you can differentiate.’

Such instances showed that a few of the research teachers occasionally reverted to regarding grammar as a collection of separate units, despite undertaking training that suggested a more holistic stance would lead to more mature outcomes. They were providing knowledge that spread out sideways – rather than fashioning what they know in a more linear manner.

7.5. Pedagogy

7.5.1. The gap between teachers' espoused beliefs and their actual practice

In the long-standing dispute about whether leaning grammar has the capacity to improve pupils' writing, reference was often made to 'learning grammar in context'. It was mostly employed as a term of approval, but, like other features of grammar the phrase has no precise definition, and has been interpreted in a number of ways. For many teachers it means not teaching grammar with worksheets. For others it might mean using whole texts as a starting point for linguistic study. This section investigates the issue of 'learning in context', and considers whether teachers were actually teaching in the ways they claimed.

During the course of this research most of the teacher participants changed, to some extent, the way they taught grammar, changed the resources they employed to support grammar teaching and all gained at least a little extra confidence in the ways they presented the subject to their pupils. This evidence was apparent from the filmed lesson observations spanning the fifteen months of the project. But the changes actually implemented were not as evident as they believed. In one area – 'teaching grammar in context' - there were serious misunderstandings about what 'teaching in context' actually meant, and how it was practised. Myhill (2005:77) believes this situation is most understandable as 'teaching grammar and knowledge about language in positive contextual ways' is not a usual method of teaching, and the whole area is 'hugely under researched'.

Myhill (2005:81) describes 'teaching in context' as a 'mantra'. It is a term widely uttered, but not always so easily understood; contrasting with all the 'worst

excesses of prescriptivist grammar teaching', and its associations within the deficit model of grammar teaching, focusing on error. Its lack of precision has resulted in a range of language learning circumstances, observed in her research and this project, all being described as 'in context'. In research classrooms, she relates, it has frequently come to mean some grammar teaching inserted into English lessons, where the focus is not on grammar but some other aspect of literacy learning. Being 'in context' could just mean, Myhill warns, that what is taking place might actually be 'not decontextualised (2005:82)'. She goes on: it might be more helpful to be clear about what did not qualify as 'teaching contextually'

Once again, the teachers should not be blamed or condemned for their lack of knowledge concerning 'contextual' study. They have not learned, nor had demonstrated to them in their own education backgrounds, what such practices really mean, and they would not have been encouraged to practise this pedagogy as part of their teacher training. As has been seen so regularly in the previous sections, so many problems connected to teaching grammar experienced by these teachers can be traced back to their lack of grammar learning.

Borg (2003:100), however, argues that knowing grammatical facts is not enough to teach grammar successfully. As already discussed, there are two sorts of grammar knowledge (Borg, 1992:3): declarative (knowledge of the features of grammar) and the procedural (knowing how to exercise those features to make meaning, by consciously articulating, designing and reflecting on language activity). Like Myhill *et al* (2013:80), however, Borg points out that teachers also need 'pedagogic skills' to enhance their craft, whilst Shulman (1986:198) went even further by positing a third learning dimension that subsumes content knowledge and pedagogic knowledge – pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) – as an essential component for bringing about successful lessons. This knowledge (PCK), Myhill and her colleagues posit: 'may be the most salient procedure in bringing about the most effective writing'. As some of the teachers in this research did not seek learning goals beyond knowing the names, and sometimes the functions, of the word classes and sentence types, knowing something of Shulman's theories might have helped them focus on the sorts of contexts that could lead to more substantial writing outcomes.

Harper and Rennie (2009:30), researching the grammar knowledge of student teachers, discovered from them that ‘learning about language occurred separately from other aspects of English or literacy’, which was common practice with teachers involved in this research. Few of these participants were able to teach in a more ‘integrated fashion’, which once again points to their lack of procedural knowledge, and its possibilities. Many primary teachers probably regularly encounter these same difficulties. Knowledge of the sorts of language stages mentioned above is not widespread.

Some of the research teachers misunderstood the concept of ‘in context’, and as a result little learning about writing developed from a number of lessons observed. **Juliet** conducted what she called a ‘modelling’ context, by writing in front of her class a continuing narrative, picking up the plot of a shared class text the pupils had read, all without a trace of grammar teaching. Occasional inputs were encouraged from the class, but nothing that took place could be regarded as ‘in context’. **Isabella** claimed that her class learned grammar through drama, but there was no evidence that linked the two in her planning or the subsequent filmed lesson.

Many of the teachers, particularly at the outset of the study, devised worksheets or used grammar textbooks for their classes, containing exercises with spaces to be filled. These resources tended to focus learning on single words, or passages of writing no longer than the sentence. There seemed to be a belief by some teachers that once an idea had been learned, it would naturally be absorbed into or contribute to better writing. Only a few teachers employed longer, whole texts, which made contextual teaching more likely; but not always. Some teachers used the texts as springboards for disassociated learning, such as ‘spot the adjective’; few planned lessons with longer texts, so little consideration of the text as a whole unit of meaning, capable of being scrutinised to discover how language had achieved particular meanings took place.

Yet another problem with worksheets was that they constrained language use. As well as the close attention to limited aspects of grammar, they usually included examples of text which might be regarded as ‘ideal’: structured in familiar ways, when language at work in the real world can contain surprising,

uncharacteristic language usage, for which teachers and pupils were often unprepared. Moving away from a planning script that offered security sometimes left teachers unsure, or even in a position where they made up an answer to a pupil enquiry which was not true.

Nevertheless, lessons built around specific learning of particular grammar features should not necessarily be condemned *per se*. There are valid teaching reasons for selecting a single linguistic element with the intention of either introducing that topic to the pupils, or remediating difficulties in specific areas of grammar that some pupils may encountering. As lesson starter activities this focused approach can occasionally contribute to greater learning. What is being studied in those sessions, however, can only be truly significant when the teacher has a rationale of where it is likely to play a part in the bigger learning setting. Much procedural knowledge has to begin with encountering and understanding separate aspects of the language, and then selecting a context in which address it.

In an effort to engage their classes and provide contexts for text construction, **Tom, Dick and Harry** used pictures or moving image texts as motivation. They were popular and enabled the pupils to pay closer attention, but most of the associated tasks required by the teachers were subsequently often undemanding and it was difficult to see how they contributed to the improvement of writing. Some of the grammar activities derived from these ‘contexts’ were little more than ‘spot the noun’, or ‘make up an adverbial.’ The pedagogy may have caught the interest of the children, but they gained limited subject knowledge form the overall exercise.

In later lessons **Miranda, Beatrice** and **Harry** gained in confidence about including more substantial material around which to build learning. **Beatrice** explored with her class the characteristic language of the book they were reading, and the whole class was occupied with considering a range of clauses and phrases and the effect they were having on conveying description. Her pupils were scheduled to teach a younger class about these areas of language at a later date, and the learning intention was about language creating atmosphere, exploring what they knew about language being put to work. **Harry**, too, in his second filmed lesson, was encouraging his class to consider

closely the adverbials in the early pages of a book they were sharing, to discover the effect they were having in building atmosphere. A few of the children felt confident about raising some significant questions about adverbials. These sorts of lessons, however, were infrequent, and suggested that although the declarative grammar knowledge was well secured in some classes, the lessons were not being planned to enable pupils to move to a procedural mindset.

7.6.The politics of education

7.6.1. Educational politics and its effects on the teaching of English

Chapter 2 of this thesis contains the details of the long and sometimes bitter back story leading to the latest National Curriculum. Since the late 1970s, governments of different political colours have sought to wrest control of the teaching of English from teachers, and more particularly the teaching of grammar in English (Hudson & Walmsley, 2005: Dean, 2003). The usual schedule adopted by a succession of Secretaries of State for Education would involve the establishment of a review panel or committee to explore the current state of the subject, and to make recommendations for the future. Each time this sequence was repeated further elements of a formal grammar programme would be introduced for teachers to implement, until the latest manifestation of a curriculum which requires, for the first time, that teachers teach grammar as preparation for a nation-wide test, intended to provide some of the evidence of a school's performance.

On most occasions when a new grammar requirement has been introduced, the compilers have assumed that the model of grammar underpinning every new curriculum development is prescriptivist. Never has there been any indication of possible alternative models, and no explanation has ever been made of the criteria on which the usual prescriptivist selection has been based. It would seem that the only model of grammar known to those are responsible for devising this latest version of the curriculum is the one operating in the middle of the last century, before its abandonment.

The most recent National Curriculum, introduced into schools in 2013 (DfE: 2013), contains more compulsion about the teaching of grammar than has ever before been required. But it also necessitates the teaching of abstruse content,

some that has little relevance with the pupils' lives, and is unlikely to contribute to writing improvement. Many teachers, including those in this research, were unfamiliar with some terms included in the glossary, such as: modal verb, auxiliary verb, passive voice, the subjunctive and 'fronted adverbials'. There are also important changes that have replaced earlier definitions; so, 'connectives', which once replaced 'conjunctions', have once again been reverted to 'conjunctions'.

Whilst the 'English Appendix 2: vocabulary, grammar and punctuation' (DfE,2013:74) recommends 'a focus on grammar within the teaching of reading, writing and speaking', the evidence of much grammar teaching seen in this study was that teachers were conducting decontextualised lessons on separate topics; the 'fronted adverbials' requirement received a lot of attention. All three observed lessons conducted by **Dick** were to do with different openings of sentences, using this knowledge, yet, not a single application of this skill in any larger textual material was planned as an outcome of this learning. **Tom** spent a lot of lesson time on prepositions and prepositional phrases with similar limited goals. There still exists a disconnect between the language to be learned and the application of that knowledge in reading and writing. The curriculum glossary also states that grammar learning is 'an aid for teachers, not as a body of knowledge that should be learned by pupils'. This is a naïve assertion: teachers unsure of the necessary grammar vocabulary will teach it as a body of knowledge to be remembered. The test that examines this knowledge is not a test of language in action, but a test of memory.

Teachers unsure of the vocabulary of grammar are recommended to 'consult the many books that are available'. Yet, this study identified teachers who were already consulting a range of resources, including books and the internet, without being able to apply sound critical judgement about the worth of that material. The preface to the glossary mentions, almost in passing, that there are 'different schools of thought on grammar', but fails to name or acknowledge any, and shows no examples of how they might be employed to play a part in pupils' learning. This suggests an arbitrary selection of a mostly prescriptive model of grammar that relies heavily on knowing the various separate parts.

The glossary section states that ‘explicit knowledge of grammar’...’gives us more conscious control and choice in our language’, which is an axiomatic belief of many with a professional interest in language, but how that ‘control and choice’ might be activated is not addressed. Like much of this document, there are many claims but less evidence. Coupled with the recommendation by Lord Bew, in his review, on which the new curriculum is based (Bew,2011), that the introduction of a grammar test will enable markers to deal with ‘right or wrong answers’, it is possible to see a strong political agenda at work behind the changes.

7.7. Conclusion

Teaching of grammar has been a keen topic of argument in education circles for more than half a century, and the findings from this research suggest that the issues around teaching and learning of grammar are still problematic, particularly in primary schools. Part of this trouble is due to so little research in this sector. There are many opinions, but limited evidence about how the current difficult situation should be tackled and taken forward.

Little is known, for instance, concerning personal epistemologies and the part they play in shaping classroom discourses and practices in the process of learning grammar. It could be seen in this study that merely making teachers aware of more than one grammar changed their epistemological outlooks to some degree. Considerable research has shown ‘a close relationship between the epistemological stance of the teacher and the way learning was structured in the classroom’ (Wilson & Myhill, 2012). There was evidence, confirming the research, that those participants with a more *dualist* epistemology – one which accepts a single view of grammar - tend to be locked into a monolithic ‘right or wrong’ viewpoint, whilst more constructivist teachers demonstrated *relativist* practices. Huge numbers of primary teachers – and their senior managers - are unaware of the academic study that has led to these sorts of insights, so are unable to benefit from them.

Two large problems which hamper the effective teaching of grammar emerged from this research. The first difficulty, shared with teachers of English in secondary schools, is that most primary teachers know so little about the subject of grammar. Not having been taught grammar at school, or

subsequently, most primary teachers have not developed their careers in a grammar-based culture. They have few models of good practice in this area. The term ‘grammar’ is not secure and not used in the same way by different agencies. Many teachers are also unable to discern between the teaching of a linguistic metalanguage and ‘grammar’ itself; the important difference between declarative and procedural knowledges.

The significant second barrier has been caused by the increased politicisation of grammar teaching. The newly introduced grammar test has been heavily influential in forcing primary teachers of older primary classes to teach within the boundaries of a particular model of grammar. The inclusion of a grammar section in the English national test for all 11 year old pupils without consideration of associated issues, such as the teacher knowledge required to enable pupils’ successful results, has been difficult for the profession. The choice by government education officials of a traditional, prescriptivist grammar to be tested has made the introduction of other, possibly richer and more open-ended descriptivist grammars less likely. Teachers already fully occupied with learning grammar for test purposes will mostly be unwilling to undertake the learning of alternatives. They will also be less inclined to practise exploring the way language works in a range of texts. There is an argument to suggest that these particular developments could lead to children becoming less literate as a result of political, rather than educational, decisions.

Yet, the study demonstrates that when teachers are offered the opportunity to learn more about grammar in a project supporting them over time, they are readily willing to participate. Some teachers changed their practices and taught grammar with a developing strong interest that they continued to supplement in independent ways. Every teacher involved in the project was prepared to relate that it had some positive influence on their language teaching because their perceptions of grammar had been broadened.

Implications for research and policy will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 8. Implications for teacher development, policy and research

To a great extent, the following sections are overlapping and could be addressed in a related manner. The implications all have to do with grammar being almost wholly eradicated from the curriculum of secondary English departments and primary schools in the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in generations of children and their teachers becoming de-skilled and unfamiliar in the subject. Carter (1990:119) laments the disappearance of grammar, although he accuses the ‘old-style’ grammar teaching of being ‘reactionary, pedagogically and methodologically...conceptually ill-founded’. But important knowledge was side-lined, he claims, during the period when virtually no grammar was taught, and children were denied the opportunity to explore a ‘remarkable human phenomenon’, which ‘disempowered them...reduced their conscious control over language to see *through* language in a systematic way, concerned with such issues as: the nature of learning, how do we learn and way and to use language more discriminately’. This study has been interested in observing the reverse of that movement.

8.1. Personal epistemologies

Most teachers know nothing about the study of personal epistemologies, suggesting that they might be difficult to discern and see in action. Schommer-Aikens (2002:115) describes them as ‘for the most part unconscious, if not tacit’, and, yet, Maggioni and Parkinson (2008:447) state they are important because they ‘represent how knowledge is generated in a specific disciplinary field or learning context’, so they should not be overlooked or ignored. There are different models of personal epistemologies, but they are all essentially about learning, whether what has been learned is the ‘truth’, as examples of the sorts of enquiries it raises. A growing body of research according to Feucht and Bendixen, is providing evidence of ‘its impact on argumentation, problem-solving and achievement’ (2010:4).

Any teacher development in this area of knowledge would not be easily arranged. Teachers would need to be alerted to the sort of questions associated with personal epistemologies and share development opportunities to learn how to put those sorts of relevant questions to themselves and their pupils, to bring

about greater consideration in respect of considering learning. Through this process and practice they should begin to understand more explicitly what their own attitudes might be to new learning, but also gain valuable information about the range of attitudes their pupils would be likely to share. Policy might require teachers to build time in their planning to enable what is currently ‘tacit’ to become more explicit.

Much more research is needed about the relationship between personal epistemologies and grammar as far and away the majority of research in this concept has been conducted in science and mathematics, usually situated in secondary schools. Yet, learning grammar generates a large repertoire of questions that could be put, to establish the attitudes and personal epistemologies of teacher and pupils. Amongst these might be: is the teaching of grammar in the primary school a worthwhile activity? Should pupils know the linguistic metalanguage? Does studying grammar improve writing skills? What is grammar? Should grammar be learned as a separate subject, or as part of a wider learning enterprise?

In answering any of these questions, responders might consider where on a trajectory, stretching from a *dualist* (a belief in the voice of a particular authority/right or wrong) position to the *relativistic* ways of knowing, they might place themselves. Such an exercise would encourage them to ‘recognise there are multiple versions of the truth’ (Perry, 1970: Wilson and Myhill, 2012:4). A critical feature of interest in this area of psychology is the relationship between personal epistemologies and classroom practice. As Wilson and Myhill (2012:5) state: ‘there are obvious parallels between dualist and relativist epistemologies and transmissive and constructivist views of teaching’. Maggioni and Parkinson (2008:446) argue that the way in which teachers ‘conceptualise the nature and justification of their subject matter and their views about teacher knowledge and their ideas about student’s learning influence the features of classroom discourse’. Discovering this sort of information about oneself and one’s pupils could make considerable improvements to the learning culture in a school, but a great deal more research will be necessary to establish if the claims currently being made are substantial in primary schools.

8.2. Sharing grammar knowledge

8.2.1. Primary teachers have a limited shared understanding of grammar within or between schools;

In this research there was no evidence of theorising grammar teaching; teachers took part in this project for mostly pragmatic reasons to do with preparing children for tests and hoping to learn something of a subject unfamiliar to most. Yet, at the start of the programme there were two teachers in each of the four schools taking part , which provided good opportunities for the pairs of teachers to share their ideas to do with planning teaching, the support materials they intended to deploy and the sorts of outcomes they expected. Such a dialogue could have been beneficial in a number of ways, but particularly germane in addressing issues of progression, as one teacher in each school taught a Year 5 class, and the other taught a Year 6. It might be argued that all the teachers had little time to spare when considering that their learning about grammar was on top of an already very busy established working life, but it was a missed chance. The sharing of what is understood by ‘grammar’ ought to be a topic which all primary schools address, particularly because the range of epistemological positions they occupy makes it likely that their relative ‘understandings’ will differ.

Not only would it be beneficial if primary teachers discussed matters to do with grammar between themselves in their own schools, but there could also be much benefit from them liaising on this subject with other schools in their partnership groups, especially where those alliances include secondary teachers. Many secondary teachers have limited grammar knowledge and some are hostile to teaching it (Watson, 2012). An understanding of the linguistic progression of children, (Gombert, 1997:Myhill and Jones, 2015), probably unknown to all but the teachers of the very youngest, could provide a loose framework for grammar development (although not a mechanistic, formulaic apparatus) from Reception class to Year 11.

Possible improvement in the teaching of grammar might result from policies on grammar shared by all the schools in the partnership. The English department in a secondary school is not only the group of teachers responsible for teaching language in their institutions; it is a feature of every single linguistic interaction

in the school, and needs to be regarded as such. Agreeing what ‘grammar’ is would be a start of a desirable journey at any level of learning.

Once again, research evidence on these topics is sparse, suggesting that exploration of grammar practices in primary schools is another area of language knowledge awaiting academic investigation.

8.3. Teacher subject knowledge

8.3.1. How limited learning of grammar is a barrier to effective teaching

Whilst teacher subject knowledge is not the only factor that generates effective teaching, it does play a considerable part. Firstly, knowing a good deal about the parts of grammar offers teachers a lot more confidence than those who know little. So, even if its only purpose is the increase of teacher confidence, there is a need for a national training programme, modelled on, but more modest than, that which supported the Literacy Strategy almost two decades ago. At its best, such an endeavour would not be designed to instruct all teachers how to follow a centralised pattern of lesson time and lesson content, but to demonstrate the possibilities of metalinguistic knowledge, suggested by Carter (1990:119) at the head of this chapter. These events would be attended by headteachers and teachers responsible for English/literacy in every primary school, and what they learn shared with colleagues. There has been precedent. This training is likely to be much more successful if devised and guided by academic linguists, to prevent the sorts of mistakes and misunderstandings of the National Literacy Strategy (Cajkler:2004).

Teachers would not just be taught the metalanguage of grammar in this proposed forum, but would be assisted to recognise the functions of grammar in making meaning in a wide selection of materials, enabling children to notice its value well beyond testing purposes. Harper and Rennie argue that teachers need to develop a “deep knowledge” about language if they are to “build conversations about how meanings are constructed by particular grammar and word choices, in particular contexts and for particular audiences” (Harper & Rennie, 2009, p. 32).

Interestingly, Giovanelli (2015:423), researching secondary English teachers who had taken on the teaching of grammar at A level, about which they knew only limited amounts, discovered an initial lack of confidence in their teaching,

shared by his participants, mirroring the experiences of their primary colleagues in my study. Despite their proven abilities in teaching English literature, their reactions in the earliest period of teaching this unfamiliar area of English showed a strong emotional response and feelings of ‘self-doubt, inadequacy and unauthenticity’. Those teachers were concerned that their lack of knowledge would be detected by their students. The research of Myhill *et al* (2012:159) showed that experience was less important than subject knowledge. Yet, many of the research teachers in Giovanelli’s study, however, found the demands made on them to be ‘transformational’, and were, ultimately, pleased that they had persevered, because they steadily overcame early difficulties and indicated they enjoyed demonstrating this new expertise (2015:425).

Strong evidence exists (Cajkler and Hislam, 2002; Burgess *et al*, 2000) that many student teachers receive at least a small amount of instruction about grammar in their teacher training courses, but not all. Some teachers in this study reported no more than an hour’s worth of grammar-focused teaching in the whole year’s primary course. These newcomers to the profession should be as fully prepared as possible in this vital subject which needs to be perceived as valuable and compelling.

These problems do not only affect teachers in primary schools. Prospective student secondary teachers with English Literature or English Literature and Language degrees are more likely to be selected by Teacher Training Institutions for their English focused courses than those with degrees in other subjects (Blake & Shortis, 2010), including a straightforward language degree.. This finding indicates a greater inclination towards training in English Literature that can be traced through the English system of education, from Key Stage 3 to 5. This bias was a long-standing practice from the 1920s (see Chapter 2, page 25). ‘Most teachers of English are Literature specialists’, claim Bluett *et al* (2004:11) in their paper about the future of English; ‘some teachers still have a fear of the unknown when approaching the content of language courses’. They also report that the status of English Language at A level is questioned in some universities; reinforcing a perception that language study still operates on an uneven playing field, although Bluett and her colleagues posit that language study is possibly ‘the most practical, empowering and vocationally relevant’ of a range of English-based degrees(2004:12).

The recent Carter review of Initial Teacher training (Carter, 2014) recognises the breadth of the ‘subject knowledge primary teachers need to teach the new curriculum’, (which includes a substantial section on grammar) suggesting that mastering that knowledge over only one year ‘may be difficult’. The review recommends that:

Universities should explore offering ‘bridge to ITT’ modules in the final years of their subject degrees for students who are considering ITT programmes. (Carter, 2014:52)

Giovanelli (2016:190) reports that designated shortage teacher subjects, such as mathematics and modern languages qualify for what are termed Subject Enhancement Knowledge programmes, in which students take part in ‘detailed and lengthy programmes’ designed to ‘fill in the gaps in subject knowledge’ for potentially good teachers ‘who may need to complete additional work around subject knowledge. He believes that teachers of language should similarly benefit on a wider scale than the current ‘in-house’ provision.

8.4. Pedagogy

8.4.1. How to teach grammar

Carter’s description of traditional grammar teaching as ‘reactionary, pedagogically and methodologically arid and conceptually ill-founded’ (1990:119) is a warning about taking the same direction now that grammar is expected to be reinstated in the primary curriculum. The easy route to teaching such grammar is to address each of the word classes separately and to contrive exercises and worksheets that highlight each of them individually. This approach need not be inevitable. Myhill (2001:75) suggests that ‘there is no strict hierarchy of knowledge in grammar’, and learning about grammar could begin at one of several starting points’.

It might be that a teacher wished to begin grammar learning by engaging the pupils with a whole text, such as a class reader. Specific grammatical features might be suggested, before reading, that the pupils could then seek, identify and discuss the sorts of meaning that has been created. The teacher could select the study of sentences as the starting point for grammar teaching, or, just as importantly, a teacher might want to fashion grammar knowledge through attention to phrases and clauses. Of course, these approaches need not be

studied separately, but in different combinations. These decisions are matters for discussion in-school and might be topics that contribute to grammar learning policies.

Noting the advice of Shulman (1986), teachers might explore his general suggestions about learning and apply them to the dimension of metalinguistics. He proposed that teachers bring together two elements of learning: subject content knowledge (knowledge of an academic domain, such as grammar) and pedagogic knowledge (knowledge of how to teach, and bring about the best setting) to create a more effective vehicle which he termed ‘pedagogic content knowledge’. Such a combination would depend on the teachers knowing their pupils well, so they could tailor their lessons in more individually targeted ways. Myhill and her colleagues, researching this methodology in many classrooms claim this approach ‘may be the most salient procedure in bringing about the most effective writing’ (2013:80).

Finally, in this section, the teaching of grammar means much more than acquiring some knowledge about word classes, as has already been discussed. Such a limited coverage would be regarded as **declarative**, and, ultimately, only be concerned with facts and information. They will need to have demonstrated the next stage of grammar learning, that which is called **procedural**. Only by being encouraged to address the ways that declarative knowledge might be transformed into taking control of a variety of meaning making options, will more effective writing result.

8.5. The politicisation of language teaching

8.5.1. Teaching grammars

On the day this section was written there was much speculation that the government was contemplating reintroducing grammar schools. In 2013 the Secretary of State for Education arbitrarily reintroduced, ignoring the advice of academic linguists and teacher trainers, a traditional, prescriptivist model of teaching and testing grammar. Understandably teachers feel confused and unsettled, many still seeking a curriculum that could be more pupil-friendly without compromising standards in the most appropriate settings.

Primary teachers in Year 6 must teach grammar if they want to enable their pupils to gain the best marks possible in a test; there is no option. But just

because the government test is based on prescriptivist manifestations of grammar, it need not be the prevailing model of grammar in classrooms. Teachers could be seeking ways of overlapping the two sorts of grammar – descriptive and prescriptive – so that the children are capable of responding well to the test questions, whilst also recognising, exploring and putting to use a more sophisticated and wide ranging grammar programme, possibly based on the Hallidayan systemic functional grammar discussed earlier in this thesis.

Schools should also be more prepared to ensure that quality teaching about grammar and how to use grammar are being taught from the time pupils enter the school in suitable pedagogic practices. Schools' policies might insist that all lesson plans include a possible grammar feature, however minimal, to remind teachers of the ubiquity of language across the curriculum..Gaining a respect for and beginning to understand the business of grammar from their earliest schooling will be the very best preparation for pupils' eventual success, and, in turn, improvements in their writing. If central government will not offer support and direction, then it becomes the responsibility of schools to develop good grammar practice, enshrined in schools' policies, to establish a secure grammar culture in which language is 'noticed', explored and put to its many possible uses.

Chapter 9 - Postscript

9.1. Reflections

I readily admit that this enterprise has been the most difficult undertaking I have ever attempted. I would not have been able to see it through without the massive help and support of a number of people at the university and beyond. But I have learned so much from my involvement.

My learning journey has been strewn with obstacles, although I have regularly been coaxed and persuaded past them. Before I began the research I had naïve notions of attaching myself to a group of children over a period of time, tracing whether or not they made progress as a result of being taught a specific type of grammar. It was soon apparent that such a modus operandi would not work, and that was not how research was conducted. What, for instance, might ‘progress’ mean?

As demanding as I found the literature review, I came to value all that I had discovered even though I often had to read the papers, or books or articles several times to gain any sense of what they meant. I enjoyed the way that reading one piece could send me whizzing off in different directions to follow arguments or gain further insights in related texts. I had no idea I possessed a personal epistemology! It was frustrating to be constantly challenged about evidence, but I came to realise that it was the heart of the enterprise. I learned that I was much better at ‘doing’ than analysing, and it took a lot of discipline to regularly revisit the same data and try to think again about what I was being told through it.

I really enjoyed the practical data gathering with the teachers, in interviews and observing their lessons. They were open and welcoming and I think they were grateful to learn about language. Relations with them all remained good throughout, and their schools allowed me much latitude. It was a particular pleasure to see some teachers grow into really enjoy grammar teaching.

I think that I have discovered some new knowledge, or, at least, made some links about issues to do with the teaching of grammar that have not been made before. It has been a very demanding project and taken up a lot of my life, particularly in the last few months. But I now know considerably more about the

research process and I become extremely angry when I hear about representatives from government and other agencies wilfully ignoring what has been discovered in research, when I know how painstakingly researchers have worked to throw light on valuable new knowledge.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses.



Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site:
<http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications> and view the School's Policy online.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name: Geoffrey Dean

Your student no: 620030919

Return address for this certificate: 74 High Street, Gt Doddington, Wellingborough, Northants NN29 7TH

Degree/Programme of Study: Ph D

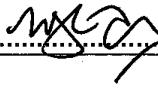
Project Supervisor(s): Professor Debra Myhill, Anthony Wilson

Your email address: geoffrey.dean@btinternet.com

Tel: 01933 277382

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed:..........date: 5/11/13

Certificate of ethical research approval

PLEASE ALLOW A MINIMUM OF ONE MONTH FOR THE ETHICAL APPROVAL PROCEDURE TO BE COMPLETED.

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT: Personal Epistemologies of Primary School Teachers in Respect of Teaching and Learning of Grammar

1. Brief description of your research project:

The project is designed to discover the personal epistemologies of eight core teachers in respect of their learning in grammar. It will begin by exploring, through semi-structured interview in the initial stages, what they know about grammar, how do they know what they know, and how reliable is what they know. Alongside their teacher colleagues, they will then be trained how to teach grammar in a way that is based on the functional approach, the work of Michael Halliday. Subsequently, these teachers will be observed teaching grammar to Year 5 and 6 children in their schools. They will be interviewed a second time part-way through the project, and finally at its conclusion. The participants will keep 'grammar logs' of notable grammar-related incidents, to add to the data, and their literacy documents and grammar planning will be scrutinised. It is hoped that the eight participating teachers will be able to meet in an informal forum to discuss their role in the research and what, if anything, they have gained from it.

2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

8 primary teachers (5 females / 3 males), teaching year 5 and Year 6 classes, based in 4 primary schools in the same geographical area in the East Midlands. All the teachers in the 4 primary schools will take part in a grammar test at the beginning of the project and retake the same test at the conclusion of the project.

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

Children will be observed in the teachers' classrooms as part of normal lessons. Some lessons will be filmed, concentrating on the teacher at work; these videos will be seen only by the researcher and no one else.

3. informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents: Each consent form MUST be personalised with your contact details.

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013

Consent will be obtained from the headteachers of the four participating schools, for the project to proceed in their schools, and giving permission for video recordings to take place in lessons.

4. anonymity and confidentiality

The anonymity of the 8 participant teachers will be of utmost importance and maintained throughout the project. They will not be identified in any respect. Transcribing of the interviews will be anonymised, as will all lesson observation materials.

Teachers taking part in the grammar test will remain anonymous unless they would like to know their score in the grammar test, when it will be necessary to identify themselves. Any information about their performance will remain in complete confidence, seen by nobody else but the teacher and myself. All data relating to the test will be converted to anonymous statistical information.

Total confidentiality will be exercised throughout the project. No information about any of the participants will be seen by anybody else but myself.

Children's anonymity will be strictly preserved by the researcher not showing the recordings of lessons to anyone else, and deleting any recorded material at the conclusion of the research period.

5. Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

The main data gathering instrument will be the semi-structured interview, agreed by all parties. These will be conducted according to careful ethical guidance, with the minimum of stress. Participants will have been advised that they have the right to withdraw from questioning at any time, or to refuse to answer questions they regard as intrusive.

Data will also be gathered through lesson observations in real classrooms. Once again, the participating teachers have been advised that they can bring these observations to an end at any time, and they have full control over whether filming will be permissible or not.

Teacher 'logs' will also be employed to record relevant matters relating to this project and shared with researcher on a regular basis. Lesson planning and school documentation relating to the teaching of grammar will be scrutinised.

6. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, or

All materials and data gathered in this research will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in my study at home in Northamptonshire, and they will never leave the premises. Nobody else but myself will have any sort of access to these resources.

Any video/audio data will be downloaded from recording devices at the earliest opportunity, ad then deleted immediately from those devices.

Electronic data will be stored in my password-protected account on the University of Exeter U-Drive.

7. special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.

N/a

8. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

These matters should not arise.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: 1 Oct 2013 until: 30 Sept 2017

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): D. Mayhew date: 06.11.13

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference:..... 2|13|14|8

Signed:..... N. Grun date: 4/11/13

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013

Appendix 2 – Headteacher ethical consent form



Teacher knowledge of grammar in the primary school

HEADTEACHER ETHICAL CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project (*please refer to the School Briefing information*).

In giving my permission for the research project to proceed, I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for my school to participate in this research project and, if we do choose to participate, we may withdraw from the project at any stage;
- participating teachers and students have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about themselves;
- any information which participating teachers and students give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications;
- If applicable, the information given by participating teachers and students will only ever be referred to in an anonymised form;
- all information given by participating teachers and students will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher will make every effort to preserve the anonymity of all participants in any context;
- some lessons will be recorded on a video camera for purposes of lesson comparison; these recordings will never be seen by anybody except the researcher and will be expunged at the conclusion of the research.

.....

.....

.....

(Signature of Headteacher) (Printed name of Headteacher) (Date)

One copy of this form will be kept by the Headteacher; a second copy will be kept by the researcher

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Geoff Dean (researcher) geoffrey.dean@btinternet.com 01933 277382 / 07971738821
OR Professor Debra Myhill (supervisor) d.a.myhill@exeter.ac.uk, 01392, 724767

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix 3 – Teacher consent form

Teacher knowledge of grammar in the primary school



TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Dear teacher,

Thank you for being willing to help me with my Ph D research. I am interested to find out what you know about the learning and teaching of grammar, how you relate to any training about grammar and what sorts of developments you might introduce into your lessons as a consequence of that training. All the information you give me will be used as data for my Ph D enquiry and, perhaps, a book about teaching grammar in primary schools. I hope that you will enjoy being involved.

In this letter, I am asking you to confirm that you have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project, and that you are happy to be involved by reading the statement below and signing to confirm your agreement.

By signing this form you will understand that:

- there is no compulsion for you to participate in this research project and, if you do choose to participate, you may withdraw from it at any stage;
- you have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about yourself;
- any information derived from you in this research will be used solely for the purposes of this project, which may include publications;
- any information I receive from you, or use about you, will be in an anonymised form;
- all information you give me will be treated as confidential and will be seen only by myself;
- every effort will be made to preserve your anonymity.

You also agree that you will be happy to be interviewed for this project.

Signed:

Date:

Geoff Dean

geoffrey.dean@btinternet.com

01933 277382

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix 4 – School’s Briefing Information



Schools’ Briefing Information

Teacher Knowledge of Grammar in the Primary School

What is it?

This Ph D study is intended to explore and discover what teachers of upper primary school classes know about teaching and learning of grammar in the context of improving writing. Personal epistemologies are concerned with what subjects know, how they know what they think they know, and from where they obtained that knowledge, and how reliable it might be. As a consequence of recent announcements by the Secretary of State for Education, all pupils aged 11 at the conclusion of Year 6 will have to be tested in grammar knowledge, yet the primary teaching force has limited knowledge of grammar because few have been adequately trained in the topic. The study will hope to reveal the gap between current teacher knowledge about grammar and the monitor how an intervention based on systemic functional grammar might improve the knowledge of teachers and the improvement of their pupils writing. Training in teaching this grammar will be provided over the course of a year for all the staff of these four schools

What will the project do?

The project will work with **eight teachers of Year 5 and 6 classes**, two from each of **four schools**: three junior schools and one primary school, situated in **the same area of the East Midlands**. All teachers from the four schools will also take a test of grammar knowledge at the beginning and the conclusion of the project, to gauge improvement in teacher knowledge. Specific development in the increase in grammar knowledge, and confidence in teaching, will be monitored through a number of data-gathering methods in respect of the eight focus teachers. These will comprise three semi-structured interviews per teacher, one before the training sessions begin, one after a few months of increased knowledge and a final concluding interview to assess what has been learned. Classroom observations will also be conducted in all eight classrooms, some – with teacher permission – recorded on digital video. Teachers will be encouraged to keep a log or record of notable grammar encounters, to be shared with the researcher. A forum meeting, where all the focus teachers can attend and discuss their different experiences

towards the end of the project, within the aegis of this project, is also intended.

The commitment required from each school is outlined below.

What's in it for me?

For the intervention group teachers, we hope that this will provide a significant opportunity to develop their subject and pedagogical knowledge about teaching grammar. The eight focus teachers will have many opportunities to discover more about the nature of the grammar with which they will be acquainting themselves, and to discuss their teaching approaches and learning outcomes. The interviews will provide opportunities for professional reflection. Every member of staff of the four featured schools will also receive free training and longitudinal access to advice and enquiries for the next year. An increase in knowledge about grammar and the implications of its teaching and learning should cascade through to all teachers working in these schools. The ultimate intention of this project is to improve the literacy skills and confidence of the pupils, especially in regard to their writing attainment.

Teacher Knowledge of Grammar in the Primary School

October 2013	* Teachers recruited and sign Consent Form. Headteachers and 8 focus teachers receive Schools' Briefing Information sheet. * Arrange interview times and venues.
October / November 2013	* Interviews of 8 focus teachers before training sessions. * Test on grammar knowledge of all teachers in 4 schools. Training of teachers from 4 project schools
February 2014	* Visits to 4 projects schools to observe 8 teachers teaching grammar to their classes
March 2014	* Visits to 4 project schools to observe 8 teachers teaching grammar to their pupils
April / May 2014	* Further training of all teachers in 4 project schools * 2 nd set of interviews of 8 focus teachers
June 2014	* Visits to 4 project schools to observe 8 teachers teaching grammar to their pupils
September	* Visits to 4 project schools to observe 8 teachers teaching

/October 2014	grammar to their pupils * Further training of all teachers in 4 project schools
November 2014	Visits to 4 project schools to observe 8 teachers teaching grammar to their pupils * Possible meeting forum of all 8 focus teachers
December 2014 /January 2015	* Final set of interviews of 8 focus teachers * Second test of grammar for all teachers of 4 focus schools for comparative purposes.

Researcher: Geoff Dean geoffrey.dean@btinternet.com - 01933 277382 - 07971 738821

Supervisor: Professor Debra Myhill, University of Exeter, d.a.myhill@exeter.ac.uk, 01392, 724767

Dear Headteachers and Teachers

I hope that this explanation and outline still interests you, and you would be comfortable accommodating these arrangements in your school. I look forward to working with you all and am extremely grateful for all the co-operation and help you have offered so far.

Thank you!

Appendix 5 – Research teachers agreement



Research Teachers

Name

Age**University/College**

School

.....**Qualifications**.....

..

Years qualified teaching

Year group

School management responsibility.....

Previous

schools.....

I agree to participate in the research Geoff Dean is conducting about discovering the personal epistemologies of teachers in respect to teaching grammar in Year 5 and Year 6 classrooms.

I agree that the details of the research project have been fully explained to me. I understand that all the data collected will be confidential and never shared with any others, except Geoff Dean's supervisor, Professor Debra Myhill. My name will not appear in any published documentation.

I know that I can withdraw from this project at any time.

I agree to participate in at least three interviews, to be conducted at different stages of the project.

I am prepared to give permission to Geoff Dean to attend lessons about grammar taught by me: some lessons may be recorded on video.

I agree to keep an occasional log, recording events and encounters concerning grammar that might have benefit for this project.

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix 6 – Initial teacher interview questions

GD Ph D Research

INITIAL TEACHER INTERVIEW

(Research Question: Teachers' Personal Epistemologies)

Introductions, explanations and thanks

1. Social construction of personal epistemological beliefs about grammar
 - Tell me about your own experiences of learning/not learning grammar
Prompts
 - **Primary experience?**
 - **Secondary experience?**
 - **How taught?**
 - **What learned?**
 - **Interested in it/not interested in it?**
 - Do you recall specific grammar lessons, or did grammar matters turn up in other subjects?
 - Do you recall ever using grammar to help you construct your writing, or playing a part in any reading experiences?
 - Did you encounter language and grammar learning in contexts outside school?
 - Are you interested in grammar in any way? (Why is that? 'In what ways'?)
 - What would you like to learn in the coming training that you don't know now?
2. What grammar knowledge is
 - What does the word 'grammar' mean to you? What do you think about when you hear it?
 - How many 'grammars' do you think there are? (Have you heard of more than one type?)
 - Do you think there is a place for grammar in the curriculum? Why? What should be included?
3. How grammar knowledge is acquired

- What do you think the children in your class should know about grammar? Why?
- How confident are you about teaching grammar to your children?
- Are there aspects of grammar you find it difficult to teach or which you see children finding it hard to learn?
- Do you feel you have an understanding of how to teach grammar?
- How do you plan grammar lessons?
- Describe a typical lesson involving the teaching of grammar (probe: instruction or language exploration)
- Do you think there is progression in grammar knowledge? (What would it be based on?)
- Are there any aspects of grammar that you believe helps children to become better writers?
- Are there any aspects of grammar that you think might hinder children in their writing?

4. Teacher Subject Knowledge

- How would you rate your own grammatical subject knowledge? Areas of confidence/weakness?
- How important is having good subject knowledge of grammar to you?
- How comfortable do you feel about applying your grammar knowledge in lessons with your children?

Appendix 7 – Second interview questions

Geoff Dean - Grammar project

Second interview outline and questions - Draft

1. Social construction of personal epistemological beliefs about grammar

- What more have you learned about grammar in the last six months that you did not know before this project?
- Has there been any specific area of grammar that you have felt more confident about as a result of the training?
- Did any of the training remind you of some things you once knew but had forgotten?
 - How helpful to your own knowledge growth, if at all, was the training you experienced?
 - Have you experienced any other grammar training from another source? (If 'YES' – was it challenging the training I provided?)

2. What grammar knowledge is

- How rule-based do you now think grammar to be?
- Have you changed your attitude about what you think grammar is and can be capable of?

3. How grammar knowledge is acquired

- Are there any websites, books or other resources that you have found helpful or supportive?

- Has your grammar knowledge come about solely because of the training, or have you devised some grammar insights from your own thinking or discussion with others?

4. Teacher subject knowledge

- What effect do you think the training has had on your teaching in the last few months?
- What do you think you now do in respect to teaching grammar that you did not include before the training?
- What benefits, if any, do you think your children have experienced because of your new knowledge of grammar?
- How has your planning changed as a consequence of the training?
- How has your planning changed as a consequence of the training?
- Have you explored grammar use in other subjects than literacy?
- Are there any areas of grammar you would like to know more about?
- Are there any areas of grammar about which you are confused or unsure?
- What other areas of literacy have been affected by your new learning of grammar?

5. Lesson observation

- How did you feel about being observed teaching a lesson?

- How successful did you think was the lesson I observed you teaching?
- Was that lesson typical of grammar lessons you teach?

Appendix 8 – Final interview questions

Central research question: **What subject and pedagogical knowledge do teachers need to teach grammar effectively in primary schools in the context of writing?**

Supplementary research questions:

- a. What are teachers' personal epistemologies of grammar in the context of writing?
- b. What pedagogical and subject knowledge barriers do teachers experience when attempting to teach grammar in the context of writing?
- c. How does the grammar knowledge of primary teachers influence how they teach grammar in the context of writing?

Final Interview Questions

Why did you volunteer to take part in this research in the first place and has your involvement been beneficial?

Has what you have learned and can now practise fulfilled the hopes you had at the beginning of the project?

How has increased grammar knowledge affected the ways you think about literacy?

What have you actually learned about language that has been important to you?

Have you encountered any problems associated with teaching grammar?

Teachers' subject knowledge

How good a teacher of grammar do you think you are?

What would help to turn you into a really good teacher of grammar?

Are there any areas of grammar that continue to puzzle or confuse you?

What benefits do you think your pupils have gained from your own acquisition of grammar knowledge?

What has been the biggest effect on you as a teacher in your increasing knowledge and understanding of grammar during the past year?

Has there been a difference in teaching grammar to children who are now better prepared in more junior classes?

Do you rely on a text book, or other published resource – or are you more confident about devising your own teaching examples?

Personal Epistemologies

What has changed in your own understanding of grammar?

What will you go on to develop in the teaching of grammar after the project finishes?

Have you changed your attitudes to the teaching of grammar/language?

Which area of language has particularly interested you in the broader field of grammar?

What have you learned about grammar from teaching your classes?

I've asked you this before, but who do you now think makes the rules of grammar?

Effect on writing attainment

What do you see as the ultimate purpose in teaching grammar?

Have seen an improvement in your pupils' writing as a result of them being taught grammar?

(If 'yes') Which areas of their writing have been affected? Has the improvement been sustained?

(if 'no') What aspect of your children's writing do you think could be improved by teaching them grammar? How would you go about teaching it?

Have any particular individuals or groups made noticeable progress, or had particular difficulties?

Appendix 9 – Lesson observation pro forma

LESSON OBSERVATION				
Teacher:		School:		
Project Lesson		<input type="checkbox"/> Week 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Week 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Week 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Week 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 3		
	Teacher's Input and Interaction		Student Response	
	<p style="color: red;">Focus observation on how the teacher makes links between grammar and writing; the quality of leading discussion; and any issues observed, esp re grammar subject knowledge</p>		<p style="color: red;">Focus on understanding and misunderstanding revealed by students in responses to teacher, or in groups and pairs</p>	
Episode 1				
Episode 2				
Episode 3				
Episode 4				
Guided writing (if applicable)	n/a			
Evidence from children's writing in lesson	<p style="color: red;"><i>Look at children's writing produced in lesson and note how they make use of learning in lesson, or make 'errors' related to learning etc.</i></p>			
Fidelity observations	Strong understanding of the edagogy; really evident use of it;			
Fidelity Measure				
Grammatical Terminology Used		Additionally planned	As planned Rarely	Partially as
Connections made between grammar and effect/purpose in writing		Additionally planned	As planned Rarely	Partially as
Discussion used to tease out thinking and choice-making		Additionally planned	As planned Rarely	Partially as

Appendix 10 – Grammar test

Grammar test

Name:

School:

M/F

Year Group:

Years teaching:

By this time, Lila had come to the end of the jungle. Climbing all the time, she moved on and on, as the trees thinned out and the path became a mere track and then vanished altogether. All the jungle sounds, the clicking and buzzing of the insects, the cries of the birds and monkeys, the drip of water off the leaves, the croaking of the little frogs, were behind her now. When she had heard them she enjoyed their company, but now there was nothing except the sound of her feet and the occasional rumble from the mountain, which was so deep that she felt it through her feet as much as she heard it through her ears.

When the night fell she lay down on the stony ground beside a rock and wrapped herself in one blanket. The full moon shone right in her face and kept her awake, and she couldn't get comfortable because of the stones on the ground. Finally she sat up in annoyance.

But there was no-one to share her annoyance with. Oh, dear! She'd never felt so lonely.

She folded her blanket away and re-tied her sarong and tightened her sandals, and set off again.

*The Firework Maker's Daughter –
Philip Pullman*

Read the extract from *The Firework Maker's Daughter* and answer the questions which follow:

WORD CLASSES

What word class is end in ' <i>the end of the jungle</i> '?	
What word class is mere in ' <i>became a mere track</i> '?	
What word class is climbing in ' <i>climbing all the time</i> '?	
What word class is the in ' <i>climbing all the time</i> '?	
What word class is time in ' <i>climbing all the time</i> '?	
What word class is thinned in ' <i>as the trees thinned out</i> '?	
What word class is buzzing in ' <i>buzzing of the insects</i> '?	
What word class is through in ' <i>through her feet</i> '?	
What word class is she in ' <i>She folded her blanket away</i> '?	
What word class is finally in ' <i>Finally she sat up</i> '?	
What word class is altogether in ' <i>vanished altogether</i> '?	
What word class is comfortable in ' <i>she couldn't get comfortable</i> '?	
What word class is fell in ' <i>when the night fell</i> '?	
What word class is annoyance in ' <i>she sat up in annoyance</i> '?	
What word class is so in ' <i>which was so deep</i> '?	

PHRASES

Which of the following are noun phrases ?	
<i>All the jungle sounds</i>	YES/NO
<i>By this time</i>	YES/NO
<i>When the night fell</i>	YES/NO
<i>The full moon shone</i>	YES/NO

<i>the occasional rumble from the mountain</i>	YES/NO
<i>The sound of her feet</i>	YES/NO
Which of the following are prepositional phrases?	
<i>By this time</i>	YES/NO
<i>She moved on and on</i>	YES/NO
<i>through her feet</i>	YES/NO
<i>off the leaves</i>	YES/NO
<i>which was so deep</i>	YES/NO
Which of the following (not in the passage) are adverbial phrases?	
<i>after the bell</i>	YES/NO
<i>When the dawn broke</i>	YES/NO
<i>They fell off the platform</i>	YES/NO
<i>during the first day of term</i>	YES/NO
<i>for a whole delightful week</i>	YES/NO
CLAUSES	
What kind of sentences are these?	
<i>By this time, Lila had come to the end of the jungle</i>	Simple / compound / complex
<i>All the jungle sounds, the clicking and buzzing of the insects, the cries of the birds and monkeys, the drip of water off the leaves, the croaking of the little frogs, were behind her now</i>	Simple/compound/complex
<i>When the night fell she lay down on the stony ground beside a rock and wrapped herself in one blanket.</i>	Simple/compound/complex
<i>She folded her blanket away and re-tied her sarong and tightened her sandals, and set off again</i>	Simple/compound/complex
<i>The full moon shone right in her face and kept her awake, and she couldn't get comfortable because of the stones on the ground</i>	Simple/compound/complex
Please circle and label each of the following if you think there is one present in the text extract	
a co-ordinating conjunction	

a relative clause

a non-finite clause

a subordinating conjunction

a minor/irregular sentence

Can you turn the following sentences from the **active to the passive?**

The dog chased the cat.

The plumbers quickly fixed the leaking tap.

All those people really enjoyed the match.

In the morning the boys broke the cupboard door.

In the following sentences (**not in the passage**) please circle the **subject(s) of the following clauses**

When the dinner was over they all took part in the washing up.

Where do you think you are going?

The whole class enjoyed their day out on the trip.

I would like to be successful with my grammar test.

Clinging strongly to the wall, ruining the delicate plaster, the ivy caused a huge problem.

Glossary

BERA British Educational Research Association

Comprehensive school – Non-selective school

Board of Education – forerunner of Department of Education –department of state from 1870s to 1930s.

CPD – Continuing Professional Development – courses for teachers, designed to improve their knowledge and skills

Department for Education – Government department of state, overseen by a Secretary of State; established 2010. In the past variously known as: Department of Education; *Department of Education and Science*; *Department for Education and Employment* ; *Department for Education and Skills*; *Department for Children, Schools and Families*.

HMI – Her Majesty's Inspectorate. A government department with powers to inspect schools and make recommendations.

KAL – Knowledge About Language

Key Stages – Children enter education in Reception (**Key Stage R**); between the ages of 5 and 7 they are taught in **Key Stage 1**; ages 7 to 11 are taught in **Key Stage 2**. In secondary school, students aged 11-14 are taught in **Key Stage 3**, whilst those aged 14-16 are taught in **Key Stage 4**.

L1 – First language user.

L2 – learners of a second language

Local Education Authority – a branch of a town/county council formerly responsible for distribution of school funding and monitoring of standards in schools in its jurisdiction

LINC – Language in the National Curriculum; a government sponsored language programme 1988-1991.

NATE – National Association of Teachers of English

National Curriculum – the government document outlining the areas of study of all subjects to be taught in maintained schools. Introduced in 1988.

National Literacy Strategy (NLS) – a programme for teaching English/literacy in primary and secondary schools, introduced in 1998, but declined after a decade.

Primary School – a school for pupils aged 4 to 11. Sometimes divided in to infant department (ages 4-7) and junior department (ages 7-11).

Ofsted – a national inspection and monitoring authority for judging standards in schools.

SAT – Standard Assessment Task; a test of writing, reading and mathematics taken by children aged 11 at the end of Key Stage 2., contributing to the school's evidence of standards.

SFG – Systemic Functional Grammar: a ‘descriptivist’ model of grammar devised by Michael Halliday, focused on employing language to make meanings of different sorts.

SPaG – a test of Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar, taken by all children in Year 6 (11 year old children) in maintained primary schools, contributing to the school's evidence of standards.

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