Professionalising in a Freelance Eco-System. A Grounded Theory Study.

Thesis submitted to the Centre for Language and Communication Studies
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Master of Literature (M. Litt.)

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2020
Declaration

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Summary

This study takes a Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) approach to identifying the key concern of Irish Sign Language interpreters with respect to their professional practice and how they resolve the main concern.

The rationale behind this study was multi-faceted. I currently work at Bridge Interpreting Ltd, a company providing ISL/English interpreters, where I am Sign Language Support Service Coordinator. Bridge Interpreting Ltd. identified a gap in the services available to support interpreters as they enter the field and progress. With co-funding from Bridge Interpreting Ltd. and the Irish Research Council’s (IRC) Employment Based-Programme Scholarship, I undertook this study at the Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS), Trinity College Dublin.

Primary data was collected by interviewing a total of eleven ISL/English interpreters and one focus group of five students attending their last year in CDS. Based on the analysis of the data within this study, the main concern of this substantive population is UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY. The main concern is associated with the TRANSITIONING from college to the real world with very limited experience and knowledge in particular when starting to work as a freelancer. Once they enter the interpreting community, NAVIGATING is the next step while PEERING with their cohort in order to explore this new and unfamiliar context.

The three main stages participants go through during their journey are explained within the theoretical framework developed in this study: STARTING-UP, GEARING-UP, BRANCHING-OUT (SGB model). The first stage is STARTING-UP which is the stage where participants embark on their new professional journey. The second stage is GEARING-UP in which the participants aim at EQUIPPING their profession so as to PROGRESS and CLIMB-UP the WINDING STAIR. The final stage is BRANCHING-OUT which is when they feel comfortable and have more stability in relation to their professional life-long career. The
theory developed from this study is PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM which is the main contribution of this study. The theory explores how interpreters NAVIGATE their career trajectory and how they resolve their main concern as they try to develop their future career. This study also contributes to the development and implementation of a Peer Support Service within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. as the main goal of this research. The lack of literature review in relation to the professional career of sign language interpreters, identified gaps within the literature review and also within the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM where interpreters practise their profession.

Finally, this study and therefore the emergent theory may have applications in other research areas where connections have been discovered. This research study explored the work of sign language interpreters paying particular attention to FREELANCING careers, an area under-explored in other fields. By saying this, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM could be helpful for graduates in other FREELANCING professional areas.
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1. Chapter 1 - Introduction and Overview

1.1. Background

This research was undertaken at the request of Bridge Interpreting Ltd. who sought an evidence-base on which to develop a peer support service for Irish Sign Language (ISL)/English interpreters. With co-funding from Bridge Interpreting Ltd. and the Irish Research Council’s (IRC) Employment Based Training Programme, I undertook a Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) study that set out to identify the most pressing concerns for ISL/English interpreters when practising in the field, drawing on the personal insights and experiences of interpreters in the field. The insights gained through my experience as a Sign Language Support Service Coordinator at Bridge Interpreting Ltd. gave me an awareness of the importance and potential of exploring this field through a research-led approach.

The original goal was to secure input from both experienced and novice professionals in Ireland, which would feedback into the process of developing a peer support service. My research study looked to examine the field from the point of view of the interpreters, including the work required as an independent professional and ways to develop support resources required for those entering a field that is seeing an incredible amount of growth.

As a Sign Language Support Service Coordinator, the development of the peer support service for ISL/English interpreters working in the interpreting community formed the main focus of my role. This service was designed to provide support and services for interpreters practicing in the field during every step in their career pathway. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the particular types of services and support that are required, it was necessary to engage with ISL/English interpreters directly, requesting feedback on current resources and also their personal perspectives on the profession and the increasing demand.
All ISL/English interpreters working for Bridge Interpreting Ltd., and the majority of sign language interpreters working in Ireland and internationally operate in a freelance capacity (Leeson & Venturi, 2017). As soon as students complete the Bachelor in Deaf Studies (B.St. Su.) at the Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS) in the University of Dublin, Trinity College, they enter the interpreting community as self-employed professionals (Leeson & Venturi, 2017). This research began in September 2017, only a couple of months prior to Irish Sign Language (ISL) being recognised as the third official language of the Deaf community in Ireland. December 24th, 2017 marks a historical moment after a campaign for its recognition lasting for more than thirty years.

The Irish Sign Language Act 2017 states that¹:

‘A public body shall do all that is reasonable to ensure that interpretation into Irish Sign Language is provided for a person who is competent in that language and cannot hear or understand English or Irish when that person is seeking to avail of or access statutory entitlements or services provided by or under statute by that public body’ (Irish Sign Language Act, 2017, p. 7).

Upon completion of the Bachelor in Deaf Studies (B.St.Su.) in ISL/English Interpreting, graduates begin their work as freelancers, operating in varied settings as required, although they start working in the educational setting with Deaf students attending third-level education. After a period of time (ranging from a few months to a few years) in the educational field, many interpreters look to broaden the scope of their work, incorporating other environments, such as the increasing number of opportunities available within the medical, legal and conference based settings. The following statement also upheld this kind of increase, ‘…the accessibility demands of the Deaf community have resulted in an increased demand for Sign Language interpreters in legal, educational, medical, employment and social situations’ (Cokely, 1992, p. 2). Sign language interpreting can be considered a recent profession. The interpreting community is evolving as the demand for their skill set within society changes (Napier &

Leeson, 2016). The support structure for interpreters needs to adapt to meet these needs.

It has been possible since the completion of this study to incorporate approaches within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. that more directly address the obstacles encountered by illustrating the primary sticking points and obstacles the interpreters encounter (Chapter 3).

In the past, the role of a sign language interpreter was someone from the community operating as a volunteer or support worker with a good level of sign language. Most of the people interpreting for Deaf people were family members, friends, and relatives, anyone with some connection with the Deaf community (Cokely, 2005). Both the responsibilities within the role and the number of sign language interpreters working within the Deaf community have notably increased over the years (Leeson & Venturi, 2017). As Janzen and Korpiniski state (2005) ‘Interpreters began to think critically about what their role should be and to define the skills necessary to move towards professionalization’ (p. 168). As interpreting became recognised as a profession requiring qualifications and structured courses, the practitioner moved from volunteer to professional. The interpreter-training program in Ireland has been available since 2001 at the Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS) at the University of Dublin, Trinity. This built on the two previous full-time programmes that ran in Ireland, funded by the European Union (1992-4, 1998-9), which offered students a Diploma course in ISL/English Interpreting, the CDS program has continued to develop, and has offered a four-year Bachelor Degree in ISL/English Interpreting since 2009 (Leeson & Lynch, 2009).

In the past, the few interpreters working within the Deaf community had some connections with Deaf people or were CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults). In the last few years however, the situation has changed dramatically with a marked increase in the number of interpreters being trained. Most of the graduates now appear to be young students, coming directly from secondary schools, with very little or no previous connections with the Deaf community (Leeson, 2012; Leeson & Venturi, 2017). At the same time, the Deaf community has also changed and seen many new developments.
For instance, there are more Deaf students attending third-level education compared to the past (AHEAD 2017/2018), which it reflects well on the impact of targeted initiatives within the Deaf Community, including support for both new and more experienced interpreters. In conjunction with this research and in respect of ISL’s recognition, a working group has been set up with the goal of establishing a National Register (voluntary or statutory) for ISL/English interpreters through the cooperation of different Deaf-led organizations and stakeholders, with the aim of setting up a register to regulate the profession and promote a high standard of professional conduct (Leeson & Venturi, 2017). It is clear based on the increasing demands put on services, that sign language interpreting is a growing profession and will form an increasingly important and essential role in many industries in the future (SLIS 2017).

This Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) study provided me with the opportunity to explore the interpreting field through the interpreters’ perspective and glean an insight into the interpreters’ main concerns based on the data collected during the interviews and subsequent CGT analysis. It became clear that the participants, for their part, saw it as an opportunity to voice personal and professional experiences on life as a contractor, reflecting on their careers and freely talking about issues they have observed and aspects they appreciate. The main concern that emerged from this study is that the vast majority of interpreters are still operating as contractors, on an UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY. The theory that was developed to explore this phenomenon, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, offers an insight from a practitioners’ perspective on both a professional and personal basis.

1.2. Research motivation

It was important, prior to developing a peer support service for ISL/English interpreters, that the specific concerns, needs and requirements of the profession be catalogued by asking individuals currently within the field, as well as those studying towards a professional career in the field, what they saw as the main areas of concern. In order to identify the details directly from my participants, the methodological approach employed for this research was Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) developed by
Glaser and Strauss (1967). By applying CGT, the aim was to identify the main concerns interpreters face when they embark on this particular career pathway and what the real-world implications are when working as a sign language interpreter both in a personal and professional sense. Following CGT, the main principle was to enter the field of study without any preconceived idea or predetermined concern that could influence the research study, in order to ensure the emergent theory would be grounded on the data collected from the participants’ interviews and not personal interpretation.

CGT was the appropriate methodology for this study as most of the interpreters interviewed for this research work with Bridge Interpreting Ltd. As an employee of a service that offers contract work, it was important that the interpreters felt comfortable and able to take the opportunity to talk freely about their profession based on their personal experiences. ‘What was actually going on...It had to provide explanations of how the participants are driven, which in grounded theory grew into how they continually processed their main concern’ (Glaser, 1998, p. 31). I was further motivated to carry out this research, when it became clear that this topic was under-explored and that no specific studies had been carried out regarding the needs of ISL/English interpreters when practicing in the field or even in relation to a clear career pathway for graduates.

Polach (2004) states, ‘...it is paramount that development professionals understand college graduates’ hopes, expectations, and challenges so that, early on, graduates can be provided with the specific development and coaching strategies they need to grow into the role of leader and influencer over time’ (p. 6).

As part of my professional duties within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. as a Sign Language Support Service Coordinator, collecting information from ISL/English interpreters, it was possible to create an accurate picture from not only the study of their similar experiences, but insights into the necessary skills of the interpreters and commonly held concerns, observations from the day they leave college, their individual career pathways and the obstacles they encounter.
1.3. Research Questions

The aim of this study is to contribute to understanding of the professional experiences of ISL/English interpreters working in Ireland and to generate a theory that explains the interpreters’ main concerns and how to address them. This investigation was necessary in order to gain an insight to explain the interpreters’ concerns, their needs and how to support their professional practice, their career trajectory and during the development of their network. ‘...there is a lack of literature on occupational stress amongst interpreters and secondly, an absence of research on professional frameworks to support the work of interpreters and provide opportunities for reflective practice’ (Hetherington, 2011, p. 139). The Interpreting profession is evolving and growing, which will make it necessary for further research into the profession of sign language interpreting. This particular study takes a Classic Grounded Theory approach, which will be discussed further in Chapter 2. For this study, Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) is employed to understand the experience of the participants, specifically in response to the following general areas:

a) What is the main concern that ISL/English interpreters experience in their professional life in Ireland?

b) What support/services do they require when practicing in the interpreting community?

By employing CGT and keeping in mind the main questions, the purpose was to become familiar with what is occurring and develop a new theory grounded on the data collected. The final goal of this study is also to contribute findings to Bridge Interpreting Ltd., and inform their aim of further improving the peer support service within the agency. Furthermore, this research should also be shared with stakeholders and others that are either interested or directly impacted by the work of ISL/English interpreters in Ireland.
1.4. From student to freelancer

The journey of a sign language interpreter starts with TRANSITIONING from college to the workforce, which I have referred to as the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. When completing college, graduates enter the field as self-employed practitioners, which is considered a significant milestone in their career pathway. This sentiment is revealed by the following quote, ‘...they may require some guidance from more experienced instructors and interpreters as mentors...they provide an understanding of how interpreter must approach her world, and from there work toward success’ (Janzen, 2005, p. 10). To FLOURISH, interpreters require remarkable linguistic skills and cultural knowledge of the Deaf community, as it is not only knowledge of the technical skills related to the profession that are utilised, but many other aspects in their approach to take into consideration in order to become a successful self-employed interpreter. Graduates have to integrate the theory immediately with the practice as they enter the profession, for the most part independently and without adequate support services to bridge the practical divide between academic and professional.

The real world is always different compared to the college life. For ISL/English interpreters, entering the interpreting community means practicing their profession in different settings, with different people at different times of the day based on the contracts available ‘...interpreters often find themselves in a wide range of situations on a daily basis in every type of situation imaginable. Interpreters work anywhere and everywhere’ (Demers, 2005, p. 206). The variety of the interpreting assignments and contexts within the field make the interpreting profession very challenging, especially at the beginning of the journey, when novice graduates’ lack of experience and limited skills and knowledge put additional pressure on already challenging situations. The diversity of the contexts, require a vast linguistic knowledge, which is routinely acquired on-the-job through EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING. When graduates TRANSITION from college to a new and unfamiliar environment such as the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, they often require support from more experienced professionals and organizations that will help them to shape their new FREELANCING IDENTITY. Although studies have been carried out about TRANSITIONING from college to employment, very few studies cover the topic of MOVING
from academic environment into self-employment. ‘...graduates often lack the career competencies needed to make a successful transformation from college to work’ (De Vos et al., 2009, p. 762). A large part of this study was a focus on the steps undertaken by interpreters when trying to develop a career strategy as a new professional. ISL/English interpreters enter the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM with the aim of building a life-long career in a profession from which they take great pride and enjoyment.

Interpreters acquire and develop skills and knowledge during the educational programme and after graduating by accepting interpreting assignments (Demers, 2005). The needs and requirements of the interpreter will evolve throughout their career based on the pathway they find themselves on and possible specialisations gleaned through experience. Through the BUILDING UP of professional experiences, they develop additional skills and knowledge, over time receiving more complicated assignments such as in medical and legal settings that can have an impact on a personal level. For example, Darroch and Dempsey (2016) explore the experiences of interpreting in very sensitive contexts and the psychological and emotional impact that can have in their life and the lack of support.

The primary objective of the study is to understand the profession of ISL/English interpreters and thereby develop a theory that would enable Bridge Interpreting Ltd. to design a bespoke support service for the profession of interpreters in Ireland and provide relevant information to the other professionals, institutions and stakeholders involved in the field.
1.5. **Structure of the thesis**

**Chapter one** presents background information about the profession of ISL/English interpreters working in Ireland and the experiences of this profession when transitioning from college graduate to self-employed contractor. The lack of research regarding a professional framework to support sign language interpreters was the key motivation of this study, with the results directing the development of a peer support service within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. to address the needs of the interpreters.

**Chapter two** illustrates the methodology I have applied in this study, which is Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) and how the methodology was employed with the required processes observed to ensure the CGT approach was followed accurately. This chapter also explains how the data was collected and subsequently analysed, and from which I discovered the main concern, the core category and the emerged theory.

**Chapter three** will delve into the theory that emerged from this CGT study: **PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM**. This CGT theory explains the main concern of ISL/English interpreters and what is occurring in this specific field of study. It also illustrates how interpreters have previously resolved their main concerns at the beginning stages of their professional life, to the stage where they desire to develop a life-long career in the community interpreting.

**Chapter four** will cover the relevant literature that supports the Grounded Theory approach and will further provide the lens with which to view this study through. The literature review was carried out based on the concepts that emerged from the analysis of the data, grounded on the participants’ interviews. Within this chapter the focus will be on existing literature and theories that were integrated within my theory: Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and the theory of Experiential Learning by Kolb. Additionally, the model Work-Integrated-Learning (WIL) and Dean and Pollard’s model the Demand Control Schema (DC-S) were reviewed and incorporated with supplementary resources in relation to key emerging themes during the CGT analysis. Within a CGT framework, it is recommended that the literature review is completed.
after discovering the main concern and core categories, in order to avoid potential contamination of the data and access new information within the substantive area.

Chapter five will illustrate the discussion around and evaluation of the emerged theory by applying the four principles suggested by Glaser: fit, workability, relevance and modifiability. These principles have been employed to evaluate the quality of the theory.

Chapter six will present the contributions, the limitations, the implications and the conclusions of this study.
2. Chapter 2 - Research Methodology

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I outline the methodology applied in this research study. In order to understand the professional life experiences of ISL/English interpreters in Ireland and their main concern in the field, it was necessary to collect data directly from participants working in this specific substantive area. As Gibson and Harman also state (2014), the aim is to discover the concern directly from the participant on the ground:

“Grounded Theory is a perspective on how to build theory that is grounded in the perspective of those in the field. It is problem-focused because it involves studying how people experience and resolve their everyday problems. The theory that is developed through the method is focused on explaining how those problems are resolved” (p. 3).

The decision to conduct my research using Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) methodology is based on the original work of Glaser and Strauss (1967). It was on completion of an extensive literature review of CGT methodology that I decided it was the most appropriate methodology for this specific research. I also met with my supervisor and consulted with other researchers using Grounded Theory, as well as participating in a three-day Grounded Theory workshop to further my understanding of the process and requirements. Continuous monthly Classic Grounded Theory seminars further encouraged me to apply this methodology.

It was my professional role within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. as a Sign Language Support Service Coordinator that motivated me to carry out this research. The aim was to determine the main concern of ISL/English interpreters by applying CGT research methodology in order to identify the key concerns of interpreters, through which to develop a theory that would explain the interpreters’ routines, pressures and professional concerns. Due to my role within Bridge Interpreting Ltd., there was also the potential to develop a more bespoke support service, designed with the interpreters in
mind. CGT was deemed the best approach for this study, as the objective was to find out directly from the participants, without entering the field or influencing the outcomes with preconceived ideas or assumptions. This idea ties in with Glaser’s comments on the approach: ‘Grounded Theory does not start with a research question or hypothesis but begins with an area of interest with the purpose of discovering a theory that gets at “what is really going on in a substantive area”’ (Glaser, 1978, p. 3). In this section, I will illustrate in detail how I applied CGT in the study and also how I developed a fuller understanding and appreciation of this methodology by its utilisation from the perspective of a novice researcher.

As Glaser (1998) states, ‘Studying an area of interest does not mean the researcher will preconceive the problem of the study. It means only that the researcher is doing research in an area of interest, that’s all’ (p. 48). This was the approach I applied when interacting with the participants. I invited them to tell me what is really occurring in the field when practicing their profession. In order to avoid influencing the data I entered the field with an open mind waiting for the main concern and core category to emerge directly from the data collected during the interviews. This maps to Glaser’s view that requires that the researcher remains grounded and ‘...tries to describe the data accurately to produce evidence and to give voice to the participants’ (Glaser, 2001, p. 4). These are principles that I sought to integrate in my approach. For example, I recognised the need to empower the participants by asking them directly to recount their experiences in order to identify what is really happening in their professional field, from their perspective.

2.2. What is Classic Grounded Theory?

Classic Grounded theory (CGT) seeks to discover the principal concerns of participants in a specific field of study and develop a theory that will illustrate the nature of the participants’ concerns and how they seek to address and/or resolve these issues. Rather than entering the field of study with a preconceived idea or problem, the goal of CGT is to illustrate the pattern of behaviour of the participants and allow the concepts to emerge from the data during the research procedure.
'The goal of Grounded Theory is to generate a theory that accounts for the patterns of their behaviour which are relevant and problematic for the participants. The core category is that pattern of behaviour which is most related to all the other categories and their properties in the theory which explain how the participants resolve their main concern’ (Glaser, 1998, p. 117).

CGT was originally developed during the 1960s by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, who outlined their theory in their 1967 publication, ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory”. Their approach ‘... developed a research methodology that aimed to systematically derive theories of human behaviour from empirical data...’ (Urquhart, 2001, p. 2). The main objective in my study is to develop a theory that explains the main concern of my participants working in the field of sign language interpreting and how interpreters resolve their concern. Glaser’s Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) methodology is applied in this study so as to generate a theory that is grounded in the data collected from participants without attempting to force the reality of the facts. Glaser and Strauss state that the purpose of the Grounded Theory method is not to force data into conceptual category: ‘Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6). According to CGT, in order to avoid any risk of leading the participants and pre-empting responses, an open and non-biased approach to the field of study will help reveal the main concern of the participants without making assumptions about possible outcomes (Evans, 2013; Christiansen, 2007; Artinian et al., 2009).

2.3. The advantage of selecting Classic Grounded Theory

I decided to use CGT rather than other approaches primarily because I wanted to encourage and involve ISL/English interpreters to relate their personal stories that would consequently enable me to get an insight into what is occurring on the interpreting field. The lack of research and the aim of developing a structured and visible support service available for interpreters is the key motivation for this work. This study
is based on the actual experience of my participants and not on my suppositions. CGT would allow me to generate a theory that was strongly grounded on the data collected from the participant involved in an area of their interest. I selected CGT because it was vital to develop a theory that reflected the reality and the accuracy of the data. Furthermore, Classic Grounded Theory was the best methodology for this study, as the main questions I needed to address were ‘what is really going on out there?’ ‘What is really happening in the field?’ I could not know prematurely what was going on without asking the people in the field (Glaser, 2014; Olson, 2008). I could not approach the participants with a preconceived assumption and lead them to respond with an answer I wanted to hear. This is an issue that Glaser comments on. He writes:

‘The first step in grounded theory is to enter the substantive field for research without knowing the problem. This requires suspending your knowledge, especially of the literature, and your experience. The researcher must take a ‘no preconceived interest’ approach and not ask questions that might be on his mind’ (Glaser, 1998, p. 122).

In sum, CGT is a methodology that will allow a researcher to identify the pattern of behaviour of the participants with respect to something that is essential to the participants involved in the field. Through CGT, it was possible to develop a theory that explained the main concern of ISL/English interpreters in the field. In addition, the development of the theory in this study provided an opportunity for the interpreters to reflect on their work in the field and for the agency Bridge Interpreting Ltd. a better understanding of what is really occurring in the area. The main purpose of this study was to give the opportunity to the participants to share their life experiences, challenges and stories with regards to their profession. On the other side, based on the data collected from the participants, we were able to identify the main concern and what services can potentially be provided within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. The development of the theory in this study PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM could be an effective instrument for the people, stakeholders and organizations involved in this area providing useful concepts about their profession.
2.4. Ethical Approval

The Research Ethics Committee (REC), School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, The University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin granted ethical approval for this research study on 21\textsuperscript{st} November 2017 (See appendix).

2.4.1. Recruitment of participants

Applying purposeful sampling, qualified ISL/English interpreters and students in their final year of studies on the Bachelor in Deaf Studies at the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin were invited to participate in this study via a number of relevant gatekeepers. Ultimately, data were collected from one-to-one interviews with eleven practicing ISL/English interpreters (nine hearing interpreters and two Deaf interpreters) and one focus group with five students attending their final year in college. Qualified interpreters were invited to participate via Bridge Interpreting Ltd. (gatekeeper) who circulated the Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) based on their database. The focus group meeting with CDS 4\textsuperscript{th} year interpreting students were contacted via a gatekeeper, the Simultaneous Interpreting \textsuperscript{2} module coordinator. Prior to the collection, the gatekeepers sent an invitation email and the Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) to each participant.

Specific procedures were applied to anonymize the participants guarantee confidentiality during the interviews and collection of the data. Each participant’s name was labeled with numbers (i.e. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3 etc.) in order to use direct references during the development of this thesis. Electronic materials were saved in a secure file online service (Dropbox) and on a password-protected laptop. Once the participant decided to take part in my research, the Consent Form was signed before we commenced data collection at the face-to-face and focus group interviews. The participants were advised that their participation was voluntary therefore they could withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.
During the data collection process, each participant was informed that the interview would last approximately one hour and that the interview would be audio recorded (for hearing interpreters) and video recorded (for deaf interpreters who were sign language users). Based on the REC, place and time for the interviews were negotiated with the participants. Most of the interviews took place at the Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS) and at Bridge Interpreting Ltd.’s office. Only one interview was carried out through Skype for reasons relating to weather conditions and distance. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the interviews and each transcription was sent to the participant who was invited to make any amendments to that record within 7 days. Although Glaser recommends against recording interviews and to instead listen to the participants and to rely on field notes only, I decided to record the interviews and to transcribe them verbatim. As it was going to be my first time applying CGT, I did not want to miss relevant information while interviewing the participants and also because English is my second language, I did not want to risk omitting certain data that would be essential for this research. My interviews involved both Deaf and hearing participants, therefore both audio and video recordings were made. While interviewing Deaf interpreters, I video recorded and arranged a translation from ISL into English. The visual recording was also necessary to ensure that no information or insight was missed. During the interviews, it was difficult to compile in depth field notes as I had to keep eye contact with the Deaf participant since ISL is a visual language. I was vigilant in ensuring that I applied the same methodology as I had with the audio recorded interviews that were taken with the hearing participants. That is, at the end of each interview, (and as I had outlined in my Research Ethics documentation), I sent the transcription from each interview/focus group to participants in order to allow each of them the opportunity to review the interview and add or modify their comments if required. This in turn helped to safeguard the veracity of my source data set (Orfanidou et al., 2015). Participants were also informed that only the researcher and the supervisor would have access to the information collected. Every procedure was followed and each action was taken to follow the REC and CGT methodology in order to conduct this study appropriately.
2.5. Simulated Interview

While waiting for the REC approval, I carried out an extended literature review focusing only on Grounded Theory methodology in order to understand in depth the methodological processes, how to apply it within my research study and how to use it correctly. Before starting the interviews with participants, I carried out a simulated interview in order to familiarize with CGT and the necessary interviewing skills I needed to apply when using CGT. My participant was an ISL/English interpreter with knowledge in Grounded Theory methodology.

Classic Grounded Theory advises that I open the interview with an appropriate grand tour question and from that point just listen to the responses and make sure to continue the conversation. In my case, the grand tour question was ‘Tell me, what is it like working as a sign language interpreter?’ As Glaser says, ‘Install a spill’ (Glaser, 1998, p. 111) which refers to opening the interview with an open-ended and semi-structured question followed by questions based on the participants’ responses. Participants were encouraged to talk openly and freely while I listened carefully so that I could isolate key words/phrases that would enable me to phrase subsequent questions. The participant with whom I carried out the mock interview highlighted that it would work best if I listened carefully to the responses and develop my interview based only on participants’ answers, without asking pre-planned questions that were not linked to their answer. The simulated interview was very helpful, as I recognised the importance of listening to the interviewee without contaminating the interview with leading questions that would have forced responses and corrupted the data. The main goal with CGT is to focus on the responses of the participants and generate the following question based on that response instead of having a fixed list of questions (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). The simulated interview also reinforced for me that CGT was going to be the right approach for this study, as the interview technique ensures that information is gathered honestly and naturally from the interviewee without the influence of a structured scientific approach. The aim is not to lead the participant, but to allow organic responses that ensure the data to be analysed is not contaminated by preconceived ideas of prejudices of the researcher. During and after the interview, a few adjustments were made to the
model in order to ensure that the questions were not leading the participants and that the conversation flowed with purpose.

### 2.6. Data Collection

In this section I explain how I applied CGT. I begin by illustrating the steps undertaken to reach the emergent theory. These included data collection, writing field notes and memos, open coding, constant comparison, selective coding, theoretical coding and theoretical sampling.

#### 2.6.1. Research Interviews

The primary source of data collection was the interviews with ISL/English Interpreters and students. The interviews were conducted between January and April 2018 (10 face-to-face interviews, 1 Skype interview and 1 focus group).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-to-one interviews</th>
<th>Focus Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of participants</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modality</strong></td>
<td>Face-to-face: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over Skype: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data recording</strong></td>
<td>Audio/transcribe: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video/translate: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average duration</strong></td>
<td>Approximately 1 hour per interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Interviews with ISL/English interpreters and students.*

The questions were intentionally open-ended and semi-structured. The first phase of data collection was carried out with ISL/English interpreters with 0-5 years’ experience working as qualified interpreters. Once the first group was completed, the
gatekeeper sent the invitation and Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) to the second
group, which included interpreters who had more than 5 years’ experience working as
ISL/English freelance interpreters in Ireland. The last phase of data collection was
conducted with a focus group of CDS 4th year student interpreters nearing the end of
their final year of studies. Students from the focus group had already completed work
placements in their third (four weeks) and fourth years (eight weeks). During their
placements, they had the opportunity to gain a broader understanding of the
differences between studying in college and the real practicalities of the profession. It
was important and relevant to interview this group to ascertain what their expectations
were prior to their placements and also the concerns that emerged from the placement,
when interacting with a mentor and other professional interpreters within the
professional environment.

Interviews were digitally recorded and immediately transcribed as outlined
earlier. The transcriptions were emailed to participants for confirmation/ modifications.
Again, during the interviews, key words and notes were recorded in order to generate
follow-up questions, while attentively listening to the participant speaking to avoid
potential leading questions. My interview guide was based on a grand tour question and
also a limited number of open-ended questions in case the interview was not
progressing or the conversation was not flowing. Using the CGT approach, I opened with
the grand tour question which was ‘What is it like working as a sign language
interpreter?’ I had a list of potential follow-up questions but according to CGT, the
recommended approach is to develop the following questions from the key words
contained within their answers. The aim of the CGT interview is to avoid directing the
participants and listen to the conversation attentively, focussing only on the
participants’ responses without developing leading questions.

As in the majority of cases, the participant replied very positively to the grand
tour question with, ‘I love it, I love my job although it is very challenging’, the open-
ended question that followed in this situation was ‘What do you mean by challenging?’
This is an example of how interviews were conducted, by diligently applying the CGT
process and generating a follow-on question based on identifying key words, which in
In my case, at the end of each interview, most of the participants made the comment that they felt the process was more like a conversation than an interview and that they felt very comfortable talking about their experiences and life stories with me. My main role was to make sure that the conversation was flowing without leading the participant or influencing their responses. The purpose of the interviews was to produce data that would contribute directly to the purpose of my research and that would be beneficial to both parties. CGT interviewing approach differs from the traditional qualitative research as each interview was slightly modified with each participant as the questions were developed based on the responses of the participants. After each interview, supplemental field notes were taken to implement the data and write down emphasis that I could not transcribe live. This reflects Glaser’s observation that ‘Doing field notes the night after the interview, allows the researcher to code and analyse right after writing his notes which is like going over the notes one and half times’ (Glaser, 1998, p. 108).

At the same time, in my case, transcriptions of each interview were prepared immediately after the interview. I interviewed one participant every week, giving me the opportunity to send the transcription to the participant and at the same time to start the open coding before starting the next interview. ‘...data collection and data analysis should overlap to allow for flexibility in data collection procedures so that the researcher remains open to new ideas or patterns which may emerge’ (Lawrence & Tar, 2013, p. 29). The gap between each interview was essential to facilitate my starting to analyse
the data immediately. This meant that when I started the subsequent interview, I was already able to see similarities and differences within the data.

Interviewing was the primary resource employed and the most reliable as the main objective of this study was to understand what is occurring in the field for interpreters and their main concern. The analysis of the data is only grounded on the data collection with the participants. Despite working within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. and despite the fact that most of the participants of this study work for the agency, I was totally neutral during the interviews and the participants reported that they felt completely open to express their experiences and issues.

2.7. Writing field notes and memos

During the interview, field notes were written down in order to ensure exactness of the data collected. At the same time, as soon as each interview was finalised, supplemental field notes were taken to implement the data. Field notes are also very important to emphasis details that cannot be recorded or eventually transcribed.

Simultaneously, memoing was employed while analysing the data. Memoing involves creating reflective notes and thoughts linked to concepts and what I was learning from the data. Birks and Mills (2015, p. 11) advise that ‘Memo writing is an ongoing activity for grounded theorists as memos are generated from the very early stages of planning a study until its completion’. Indeed, Holton (2010, p. 32) explains the importance of memoing in CGT in the following way: ‘Memos are theoretical notes about the data and the conceptual connections between categories. The process runs parallel with the coding and analysis process to capture the researcher’s emergent ideation of substantive and theoretical codes and categories’. Thus, every time a thought, an idea or a reflection linked to the concept or related to the data was popping up into my head, I paused the analysis and instantaneously wrote a memo. The CGT package will lead to the achievement of the theory grounded on the data.
Sorting the memos is the key to formulating a theory and it is an essential step during the theoretical writing stage and as Glaser (1992, p. 109) states ‘It consists of sorting the memos in a theoretical outline in preparation for the writing stage’. Sorting is the last step before writing the theory. As previously mentioned, throughout this CGT study I have used a notebook to write my memos in order to record ideas and thoughts in relation to what was occurring. For me, a memo was normally a description or a certain event or the analysis of a concept. Sometimes it was the breakdown of an incident and the modification of the same concept many times. For example, the incidents that I initially labelled as “throwing into a context’ and ‘bridging the gap’ eventually became TRANSITIONING. Through sorting memos, the aim is to formulate the final theory that will be presented to others. At this point, the theoretical sorting of memos provides the organization of ideas and concepts that will fit in the emerging theory (Holton & Walsh, 2017; Glaser, 2002). During the sorting of the memos, I integrated the concepts with the memos while trying to find connections between memos, categories and the final core category.

At the same time, it was a way to self-reflect on the responses and new answers that made me reflect on unexpected or unknown reactions from the participants in the field. Memos were also written down during the study in order to document the dynamics during the research and also to record ideas and thoughts emerging throughout the process. Writing about this process, Goulding (2002, p. 75) notes that ‘These are vital as they provide a bank of ideas which can be revisited in order to map out the emerging theory. Essentially, memos are ideas which have been noted during the data collection process which help to reorientation the researcher at a later date’. Memos were also written down during a seminar I organized in 2018 in relation to the support service offered within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. (‘Professional boundaries between deaf/hearing clients and interpreters’). At the same time, the aim of the seminar was to introduce my research to the ISL/English interpreters who might have wanted to get involved and potentially be interviewed. I intently observed the interpreters during the seminar, their interaction and how they engaged among themselves. Everyone was interacting and asking questions in relation to their personal experience and sharing the same professionals’ issues. As Glaser states ‘All is data’
(Glaser, 1967; Glaser, 1998; Glaser, 2001) therefore an anonymous Feedback Form was made available to the attendees. At the end of the seminar, I collected the Feedback Forms and some of the comments submitted are listed below. It is important to note that this data does not form part of the dataset proper collected by me for the purpose of this study. However, as the feedback was provided anonymously and the content was extremely relevant to my research I thought it was important to mention them here.

‘It was good to learn from others’ experiences and discuss them.’

‘Great opportunity to think about how you would react in difficult situations.’
‘It has prepared me for future situations.’

‘I would like regular support.’

‘Really made me reflect on my practice.’

‘Learn about situations that I had never thought about before.’

‘More discussion based events, it is really beneficial to see others’ experiences’

‘Would love to attend regular events’

Anything collected from the field was included in this research, particularly anything directly from my participants. I used to keep a notebook where I could annotate anything emerging in any situation and time of the day. As Glaser states (1992) ‘...I defined memos as the theorizing write-up of ideas as they emerge, while coding categories, their properties and their theoretical codes. They are written up as they strike the analyst when constantly comparing, coding and analysing’ (p. 108). Often during the interviews, particular words used by participants would strike me as insightful, needing further scrutiny and were documented for future consideration. Interacting with different groups, colleagues and individuals in different settings often offered other perspectives and lines of reflection for the study. For instance, the concept of
SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM is one example of a ‘lightbulb’ moment. By considering the structure of a scaffold, we can link the participants responses when they discuss ways to BUILD-UP their career with their goal of PROGRESSING and FLOURISHING in the field of interpreting. In order to get to the top, you need to establish secure layers that work together and support the overall structure, as in the case and consideration involved when constructing a scaffold. This linked to the responses from the participants when they were talking about how to BUILD-UP their career with the aim of PROGRESSING and FLOURISHING in the field of interpreting. Memos are the process that enables the researcher to write down ideas and thoughts generated any time during the research. Glaser suggests stopping doing anything when the idea appears during the coding or any time during the research (Glaser, 1978; Urquhart, 2001; 2002).

2.8. Data Analysis

Within this section I will outline how CGT has been applied throughout this study. When applying CGT, the analysis of the data begins after the first interview has been completed. The initial analysis called open coding is used to break the data in order to compare incident to incident and start looking for similarities and differences. At this point, the researcher analyses data line-by-line and word-by-word and compare them to understand what is happening.

2.8.1. Open Coding

The initial phase of the analysis of the data starts with the open coding method. As soon as the first interview is completed, following a rigorous transcription, the open coding method is immediately applied. The open coding starts by fracturing data and analysing line-by-line and word-by-word each interview and compare incident-to-incident. The process of coding line-by-line and comparing incidents to other incidents in the data ensures that nothing will be missing.
‘During the open coding the data are broken down into incidents, to be closely examined and compared for similarities and differences while constantly asking...” What category or property does this incident indicate?” This question and open coding are the basic grounding approaches to the data and lead to emergent discoveries” (Glaser, 1992, p. 39).

At an early stage of the open coding, the analysis entails analysing everything in the interview transcribed. I focused on the analysis of incidents and compared the various incidents to each other. At the beginning of this procedure, I was looking for similarities and differences ‘...so that a pattern of many similar incidents can be given a conceptual name as a category, and dissimilar incidents can be given a name as a category, and dissimilar incidents can be given a name as a property of a category, and the compared incidents can be seen as interchangeable indices for the same concept’ (Glaser, 1992, p. 40). Indeed, Glaser (1967) recommends that when applying open coding, codes should be written on the margins of the interviews next to the line or on post-it. The pictures below show how I employed this task when applying CGT methodology to my data set.
These are examples of open coding during the line-by-line and word-by-word analysis, which consequently underpinned the development of codes and facilitated the comparison of them. The first picture shows the coding and fields notes written on their margin of the sentences. The second picture shows written post-it where similar incidents were collected in the same post-it under the same category. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) state, ‘Coding need consist only of noting categories on margins, but can be done more elaborate (e.g., on cards) ... while coding an incident for a category, compare it, with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category’ (p. 106). The line-by-line and word-by-word analysis stimulates more
abstract thinking and it aims at looking beyond the surface of the sentence and goes beyond and explores in depth the meaning.

The open coding method was applied immediately after each interview and incidents were added under the same category until saturation while labelling the main concepts. The coding is done at the same time data are collecting instead of at the end of the data collection. ‘Open coding is the process of breaking down the data into distinct units of meaning’ (Goulding, 2002, p. 76). As a result, 116 codes were initially generated through open coding process based on my data collection. While comparing fragments of data, as Glaser says, ‘The analyst codes for as many categories that might fit; he codes different incidences into as many categories as possible. New categories emerge and new incidences fit existing categories’ (1978, p. 56). During open coding the interviews are constantly compared to each other. As the researcher is not starting with a preconceived concern or an assumption that need to be verified, it is essential to stay focused and remember that the aim of CGT is to discover the main concern of the participants in the field and from there develop a theory that will help sort out the issue. ‘Open coding is the initial step of theoretical analysis that pertains to the initial discovery of categories and their properties...Open coding comes to an end when it yields a core category’ (Glaser, 1992, p. 39). After constantly coding and comparing, the focus was on the emerging concepts and eventually the main categories. Constant comparison was also continually applied to compare codes with other codes trying to link them with the focus on the main category.

2.8.2. Constant Comparison

The process of constant comparison is used in CGT with the aim of generating conceptual categories. The aim of constant comparison is to identify the patterns throughout the consistent procedure of coding and comparing the collected data while integrating them under conceptual categories. Categories are referred to as being theoretically saturated when these concepts fit and are clearly explained (Glaser, 1998; Birks & Mills, 2015). ‘We refer to constant comparative method as comparing data to
data, and then concepts to more data, to further saturate and integrate categories and their properties.’ (Glaser, 1992, p. 56). During constant comparison, incidents are compared to other incidents and consequently the category with its properties emerged. Once the category appears, the category is then compared to other incidents and then a new category will emerge and that category will then be compared to other categories. Constant comparison is carried out simultaneously with open coding and it starts immediately after the first collection of data. I was applying simultaneous tasks of open coding and constant comparison while collecting more data. Every time I was facilitated a new interview; I could compare the similarities and differences already between interviews. I was hesitant thinking of starting without having a preconceived concern or idea to verify. I was concerned I was not going to find out what the main concern was or that I would have misinterpreted the data. Glaser suggests that (1992) ‘...if [one] has the patience and trust to allow emergence, the code will slowly become relevant and fit and will begin to work and eventually saturate!’ (p. 45). Fig. 2-3 below is a practical example of how constant comparison was employed in this study. By constantly comparing incidents to incidents, concepts began to emerge facilitating the move towards comparison across concepts.
While engaging in constant comparison, I was still interviewing the participants and simultaneously completing open coding of new interview data. In some cases, new incidents were arising from new interviews and therefore new categories emerged. During this phase, as the picture shows, I was trying to identify the main categories with the aim of identifying the core category (Hallberg, 2006). By constantly comparing the categories and properties, the objective was to condense the same categories and properties until the number of categories decreases. ‘The analyst starts by coding each incident in his data into as many categories of analysis as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerge that fit an existing category’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 105). I was really apprehensive, as I did not want to eliminate the main categories that would have led me to the core category.

The process of constant comparison involves the analysis of the emerging concepts and continually refines the labels and their position under the categories. ‘Constant comparison is defined as the process of constantly comparing instances of
data that you have labelled as signifying or belonging to a particular category to see if these categories fit and are workable’ (Urquhart, 2013, p. 182). This process entails the constant review of the data and it starts immediately after the first interview. The benefit of constant comparison is that the resultant theory will be consistent with the empirical data and grounded on the data collected. Constant comparison methodology allowed for categories to emerge and allowed me to find links among them. Following this process, eventually the main categories emerged. I was reviewing the data persistently until filtering and focusing on the main categories and eventually move to selective coding. Through selective coding, the objective is to extrapolate the main categories and recognise the links between them and discover the relationship to each other.

2.8.3. Selective Coding

Selective coding follows open coding, and is the stage where the coding and the constant comparison focus on the categories that relate most closely to the main core category. At this point, the aim is to saturate the categories and identify connections that have emerged with respect to the main core category (Gibson & Hartman, 2013). It is extremely important that at this stage of CGT categories make connections and are relevant with the aim to identify the main category and subsequently generating the theory (Urquhart, 2013).

At this point, my main focus was on discovering the main category and the main concern as well as the relationships that held among the main categories and properties. ‘Since the theory must be grounded, verifying its fit and relevance requires patience in going over and over the data to be sure it works with ease, before a secure investment is take in selective coding for a focus on a core variable’ (Glaser, 1978, p. 61). Qualitative research is recursive in nature. In working through my data set, I was aware of the main category and the main concern but it took me a while to conceptualise the main categories and therefore the core category. In each category, I had properties with the same occurrence but it took a while to label each main category based on the properties that were central to each of them (Glaser, 2002). It was not easy to identify the core
category that would represent the pattern of behaviour of the participants. ‘The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour which is relevant and problematic for those involved’ (Glaser, 1992, p. 75). Over time, however, it became clear that the core category was FLOURISHING. From NAVIGATING, I moved to COMPASSING THE CAREER TRAJECTORY but other properties were showing the lack of structure in COMPASSING the career. After this concept, COMPASSING IN A PROACTIVE PATHWAY emerged but I was still not sure it was the one. This process of working towards a resolution with respect to the core component of the theory is something that Glaser has commented on. He notes, ‘In grounded theory, the focus is on accounting for, with continuous resolving of, a problematic situation with a theory. This theory hinges on a core category which accounts for most of the variation in the problematic pattern’ (Glaser, 1992, p. 76). Selective coding was very challenging but also the most crucial part as it is the stage where the researcher must identify the core category that will be integral part of the final theory.

While carrying out selective coding, I felt like I was constantly ‘sieving’ categories and properties. The picture below shows the main categories and properties I have been coding throughout this phase. The core category fits the behaviour pattern from their responses. The core category of the study will emerge from the meaning coming up by constant comparing the data.
Figure 2-4: 'Sieving' categories and subcategories for the discovery of the core category.
As Glaser says (2010) ‘Data go to concepts, and concepts get transcended to a core variable, which is the main underlying pattern...the research keeps comparing and trying to figure out what is going on and what the latent patterns are’ (p. 7). Simultaneously, I had to keep in mind to think theoretically and apply theoretical coding.

2.8.4. Theoretical Coding

Glaser (1978) states that the theoretical coding stage is an incredibly important part of CGT as the researcher is establishing the connections between codes and if the codes have no links, there is no theory at the end of the research. As Urquhart (2013) also says ‘So, theoretical coding is when we relate the codes to each other and look at the nature of the relationships between codes. This is what builds the theory’ (p. 26). I continued to utilise constant comparison during the theoretical coding stage, while also including reference to notes made during the interview process. I reached the point where I had three main categories STARTING-UP – GEARING-UP - BRANCHING-OUT that were included in the theoretical framework of the initial draft of the theory that I developed. This subsequently evolved into the theory that I call PROFESSIONALISING IN FREELANCE ECOSYSTEM. This process is in line with that described by Holton and Walsh (2017, p. 115), who note:

‘Once the core category has emerged, having identified those concepts that bear some relationship to the core and having theoretically sampled to saturate the core and related concepts, the analyst is ready to begin the process of theoretical coding as the final shaping of the emergent theory’.

The picture below illustrates the phase were the main aim was to narrow down the concepts and get closer to the main categories which could be linked to each other and eventually to the core category.
The above picture illustrates the point at which the main concern and the core category became apparent, but I required further work on the appropriate labels to attach to the three main categories. As Glaser states “…a concept is the naming of an emergent social pattern grounded in the research data’ (2002, p. 24). These three stages became distinct upon a professional timeline, but required further examination in order to identify their key characteristics before assigning appropriate labels. This was the last stage before the theoretical sampling, the stage wherein I needed to name the main concern, the core category and the three main stages.
‘A core category pulls together all the strands in order to offer an explanation of the behaviour under study. It has theoretical significance and its development should be traceable back through the data. This is usually when the theory is written up and integrated with existing theories to show relevance and new perspective’ (Goulding, 2002, p. 88).

Once completed, the theoretical coding and therefore the main concern and theory emerged. Next, I wanted to test the theory by applying theoretical sampling to understand if the work was relevant and made sense. The theoretical framework I presented was entirely grounded on the emergent categories and eventually confirmed by the theoretical sampling process.

2.8.5. Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling helped inform me of the data that next needed to be collected in order to confirm the emerging theory and decide how best to outline the emerging concepts for possible future data collection (Holton 2008). The intention was to have additional samples to confirm the emerging theory. Theoretical sampling was the most appropriate method to sample the outcomes of this study. As Glaser states (1978) ‘The analyst who uses theoretical sampling cannot know in advance precisely what to sample for and where it will lead him.’ Instead, this becomes clear, “Only as he discovers codes and tries to saturate them by looking for comparison groups...’ (p. 37). As I did not have time to start a second collection of data, I applied theoretical sampling by engaging with a significant number of sign language interpreters from across Europe and further afield at the 2018 conference of the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli). At the efsli conference, I presented a poster on my research in progress. Here, I explained my grounded theory to the conference participants and illustrated the three stages that had emerged from my study. I completed an audience poll asking them ‘Do the three stages reflect your own professional experience?’ The picture below shows that most of the participants who engaged with the poster say that they too went through the three stages: STARTING-UP, GEARING-UP, BRANCHING-OUT during
their professional career. Sign language interpreters who answered ‘YES’ were all self-employed professional interpreters. Only two participants answered ‘NO’. Notably, they were both employees, working for companies on a full-time basis rather than working as freelancers. This suggests that there are different concerns that hold for interpreters who are in employment versus those who are freelancers. In this way, we can agree with Glaser’s point that theoretical sampling ‘… extends the power of the emerging theory’ (Glaser, 2001, p. 169). The theoretical sampling phase thus gave me the opportunity to present my findings to a wider audience and to explore the experience of other sign language interpreters in other countries practicing in the same field. The poster presentation at the efsli conference was extremely beneficial as it confirmed that the emerging theory I had been developing resonated with professionals in the field, who confirmed that it not only fit, but was relevant and would work. Holton (2008) also states that the researcher needs to identify the next source of data in order to confirm the emerged theory and the question that should be asked during the theoretical sampling is ‘...to what groups or subgroups does one turn next in data collection and for what theoretical sampling?’ (p. 55).

![Audience Poll](image)

**Figure 2-6: Theoretical sampling at efsli 2018 conference.**

After completing the theoretical sampling of my outcomes and, having received confirmation that the categories that had emerged were relevant to freelance interpreters both here in Ireland and further afield, I started the writing-up process and prepared the final instantiation of my theory.
2.9. Summary

In this chapter, I illustrated the methodology applied for this study. In this chapter, I have presented the steps undertaken when using CGT. I employed this methodology by following CGT methods accurately and appropriately. The CGT methodology was very effective as the main concern and the core category of this study emerged without forcing the data. In the next chapter, I will illustrate the categories and the final theory emerged by using CGT. CGT aims at discovering the main concern of the participants, the core category and the sub-categories (Glaser, 2001). The categories are then compared to other categories with the aim to conceptualize them appropriately and find a relationship among them. I identified patterns of behaviour where interpreters had to face certain issues in the working field and how they were seeking for improvement and solutions.
3. Chapter 3 - Professionalising in a Freelance Eco-System Theory

3.1. Overview of the theory

The primary focus of this CGT study is to generate a theory that identifies the main concern of ISL/English interpreters who have just embarked or are about to embark on their career path and those with extensive experience in the field. This study is built on data from eleven face-to-face semi-structured interviews and an interview with a focus group of five students in their fourth (final) year of interpreting studies. The result of applying CGT methodology to this cohort was the emergence of the main concern and the theory presented in this chapter. The main concern that emerged from the interviews with ISL/English interpreters who participated in this study is the UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY that they encounter across their working lives as they NAVIGATE the new unfamiliar FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. This concern persists and participants report uncertainty when they NAVIGATE the new and unknown FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM particularly when they are about to enter the real world (focus group) and as soon as they enter the professional field.

Throughout their professional career, ISL/English interpreters may practice their profession in many different settings. It is often felt at the beginning of their careers, that every interpreting assignment is unique, and (given their limited experience to date), that each job they take on is different from their previous job. This sense of constantly dealing with diverse and challenging interpreting assignments can continue for quite some time. In education, lecturers have different styles of teaching and students have different styles/experience of learning, with the result that these two aspects can create minor or even major differences from job to job. In medical and legal every case and the setting (issue and people) vary all the time. It might become more regular; when the interpreter works for the same course for several years but at the beginning it can vary every time.
Participants talk about having to handle the unknown and expecting the unexpected: ‘You are never aware of the full situation before you go in .... There is always something that will just pop up’ (Participant 4). Working as a freelancer means working for different agencies in different locations. Freelance interpreters develop certain strategies that will guide them during their formative period and the working experiences will facilitate enormously the journey from theory to practice. The professional dynamics of this practice will help them to shape their identity and equip them with knowledge and different skills needed to practice in the field (Bown, 2013). The context where they practice can vary and depending on the topic, setting, Deaf and hearing people attending a specific event. The interpreter applies what he/she has learnt in college and at the same time adapting to the context to the unfamiliar environment. It is not going to the same work place every day but every day it changes ‘...as an interpreter, one of the things, you can be anywhere, you can be in any situation...I just have to learn by doing it, this has been a big challenge...If for example you get dropped in a work meeting where there have been a regular interpreter and then you go and have to replace the interpreter. There is terminology that the interpreter would have known and you don’t...if you don’t have the context, this is an issue for me. My ears cannot make sense of it’ (Participant 2). The progression of this profession goes hand-in-hand with the experiential learning by conducting the job.

Based on the data collected for this study, interpreters enter this profession with the aim of flourishing and developing a solid freelance career although an individual’s career trajectory may vary based on the individual interpreters’ motivations and goals. Interestingly, participants consistently compared their situations as freelancers against that of those with employment contracts within organisations rather than with other freelance professions. As a result, they made reference to the fact that in traditional employment environments, employees new to an organisation experience a phase of orientation and induction. They follow instruction from managers and have a cohort of colleagues to engage with. They have a path of progression open to them. These conditions are perceived to be typically not available to freelance interpreters. There is a general perception that the lack of visible and outlined support services is not at their disposal. In a freelance eco-system, the career pathway and the progression towards
goals can be different for every single individual although the core category in this study is common to the participants: FLOURISHING. Such FLOURISHING is happening differently depending on their personal experience. Based on the data in this study, interpreters seem to PROGRESS along the same pathway although the development of each individual varies based on the professional experience and the goals that they want to achieve.

The theory presented here, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, seeks to explain what participants experience as they move through several points of TRANSITIONING; moving initially from college to the workplace, and ultimately, on the pathway to develop a life-long FREELANCE career. The theoretical framework presented hereafter these key transitions points that ISL/English interpreters work through their career journey STARTING-UP – GEARING-UP – BRANCHING-OUT (SGB theoretical framework). The findings are illustrated by quotes selected from participant interviews.

In contrast, participants reported that they, as freelancers, work mostly on their own which is a state when TRANSITIONING from college to the real world. It is recognised as a considerable milestone for students with little knowledge of FREELANCING and with very limited experience as professionals due to the fact that for most of them it is going to be their first professional experience as qualified interpreters. They are not attached to just one organisation and, as a result, have no opportunity for orientation or induction within any given institution where they work. Instead, by NAVIGATING their new field, they look for information needed. As Participant 2 states, ‘How do you – practically - open the door and step through? Day one, what do you do?’ As freelancers, interpreters do not have managers, per se, though they do report to the agency that booked them. The interpreters commented heavily on the lack of clarity around the TRANSITIONING from college to a FREELANCING career and later on the lack of clarity on how to keep PROGRESSING as a freelancer towards a successful career. At the beginning of the career, the pathway is FLUCTUATING and in some circumstances limited due to the lack of experience and limited knowledge. They start with the aim of SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM towards a PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM.
Participants repeatedly pointed out the need for GUIDANCE and MENTORING once they had completed college and commenced their new career. For example, one interpreter noted that ‘I feel like a drop in the ocean, I feel lost when I get there. It would be nice to have an anchor’ (Participant from focus group). By NAVIGATING and PEERING, ISL/English interpreters try to figure out what they need when starting to work as a freelancer and what other aspects this profession entails in order to practice it towards a successful FREELANCING career. Participant 4 noted that, ‘It is a funny thing when you become an interpreter; it is so confusing. When am I ready to take this kind of work? You are by yourself, you are now a freelancer. You don’t know what your actual career is and it is not that simple’. Life in the field is always different compared to life as a student in college. It is crucial to have the appropriate SUPPORT and NETWORKING, in order to be able to ask for information and develop the knowledge and skills indispensable for their new professional IDENTITY and new role in life.

3.2. The WINDING STAIR of ISL/English Interpreters

The theory PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM is defined by the three stages abovementioned STARTING-UP – GEARING-UP – BRANCHING-OUT (SGB Model). The idea of FLOURISHING is characterised by the ability of interpreters to follow a structured career path with the aim of PROGRESSING and MASTERING their FREELANCING career. The three stages are situated in a WINDING STAIR as they are strictly related to each other but also the actual process of career development advances through oscillation within the three stages. Sign language interpreters aim at thriving in the field and EQUIP themselves with new skills and knowledge within each stage while moving upwards.
The three main categories were conceptualised after grouping together the facets of data, incidents with the same properties under each category. Each stage and each category includes various sub-categories, which emerged from experiences and concerns from the participants. Each category (stage) is extensively explained and each category has an impact on the other categories and the connections between them developed the emergent theory.

The interpreters start from the first stage (STARTING-UP), NAVIGATING their way in their new career while trying to develop the knowledge and the skills they need in this first stage, which equips them to PROGRESS to stage 2, GEARING-UP and moving towards stage 3 BRANCHING-OUT. The pathway is illustrated as a WINDING STAIR as the career trajectory is not a linear sequence, but rather an upwards spiral. While PROGRESSING upwards there are aspects that need to be undertaken in order to PROGRESS towards a more successful career in the field. BENCHMARKING the steps and analyse the key aspects within each stage would assist freelancer interpreters and other professionals and
entities involved in the ECO-SYSTEM to tackle certain requirements. The three stages provide a framework that allows us to review professional progress over time. Each stage contains developmental factors leading towards an independent career.

Furthermore, this exploratory study emphasizes the stages interpreters go through as they develop on their career trajectory with respect to their main concern. The goal of CGT is to develop a theory grounded on the data emerged from the participants within this study. PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM theory emerged from the data collected from the participants within this study. The SGB Model illustrates the three main stages ISL/English interpreters go through when start to work in the field while aiming at FOURISHING towards a successful career.

3.3. The Push and Pull Factors

Push and pull factors are dynamics employed consciously and unconsciously by people in relation to decisions in life. The push and pull factors allow us to analyse a certain position that can change, improve or stay the same as the situation develops. Pull factors are those that draw people towards a decision or profession, while push factors are those that drive one away from it. Within this study, ISL/English interpreters reference these aspects of their profession and the effects of factors that have already impacted their careers or may do so in the future. It is important to mention that at the time of the study, no participant voiced an intention to leave the interpreting field but all noted that a more STRUCTURED CAREER pathway would help them attain a state of FOURISHING. The push and pull factors that surfaced during this study reflected the interpreters’ full experience of the profession and how aspects can impact both their professional and personal lives. The TRANSITION from student to self-employed empties the diary that the graduate must now fill and from which they must earn a wage. These proactive and intersocial requirements exert additional pressure on already mentally and emotionally draining experiences. Participants in this study universally expressed their love for the profession and their desire to FLOURISH, with the objective to practice
within the field for a long time. The figure below illustrates some of the push and pull factors that form the basis of their professional decisions.

Figure 3-2: Push and Pull factors.

During the interviews, many of the push factors that emerged relate to a lack of guidance and an inability to benchmark progress. As this makes it more difficult to clarify a freelance interpreter’s current status, available options or ways to record and review their career progression, many expressed an ongoing anxiety regarding the uncertainty around the job security that lies within their profession. There are internal and external concerns when practicing a FREELANCING profession as the individual needs the control
over the professional field such as receiving enough work or make sure EQUIPPING their profession with profitable skills. Interpreters were also concerned about STAGNATING in the same setting which without peer guidance, professional advice or networking opportunities can be difficult to avoid. PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM with the aim of ADVANCING personally and professionally requires an appreciation of these factors by not only graduates and professionals but others associated within interpreting circles. As the models and study within this field become more comprehensive, the aim of the model is that factors be removed from the push side of the scales and more added to the pull.

Push factors play a part throughout the career path, at different times, taking on different characteristics as professional goals seek ways for advancement. STAGNATING occurs when interpreters remain in their comfort zone, without challenging themselves or seeking out a broader range of experience. This was not the case for the participants in this study, though other studies on freelance work has confirmed this issue occurs (Nabi et al., 2010; Rozanes, 2014; Stott et al., 2014). Participants in this study were committed to the goal of PROGRESSING and SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM through gaining experience in different settings to more fully understand the avenues open to them and also increase the potential for additional employment. The resulting model is to work towards reducing push factors leading to interpreters leaving the field and either create or update pull factors that would encourage them to strive for a PERSISTING and successful career in the interpreting community.

In summation, the objective of the study was to develop a theory that would interpret how ISL/English interpreters appreciate, address and resolve the requirements and concerns shared by fellow peers within this unique professional environment. PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM is the theory of how the primary concerns of the freelance interpreter need constant attention. PROACTIVE engagement in outlook and approach is necessary to communicate, negotiate and perform in a professional manner to further one’s course along a successful freelance career pathway. In the next section, I will explain the insights that emerged during the interviews and the patterns of behaviour that were generated as a consequence. Each concept or pattern that emerged
from the data was compared with previous research in order to shape the core category of this study.

3.4. Stage one: STARTING-UP

3.4.1. Overview

Earlier in this chapter, we pointed out that there are three stages of progression that interpreters work through in their careers. These can be recursive, which is why we use the metaphor of the WINDING STAIR to describe how interpreters progress between stages. At each stage of progression, there are skills that need to be developed and improved in order to progress forward (and upwards). Having completed their formal education, the transition from college to work life was identified as a considerable milestone. Interpreters in this study talked about being thrown into the deep end in a work-related context that it is pretty new to them. Newly graduated interpreters explain having to deal with a new and unfamiliar environment when entering the field. We discuss this initial TRANSITIONING in the section below.

3.4.2. TRANSITIONING

TRANSITIONING involves moving from a comfort zone (university) where there are tutors, lecturers, instructors, peers, university/peer support services and mentors to becoming an independent and autonomous practitioner where there is a clearly articulated need for support for new and experienced interpreters alike. For example, participants commented on how they have had to resolve the shift from having access to detailed feedback on their interpreting performances while in college, to having none when they begin to work [ISOLATING]:

‘For four years, they are interpreting and they get very detailed feedback, they have a tutor, they need to watch this, they need to improve on that. It is very structured. When they start working, they don’t get that...’ (Participant 5).
Freelance interpreters report that, in the absence of clear career trajectories, they network and collaborate with peers to provide a de facto career framework. This entails planning for progression including consideration of skill development for like-minded groups. The concern is not only about aspects of interpreting practice, but also about their professional development and progress in a range of different situations that interpreters will find themselves in.

TRANSITIONING from being a student to being a professional freelance interpreter marks the beginning of a new journey. Starting a new business requires the development of additional skills and information and this is reflected in the main concern of participants, whose focus was the lack of a structured trajectory and the need for guidance for new entrants to the field of interpreting:

‘I think it is hard when you start with your first job, you are by yourself, you are going from this lovely sheltered environment and you have been on placement... I think there should be more [of a] transition period and then have still that support’ (Participant 4).

Building up experience will enhance and increase the freelancers’ knowledge and skills in order to master them and integrate them in their daily practice. Such a supportive eco-system can be an important element for students that would provide support and motivation during their learning career:

‘Because there is so much we don’t know, so much. You go from being a student to being a freelancer, a self-employed sign language interpreter that is like worlds apart. And you are on your own and there is no sign of team interpreting jobs. They are not there so you don’t have another more experienced person to call upon. Maybe you don’t have that many connections outside your little class crew within the interpreting world’ (Participant 4).

On completion of interpreter training, graduates enter the market as freelancers. Given that, this initial stage, of moving into the interpreting field is labelled STARTING-UP.
This label applies because it resonates with the idea of starting up a new initiative; it is the first step for interpreters embarking on their career as ISL/English interpreter.

3.4.3. **SELF-REFLECTING**

The focus at the beginning of interpreting careers is on the establishment of a professional identity. This process of TRANSITIONING from life as a student to life as a freelancer necessitates figuring out the skills they need to handle the management of their business, for example, managing their finances. TRANSITIONING requires the novice interpreter to identify that there is a gap in their knowledge, which requires SELF-REFLECTING, and the capacity to find a way to bridge that gap by RESPONSING in effective ways, which, in turn, allows them to start NAVIGATING the systems, structures, and indeed interpreting environments they encounter or must respond to. SELF-REFLECTING about their experiences in relation to their daily life and what skills and knowledge they need to develop in order to follow the career path. At the same time, SELF-REFLECTING may also assist in focusing on how to resolve and tackle certain incidents if no support is provided. This approach also helps interpreters to understand that in certain situations they need to MASTER what they have at their disposal such as SELF-REFLECTING, PEERING and NETWORKING. For example, one participant said:

‘Yes, I hugely struggled, I really did. It took me forever to find out... I ended up getting an accountant because I was not able to do it by myself because I don’t have the knowledge... I really think it should be taught in your degree. We are taught to be interpreters - we are not taught to be self-employed’ (Participant 1).

Further, the fact that novice interpreters were trying to figure out what they should do in this initial phase was experienced as OVERWHELMING:

‘Stop, stop, stop. I tried to register for tax as a sole trader. Stop the lights! I didn’t know how to find an accountant, I didn’t know what’s normal to pay for an accountant, the kind of services that I needed... it’s dehumanizing, it’s demoralizing, it’s overwhelming’ (Participant 2).
This demonstrates how interpreters navigate TRANSITIONING into their new role. Beyond figuring out the financial management and handling negative emotional feelings as they TRANSITION, there are also issues associated with the fact that freelance work does not come with a clear structure of induction and support. Participants noted, “If you are in structured employment, you have induction training, you have all of this.” (Participant 7). Further, TRANSITIONING also means adjusting to the fact that the ‘real world’ is not the same as the more sheltered space that interpreters experienced in university. The same participant (P7) remarked, “I know you have the training in college but it is not the real world. It is a safe environment”.

In order to resolve their main concern, interpreters try to NAVIGATE the new field, but because of the lack of a structured trajectory, practitioners approach their cohort and peers when they need support or guidance related to their profession or for any particular assignment. ‘My support is in my peers, especially my groups and more and more outside my group. There is definitely very good collegial support when you work with people. It goes both ways, I would like to see it more structured’ (Participant 3). This career path is definitely a unique trajectory compared to working within a more well-knit organization or a company, which is evidenced by this statement above. It also means that graduates have to be far more self-regulated and motivated when exploring their future professional field in a FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. It was a common observation comparing their FREELANCING career with traditional employment settings. However, it is essential to mention that the career of a freelancer is mostly self-structured. By saying this, graduates would like to identify a more structured career pathway throughout their journey. The perception is that they would like to identify a more structured pathway that would provide more support and guidance when bridging the gap between college and workplace.

Newly qualified practitioners report that they mostly work alone and feel alone as they try to figure out their new, unfamiliar work environment. Professionally, their work can be ISOLATING. As a result, complete novice interpreters (with 0 - 1 year experience) report that they often have to figure things out by themselves: ‘You have to find a lot of things by yourself. Learn how to be self-employed. You are on your own until
you, yourself, look for something like a training programme’ (Participant 1). In this fashion, interpreters beginNavigating their work environment, and mostly, they do this on their own or by asking their peers from the same cohort. More experienced interpreters also recall their earlier experiences as a novice and how they started byNavigating and Self-Reflecting while learning the profession. It was interesting to observe that despite 15/20 years of experience; experienced interpreters still remember the complexity of Transitioning in a very small and Isolated environment.

It is a common challenge for interpreters to go through the transition and try to plan their own career, and this challenge is further complicated by the need to set up a professional identity and an independent business with very little experience and limited support.

Self-Reflecting is an important aspect when the same individual has the duty to self-assess their own situation while Learning the profession and for the development of knowledge and skills. As some participants stated in this study, they apply Self-Reflection and assess their outcomes after each assignment to understand and evaluate themselves. On top of that, Mentoring and Validating should be integrated when working on Building-Up their new and inexperienced career. Key questions arising include – how does a novice interpreter begin to navigate their career path? How do they figure out the goals that they need to set? How do they plan to achieve them? These are questions that have been considered by many of the participants:

‘There is a need for the new interpreters - during their first and second year out - to have someone to have a conversation with [as] your mentor…. You want to know that you are doing well but you have no one with an expert eye looking at how you are doing. If you don’t have that at all, you don’t know what you are doing.’ (Participant 5).

They also feel that they now lack a Validating presence to advise on their performance and/or decisions that they have made professionally. To resolve this, novice interpreters revert to their peers from college and/or seek out a more experienced interpreter who serves this function for them. Novice interpreters want to
be less isolated in an area where they can share knowledge, resources and information that will support and assist them in their career trajectory. They do this by navigating most of the time within their peers and some of them by eventually starting to broaden up their community of interpreters. This process is not ‘pain-free’, but demands that the novice interpreter also engages with new processes (e.g. systems associated with being self-employed) and practices (e.g. preparing invoices for payment, preparing finances for return to Revenue):

‘You focus on interpreting skills and maybe later on you might get skills how to be self-employed how to liaise with the clients. This is really hard as you don’t get training’ (Participant 5).

During the transition and within this first phase, novice interpreters and also more experienced interpreters report that getting mentoring at the beginning of any career can be extremely beneficial for several reasons.

3.4.4. Mentoring

New interpreters as well as experienced ones recognise the complexity of starting to work as freelancers with very limited support, experience and knowledge. All the participants involved highlighted the importance of mentoring from the beginning of their interpreting career onwards. Other studies demonstrated that it is necessary to have someone to call upon or rely on at the beginning and also later on particularly when working independently and there is so much unknown. As a matter of fact, mentoring was one of the concepts most surfaced from the data collected from the most novice interpreters to the more experienced practitioners.

‘I would love mentoring so much. Oh my gosh. When I started interpreting, there is another interpreter in my class, we called each other every single day, because every day we didn’t really know what was going to happen...because there is so much you don’t know’ (Participant 4).
There was consensus amongst the participants that life in the field is always different to their college experience. When starting a new career, the new professionals are mostly knowledgeable with theory-based experience. Once in the field, their knowledge from college can be applied and shaped in each situation and by each new experience. MENTORING is an important element in BRIDGING the gap as they transition from formal education to what is expected from a professional. The concept of MENTORING has been included in the first stage of the model, although MENTORING is referenced across the three stages – the need for it does not end after the first stage. More experienced interpreters consider MENTORING a very important element for the PROGRESSION of the career and they still have the need to interact with other experienced professionals. ‘Having a mentor is definitely important for advices, knowledge, and experience, to let people know that they are doing things ok’ (Participant 7).

A key concept emerged from the interviews suggesting that implementing MENTORING is one way to assist sign language interpreters during their career trajectory. ‘There is a need for new interpreters during their first year and second year out, to have someone, to have a conversation with your mentor’ (Participant 5). In many fields, MENTORING is considered a significant element for novice professionals and also involves experienced professionals, so that the novice can develop new skills and progress in their career path (Delk, 2013).

As interpreters gain experience and knowledge through their working lives and the interpreting assignments they accept, they may often question whether they are PROGRESSING, if they need to improve certain aspects of their profession. VALIDATING is a crucial factor for most novice graduates, as they want to know and make sure they are practicing their new role properly and correctly. Who is telling me that I am doing the right job? Who is telling me that I have interpreted correctly? Who is telling me that I should have done it in a different way? They need to know that they are doing well but they also want feedback that can help them to improve. Team interpreting opportunities offer the only occasions when they co-work with another interpreter and have the opportunity to discover where they need to invest more time and effort and identify what are their current strengths. At the beginning of their careers, interpreters depend
largely on external validation of their work, but with more experience, an interpreter can develop the ability to internally assess themselves.

Interpreters recognised the importance of having a mentor during their placements in college (4 weeks in their third year, 8 in their fourth year) and the experiential learning arising from watching more experienced practitioners, constructive debriefing at the end of each work, the essential input and the benefits of working with a second interpreter at the beginning of a career. Interpreters value the opportunity to work and learn with a mentor which is extremely essential for shaping their identity, as stated by the quote below, 'I feel when you can pick really bad habits with interpreting in the first little while because you are not really sure what you are doing... and then they continue to be bad habits further on. It is a snowball. Oh Lucia, mentoring!' (Participant 4).

Some of the more experienced interpreters remember how significant it was to have an informal mentor (there were no formal mentors at the time). 'I was really lucky that I could shadow interpreters. I was by myself, I don’t know if I would have coped the same way I did and it is still difficult’ (Participant 7). Mentoring was recognised as an effective way to provide support to interpreters, although it is not the only issue required to support the process of transitioning successfully into a freelance-interpreting career. Nowadays, the situation has changed. Students from CDS have mentors who are practising interpreters when they are on work placement in their 3rd and 4th year of studies on the Bachelor in Deaf Studies (interpreting strand). Mentoring is part of the peer support service offered by Bridge Interpreting Ltd. when students are placed during their internship. Once starting to work as a freelancer interpreter, mentoring is not officially provided by the agencies or any other entities. Novice interpreters express the desire of having a mentor at the beginning of their career. On the other side, more experienced interpreters also mention the importance of mentoring but at the same time the need of having a more structured mentorship programme to train and become official mentors and possibly remunerated.
At the moment, PEER MENTORING is the way to feed forward and the way to move forward. It is not only the students to be in the journey but other people and entities should be involved. The aim is to pair a more experienced interpreter with a student, as this is their first, real approach with the real world outside college. Students from the focus group recognised the importance of ENGAGING with their mentor and with other interpreters while on placement. The need is to have a sense of belonging and create a structured support, as at the beginning of the journey they are not really aware where to go for support. During placement, they have this ‘anchor’, the mentor assigned for the period of time of work placement, which they can contact and debrief. Building an active ECO-SYSTEM as students and novice interpreters are struggling during the TRANSITIONING. It is a form of acquiring knowledge and learning new skills through observing, shadowing and asking questions in real life.

‘The mentoring in Bridge is just brilliant because you always could go back. She was able to give me feedback and the more we went on, she was giving me more opportunity to sign and could see the progress during the week’ (Focus group).

At the same time, the more experienced interpreters recognise the need for a formal mentorship programme that would be designed to prepare and provide the appropriate skills for experienced interpreters to be able to work as a formal mentor for newcomer interpreters. ‘A mentoring programme for mentors would be excellent. Every time I have had a student, I am talking about coping mechanism, coping strategies, linguistic ethical, emotional, I try to give some structure on it’ (Participant 7). Because of the lack of an official support system, normally interpreters approach their own peers and cohort interpreters.

This sense of being on your own for newcomers to the profession is reinforced by the fact that they have limited experience to draw on when making decisions. Indeed, most of their decisions depend on the limited experiences they had in the interpreting field while they were students, but in that context, they had access to more experienced interpreters and mentors back in the university. That is, there is a perception that every job is different. For example, the key stakeholders (hearing and deaf) whom the
interpreter works with may differ from booking to booking. The topic that is under
discussion (i.e. which the interpreter must interpret) varies in terms of complexity. This
degree of variability in the demands of the workplace is seen as highly challenging,
particularly for those new to the field as they have limited experience and potentially
limited life experience relative to the domains that they are now working in.

At the beginning of their career, PEERING with the same colleagues from their
cohort group is the first strategy novice interpreters apply when looking for support or
when they feel they need to increase their knowledge in a particular area of practice.
Most novice interpreters are not NETWORKING with more experienced interpreters
because they still do not know them well. NETWORKING increases when they start working
more and when they are teamed with other interpreters in other settings. ‘At the
moment, it is very informal. I am in a lucky situation, I am surrounded by people that can
help me but I feel for interpreters in the future ... that are not as lucky as me, maybe they
are quieter, they are shy ‘I don’t want to bother anyone’ (Participant 4). Becoming
members of CISLI is another strategy adopted to expand their network. By meeting more
experienced interpreters and NETWORKING within the ECO-SYSTEM, it is crucial to move to
the next stage GEARING-UP.

3.4.5. PEERING

At the beginning, PEERING is the strategy applied by most of the novice
interpreters ‘...we just didn’t know who to contact so we just contacted each other and
try to work it out between us. Then as my connection grew, I was able to develop my
network a bit further than my class’ (Participant 4). They start by mostly contacting
graduates from their cohort from university and gradually engage in NETWORKING with
more experienced interpreters, as this is perceived as important and something that will
nourish their development. Contacting more experienced interpreters is considered a
resource and a support available in case they need advice regarding certain issues
encountered in the field.
All graduates reach the point where more experience and additional skills are needed to keep climbing the WINDING STAIR. Throughout the first stage, they tend to interact with their peers from their cohort group. Most of the participants do not feel comfortable contacting other interpreters or more experienced interpreters they do not really know or have been in contact with. BROADENING the scope and the NETWORKING is not occurring straightaway but through the interaction with other interpreters at CISLI events and when they start team interpreting and engage with more colleagues. Some graduates take six months, some others more because of personal circumstances such as family, some feel they need more time before moving to new areas, some start very slowly and some are more PROACTIVE and GEARING-UP is the next stage they want to move in.

3.5. Stage two: GEARING-UP

3.5.1. Overview

After six to twelve months in the field, interpreters realize that the need to improve their skills and move forwards and upwards as well as to broaden the scope of settings within the field. The second stage of the model is GEARING-UP. Within this stage participants want to acquire more skills and knowledge, want to EQUIP themselves with more experience that would develop more learning skills. Using the experience for learning in order to PROGRESS in the field. They are aware that they need to up skill and practice their profession in several settings with the aim to be able to learn and therefore to increase in interpreting assignments. Within GEARING-UP, properties are illustrated to demonstrate what is occurring within this second stage and how to keep FLOURISHING.

3.5.2. NETWORKING

NETWORKING commences from work placement in the third year of their programme and continues in their fourth year. Work placement should also be an opportunity for students to getting to know interpreters practicing in the field and build
relationships. When on work placement, the focus is on the practical aspect of the profession although, they need to know that other factors can be developed that will be essential when entering the field such as NETWORKING. The importance of NETWORKING is clear, not only from a social perspective, but it is also beneficial for career and professional growth and success.

As data suggested NETWORKING should not only be among cohort but it is recognised to be extremely beneficial when working as a self-employed professional by ENGAGING more experienced interpreters or institutional structures. NETWORKING is another form of acquiring knowledge and receives more information while learning. Sharing information and resources with others practicing in the same ECO-SYSTEM can be an effective method for DEVELOPING their career. As previously mentioned, being a quite ISOLATING profession, they are aware of the importance of building up a solid support network among professionals that will assist them in the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. It is advisable that the integration of resources and support together with proactive and dynamic interpreters are essential to the process of GEARING UP.

‘I am lucky because I have been in the CISLI committee from when I started interpreting; I had so many interpreters around me which is great. Even at the meetings, when we are having tea before [we get started, we have the opportunity to ask questions like] ‘I had this thing, what do you do for that?’ Someone is able to tell me straight away. I feel there is not very formal provision for that kind of guidance, which I think it needs to be put in place…. You need... because we are such individual profession that you would need to connect together to make you feel you are part. It is not like a company [where] you have people in your department you can go and chat [to]. You don’t have that if you have something more. I think it is getting better in Ireland; you have a network of interpreters. If there was a more kind of formal system at least if I have an issue I know where I can go to them straight away and they can help me out’ (Participant 4).

NETWORKING is crucial when working as a freelancer and in particular at the beginning of the career when the knowledge is narrow. PEERING can be a limited resource as the aim in this stage is GEARING-UP. BUILDING-UP the relationships and working with
more experienced interpreters would assist them in MONITORING their progress, MAPPING-OUT and SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM which are all essential within the stage of GEARING-UP. A more experienced interpreter during the interview stated that ‘It is not only CPD but it is more practice. How do people know they are getting better? Practice in a very supporting environment with people you are comfortable with, people have the experience to understand what they are doing, what am I doing?’ (Participant 5). Thus, it is extremely important that interpreters are PROACTIVE in seeking out feedback and working to incorporate that into their practice. COMBINING training, practice, constructive feedback, NETWORKING with other colleagues in order to share experiences and information are vital components for GEARING-UP. They all need to be constant employed proactively by everyone involved in the field. It should be a cyclical, proactive environment where the ECO-SYSTEM is nurtured with the contributions of like-minded people and institutional structures aimed at providing resources and knowledge with the aim of creating professional support and growth.

3.5.3. MONITORING PROFESSIONAL PROGRESS

There is a request for BENCHMARKING along the way according to the participants in this study. Within the GEARING-UP stage, novice interpreters start wondering how they can benchmark the steps by MONITORING their PROGRESS. By doing the job and learning on the job, they develop knowledge and know-how. At the moment, the MONITORING is carried out by the same individual based on their experiences and their own SELF-REFLECTING. Some participants assess their readiness for similar assignments in the future based on their perceived performance and level of experience. In some cases, after an unexpectedly disappointing performance, participants just try to avoid the same situation again thinking they are not ready or good in that particular setting. ‘It was so bad that I buried my head in the sand and I said, “I would never do science again”’ (Participant 6). The participant did not have the opportunity to share or talk to anyone about that interpretation who was not the only one going through the same experience. The MONITORING would help analyse the situation, what to do differently next time and what needs to be done in order to improve instead of avoiding. There is a need to identify the appropriate steps to undertake and also effective feedback that will shape
their interpreting skills and MONITORING their progress. ‘If you are not able to see your career progression, you just get a bit fed up I am going to do something else…I feel to keep interpreters in a sort of a system, there is a need to have more solid benchmarks in your career. So, you are able to see a career progression after a few years you might just be like, it’s so irregular, I don’t see where I am improving…’ (Participant 4). Most of the participants highlight the fact that they do not know when they are ready to undertake a new job or sometimes how to assess themselves in relation to their PROGRESSION. In order to be able to NAVIGATE the career path, individual interpreters need to decide the future course of their career based on progress, experience and time in the field. A more experienced interpreter backs this up and underline the importance of MENTORING is MONITORING not only at the beginning ‘If you are in a mentor relationship, this is what I think we can do together to work on this. If you are a new interpreter you have this sense of ‘I am crap, I am crap, I should not be an interpreter’ and leave. You have to analyse the situation, what part was rubbish, why you think it was rubbish, what is your definition of rubbish and what you would do differently next time…’ (Participant 5). The SELF-REFLECTING is crucial but it is also crucial to COMBINE it with constructive feedback and DEBRIEFING that would assist to review the actions taken and analyse issues and concerns in detail by providing support and significant information.

Interpreters typically start by working in educational settings, normally in third-level education, and after a while (depending on the individual) they aim at SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM and broaden their scope by working in a broader range of settings. The main goal is to BUILD-UP their professional career but they feel they would like to do that with the support of a more expert colleague. PROGRESSION is based on the individual although all the participants in this study aim at FLOURISHING in a successful career.

A more experienced interpreter recognised the importance of having someone to rely on in particular when entering the field immediately after college:

‘There is a need for the new interpreters during their first and second year out... You want to know that you are doing well but you have no one with an expert eye looking
at how you are doing. If you don’t have that at all, you don’t know what you are doing.’ (Participant 5).

By default, interpreters reach the point where they want to achieve new goals and want to take new actions that will assist them in diversifying their range as an interpreter (e.g. they may want to begin to work in healthcare or legal settings). Thus, MONITORING refers to the possibility of having a more experienced interpreter, a mentor or the agencies available to support them as they are GEARING-UP professionally. Participants also mention the importance of having support when MONITORING their progress. MONITORING their professional progress is also crucial in order to keep MAPPING OUT the skills and knowledge developed while practicing and learning their new professional role. MONITORING is an integral component within this second stage as it focuses on the progress of the professional individual, which will help apply strategies for the long-term development of the career. Based on the assessment of their interpreting assignments, the aim is to assess and benchmark what needs to be done, what is next in order to CLIMB-UP the WINDING STAIR. It is also interesting to underline the fact that more experienced interpreters starting to work in new settings say that they would appreciate the support of an external party in assessing their development in a new area. As we mentioned earlier, MONITORING is not only important for novice interpreters but also for more experienced ones. For example, even very experienced interpreters with more than ten years’ experience commented on the relevance of this for their progress:

‘I would like to get into the legal [domain]. I am afraid to do it because I don’t know where to start. I don’t want to start somewhere and then I am lost and then never do it again. I would like some training or mentoring or shadowing, I would like to shadow people in certain areas’ (Participant 8).

With many years of experience in the field, interpreters continue to think about their progress [WINDING STAIR]. In any profession, people start out with the intention of developing and honing their skills, knowledge and capabilities. This can be achieved by following proscribed pathways in some careers (e.g. nursing, teaching). However, in
other fields, and, I suggest, especially for freelancers, there is a need for an autonomous mind-set that supports self-progression and self-assessment. It is a constant work in progress which can only be developed where the professionals in question engage in being PROACTIVE, for example, by NETWORKING with other professionals and engaging with their professional body/bodies as well as other stakeholders.

It is ideal to develop an active ECO-SYSTEM where the experience and the knowledge of more experienced professional and the entities involved in the field, can have an impact on the TRANSITIONING of students when leave education and enter the real world. It is clear from the quote below, very common among participants, that a more outlined and more partnership between college and the outside world can facilitate smoothly the passage.

‘Offer more structure just like other careers have - pathways, and steps with clear progression, [so you can] work your way up. It is not in place at the moment. I hope through CPD and mentoring, you have a role model, you can be supported and to stay in a profession as long as you like instead of getting fed up...[Otherwise] you start losing interpreters, all the experiences they have already gained and start from scratch again’. (Participant 4).

Being PROACTIVE is a recognised characteristic of successful freelancers in the field. One participant noted that ‘Nothing changes without being active. A new interpreter in the field will improve with experience but if the students actively try to improve...They improve quicker because you are actively trying to put it into practice’ (Participant 3).

MONITORING is intended to assess the progress and identify the opportunities for improvement and development. Through MONITORING, individuals aim at MAPPING OUT their journey and this model is intended to offer practical assistance and shed the light in order to advance and how to step up. MAPPING OUT shows the individual the current position and the direction towards the career pathway each individual can design in order to advance in the WINDING STAIR. Additionally, the STARTING-UP – GEARING-UP
– BRANCHING- OUT model (SGB model) aims at embedding and identifying areas that need to be reviewed based on the participants’ responses. With practical assistance, based on their life stories and their professional experiences, valuable advice and suggestions can be illustrated within the whole model. The goal is to help identify any resources available and changes that can be applied and ultimately the development of a model that can assist sign language interpreters by MAPPING OUT progress and identify opportunities for FLOURISHING.

3.5.4. MAPPING OUT

At the beginning of a new career MAPPING OUT how one will grow in the profession can be confusing, especially if there is not a clearly defined pathway to follow. In this context, MONITORING is strictly linked to MAPPING OUT: as an individual develops their capabilities and receives more guidance in relation to their skill development, more opportunities open up for them as a result of their GEARING-UP. MAPPING OUT means VISUALIZING how to get to the next career stage. The next stage for freelancer interpreters is not obvious nor pre-planned but freelancers have to NAVIGATE the field and assess their own skills and knowledge in order to climb the career ladder (WINDING STAIR). Most of the participants in this study underline the complexity of knowing when they are ready to move and work in a setting other than education. TRANSITIONING is taking place again; MENTORING and NETWORKING are requested in order to understand how acquire and master new skills. Ensuring visible support and guidance for the development of an individual are important elements that need to be taken into consideration. COMBINING the factors available within the ECO-SYSTEM would help when working on the skills that need to develop in order to pursue the next level. BENCHMARKING the steps between an individual’s current position and what is next would help figure out where they are currently, what is still missing, and what skills need to be developed. The participant below tried to explore the resources available that can assist novice interpreters to design their career trajectory by MAPPING OUT the pathway and at the same time by SETTING UP GOALS.
'You are working with your mentor [setting CPD goals, which allows you to say] this is the CPD that I can [use to] work towards that. I can work with that; go back to the mentor [and] let them know how I’m getting on. Set your goals or if you are not, [ask], Why is it not working? How am I not progressing?’ (Participant 4).

Having completed training in college, a newly graduated interpreter is gearing-up professionally by gathering experience from each single assignment they undertake, in a process of continual experiential learning: for example, as Participant 1 noted, ‘...You literally learn from every experience’. However, collecting a portfolio of interpreting assignments based on their professional experiences is a method that can and should assist individuals in mapping out their progress and benchmark the steps that need to be undertaken in order to continue to work in the field. It is also a method to figure out the support and guidance needed based on their work that will help bolster and reinforce the development of their life-long career. For example, Participant 4 noted that ‘...there is a need to have more solid benchmarks in your career, so you are able to see a career progression...’.

Combining proactivity and networking within the eco-system can assist in accessing different resources including other professionals in the field. Thus, the diversity of each interpreting assignment completed helps develop additional professional skills for the budding interpreter. In this way, despite the frustration that new interpreters frequently report experiencing, the initial period of work as an interpreter is highly productive in terms of its potential for rapid growth. Working as a professional freelancer requires more autonomy and discipline when it comes to make decisions and decide for yourself how and what is next. ‘If I had a simultaneous service, calling along and guiding me on my steps as I go, that would help me so much. It would just provide guidance and support and then [I’d] take CPD, mentoring, supervision to help map your own progress because it is a very difficult thing to map your own progress by yourself’ (Participant 4). Regularly mapping out their own progress as a result of their experience on different assignments can assist an individual in developing their career pathway towards a successful career. Being proactive will help identify the resources available in the field and also identify professional organizations and like-minded people.
practicing in the field. MAPPING OUT the experiences and the skills developed during the journey can be a helpful guide to continuously grow.

3.5.5. **SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM**

SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM relates to all the aspects of an interpreting career. From MONITORING one’s own PROGRESS to MAPPING OUT their future career path, SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM is the mechanism that helps practitioners in the process of TRANSITIONING to the third stage BRANCHING-OUT.

By COMBINING all the components that might be available and helpful within the ECO-SYSTEM, graduates not only learn the practical side of the profession but also how they can effectively MANAGE other aspects essential in their profession essential for running a successful business. SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM means COMBINING all the elements necessary to become an autonomous, independent freelancer. This entails a steep learning curve for several years. Initially, it is necessary to understand the profession, the environment where it is practiced, the resources available, and the prevailing dynamics in the field. For example, ‘Everyone is responsible [for] making our profession better, all of us. It is down to all of us. ...Everyone is responsible’ (Participant 7). The ECO-SYSTEM within which interpreters practice should be appropriate outlined if everybody involved in the field participates actively and a more structured career trajectory can be shaped with the intervention of everyone. When entering the field, novice professionals are aware that their skills and knowledge are primarily theory-based, and that other real world skills and knowledge need to be developed and sourced in order to succeed within the field. SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM is referring to the development of the general profession of freelancers and the knowledge needed to run their own career. Becoming a professional, self-employed interpreter entails the requirement of other skills too. Participants in this study, highlight that apart from the specialized knowledge, they acquire required skills by NAVIGATING.
‘I think you look for someone else who has been through exactly what you are going through and has made it through to the other end, you can reach them for their experience. Experiential learning through another people’s experience... it really helps and it can guide you through. I think you learn a lot from other interpreters and people around you’ (Participant 4).

SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM means being able to make FREELANCING decisions. At this point, having received guidance from more experienced interpreters, by working in a team and receive feedback, PEERING and through NETWORKING, their own PROACTIVITY, and with access to role models, they may move towards the third stage, BRANCHING-OUT. As one of the most experienced interpreters mention below, there are other aspects that need to be nurtured together with the practical skills of the profession.

‘After a while, the technical part of the job, the translation and the vocabulary are always going to be important but you also realise that there is other stuff. Like, the relationships and the support are even more important’ (Participant 5).

For sign language interpreters, the fact that the community is small and working in a niche area means that it can be possible to create an ECO-SYSTEM where everyone is a potential resource who can bring knowledge and share experiences. BUILDING-UP relationships and making new connections with peers is part of SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM. This is important, as the interpreter’s role involves not only the technical aspects of the work but also engaging in handling the context in which an interpreter operates. Thus, SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM by BUILDING-UP relationships can help improve capacity and support an interpreter in identifying the skills they need that have not been (fully) developed yet. Those in the ECO-SYSTEM are an important source of information and can show the newer interpreter how to BROADEN HORIZONS and at the same time additional skills useful for the long term such as controlling the finances, time management, workloads and any other skills related to the FLOURISHING of the profession as a freelancer.
The third stage of the model is **BRANCHING OUT**, which we describe below in detail. Within the **BRANCHING-OUT** stage, interpreters seek to routinize (ROUTINIZING) their professional career. Within **BRANCHING OUT**, interpreters focus on PERSISTING and MASTERING the profession. They want to BUILD-UP a sustainable profession being able to reach the point where they have financial stability therefore a life-long career. The aim within **BRANCHING OUT** is to achieve a satisfactory position within their career and content.

### 3.6. Stage three: **BRANCHING OUT**

#### 3.6.1. Overview

At this stage of the professional development journey, which I call **BRANCHING OUT**, interpreters have been through **STARTING-UP** their own professional practice, **GEARING-UP** through the honing of their professional skills and knowledge base and then they enter this third stage, where processes of ROUTINIZING, PERSISTING and MASTERING are engaged in. At this stage, the professional identity is clearly unfolding. The interpreter’s goal now is to flourish [FLOURISHING] through the creation of a professional routine and management of their workload in a way that allows them financial stability for their work, and continued progression in their chosen field. This is the stage where individuals want to feel autonomous and independent and have the experience to be able to make decisions and keep **BROADENING THE[ir] HORIZONS**. There is not the end of MENTORING, PROACTIVITY, NETWORKING and the rest of the elements previous mentioned although they may be employed with a different perspective and with different requirements based on the experience and the development of their personal and professional growth.

When they reach this stage, **BRANCHING OUT**, participants identify themselves as fully-fledged professional, self-employed interpreters where the desire is to have a more stability and autonomy but in an active field where everyone should be involved in order to collaborate among them for the benefit of everyone: Deaf community, agencies, stakeholders, governmental structures and educational authorities.
3.6.2. ROUTINIZING

The flow of works available fluctuates [FLUCTUATING] and, because of this, it can be difficult to establish a routine in terms of work [ROUTINIZING]. Some participants feel very stressed as a result of the UNCERTAINTY that arises, and feel de-stabilised as a result. Educational setting is an area where most novice graduates start working when engaged by Bridge Interpreting Ltd. They mainly work with Deaf students who are attending third-level education and work is based on the academic timetable. After a few months or even after their first year working in the academic setting, they start NAVIGATING and BROADENING THE SCOPE with the aim of PROGRESSING by accepting assignments in other settings. At the moment, the typical strategy involves the interpreter CHALLENGING themselves, ‘learn by doing the job’, making the most of the working experiences they encounter and the information available on site. SELF-REFLECTING would be a method to assess their own performance and from which they could turn to MAPPING OUT their skills and identify what could be improved or what they can “put under their belt”. It is an unstructured professional learning environment and MONITORING the progression of novice interpreters is occurring based on the professional opportunities and the MOTIVATION of the individual interpreters involved. ‘Interpreting is an unstable profession, if the work comes up; you have to take the work. For me at the moment, if any work will come up, I take it because I know the summer time is going to be quiet for me’ (Participant 1). Wintertime can be considered to be more ROUTINIZED as most of the interpreters work in educational settings (colleges, universities) and therefore they have more regular assignments over the academic year.

The unsettling time is during the summer when the number of available interpreting hours drop drastically for most: ‘I find summer time really annoying, I have to say, I find it really frustrating because I would love to interpret full time, but that little window of three months... I got two jobs in three months last year. This is not acceptable’ (Participant 1). This participant also stated that most of the assignments that arose during the summer are in settings that they do not feel prepared for. These include medical and legal assignments, conferences or counselling sessions; or they are not certain how to ACQUIRE certain skills that will help them with FUELING THE DEMAND in these
new domains. By EQUIPPING them with more knowledge, skills and terminology in specific settings, interpreters can have the opportunity to accept more interpreting assignments and therefore by BENCHMARKING the pathway, initiate have a more ROUTINIZED profession. This cyclical process demonstrates that participants are aware that their DEVELOPMENT towards and upward trajectory is occurring as a result of SELF-MONITORING their PROGRESS and EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING although novice interpreters are seeking for a more SUPPORTIVE/LEARNING environment where SELF-EVALUATING is not the only option. Novice interpreters perceive this trajectory of learning by MIRRORING more experienced interpreters and by DEBRIEFING with co-workers who can assist them in shaping their professional habits and UPSKILLING so as to be able to recognise their own career progression. GATHERING more professional experience is the aim of most of the interpreters so they reach the point where they feel more content and stable in relation to many aspects of their personal and professional lives.

By ROUTINIZING their work, interpreters aim to continue in the field, and have a long and successful career [PERSISTING]. In order to create this cyclical process within this substantive area, certain dynamics within the ECO-SYSTEM, more opportunities and also the initiative of the same interpreters and the entities involved such as the agencies are necessary so as to provide more workload. It is a professional ‘life-cycle’ in an ECO-SYSTEM where each one can be nurtured to make their essential contributions. In order to create this cyclical process with the aim of ROUTINIZING their professional career, agencies can focus on creating more learning opportunities for novice graduates, which will, at the same time, increase access for Deaf people within the wider society.

3.6.3. PERSISTING

The concept of PERSISTING emerged as interpreters are NAVIGATING the three stages we have outlined with the goal of having a PERSISTING career. Interpreters see FREELANCING as their career. They want to feel comfortable and they want to succeed. PERSISTING is referring to the life-long career of a professional. ISL/English interpreters aim at PERSISTING in this career and STAYING MOTIVATED as a freelancer interpreter. The goal is not to leave the profession but to be able to MANAGE their own career in the long
term. PERSISTING also means RENEWING one’s goals: Participants are willing to learn and upskill but at the same time they feel they are often isolated in the work that they do [ISOLATING].

‘Offer more structure just like other careers have - pathways, steps with clear progression, [where you can] work your way up. It is not in place at the moment. I hope through CPD and mentoring you could have a role model to look up to. You could be supported and stay in a profession as long as you like instead of getting fed up and saying, ‘this is not for me’. You start losing the interpreters, all the experiences they have already gained and start from scratch again’ (Participant 4).

The sentiment inherent to the statement above is common among the interpreters who participated in this study. A negative experience or the lack of support can have an impact on the PROGRESS of an interpreter. Every single interpreting assignment is an opportunity for REINFORCING and NURTURING the career. Increasing the knowledge and acquiring new skills will help them to receive more assignments and therefore PERSISTING in the field.

‘We need more conversations about peer support, progression. Someone needs the time and space for a designated role and to look at the work, the SLIS role, the manager role around policies, provision and agencies...The implications of the [ISL] Act [2017] and all these issues will come up because of it. All of these issues are already there but they need to be intensified. For example, debriefing is not an essential ongoing service but I think it is something that needs to be available’ (Participant 7).

The above statement is from a very experienced interpreter who recognises the need for SUPPORT and DEBRIEFING, additional resources that should be available when needed. By providing resources necessary and by COLLABORATING with like-minded people within the field and SHARING the experiences can be beneficial for the interpreter while CLIMBING the WINDING STAIR. TRANSFERRING the knowledge and LEARNING from previous experiences would help them GAINING more familiarity across different contexts, which are necessary for the lifelong learning and for PERSISTING in the field.
3.6.4. MASTERING

Even highly experienced interpreters talk about the importance of having a mentor:

‘Having a mentor is definitely important for advice, knowledge, and experience; to let people know they are doing things ok. There is panic there - ‘Am I doing this right?’ For feedback, notes, even years later... I ended up working with interpreters in cases together and the feedback that I got was fantastic. It really helped me think about what I do. It is really valuable to have that knowledge...Mentoring is really, really valuable and especially when it becomes domain specific like medical and legal’ (Participant 7).

Listening to more experienced interpreters offers an opportunity to understand what they believe is needed. They have experienced the changes that have occurred in the profession and they have moved through the stages that I have outlined above. They know what it is needed and what they would like to see in place and also, they know what the novice graduates would benefit from. The less experienced interpreters aim at GAINING more experience by PRACTICING the profession and also by receiving some GUIDANCE that will help them to set goals and to direct them to the point where they can reach the stage of MASTERING their career. By MASTERING, interpreters have acquired experience and knowledge that will be able at making FREELANCING decision and have the command to MANAGE their professional situation with more confidence and autonomy. MASTERING also entails MANAGING the financial situation and has a more stability personally and professionally. MASTERING refers to when the individual reaches the point where they are in CONTROL of their own career. It does not mean their career development has been completed; FLOURISHING continues and, indeed, challenges still occur - even for more experienced interpreters.

‘We should have had more formal structures in place...I would like to see debriefing available, I don’t know who would provide that...I would love to see if there is anything in placement in other countries around vicarious trauma...When you interpret
the trauma is happening again, it is tough...I think it would be helpful to know that there is a kind of backup to debrief’ (Participant 7).

MASTERING all aspects and requirements of a FREELANCING career in a more INDEPENDENT way and with more AUTONOMY, allows the interpreter to make FREELANCING decisions based on their individual professional development. By EQUIPPING their own profession and IMPLEMENTING the skills, experience and knowledge acquired throughout the journey, sign language interpreters aim at BRANCHING-OUT to towards several directions within the interpreting community so as to feel satisfied while maintaining a PROACTIVE approach for a life-long self-employability.

3.7. Summary

The WINDING STAIR represents the pathway that ISL/English interpreters proceed along and the three stages they go through with the goal of PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. By applying CGT, I was able to understand the experiences of ISL/English interpreters within this substantive area and develop a theoretical model that reflects their key concerns and builds on their personal experiences in the field. The SGB model, which is represented as a WINDING STAIR, includes the three stages STARTING-UP, GEARING-UP and BRANCHING-OUT which has been designed as a tool for sign language interpreters when they face they main concern emerged within this study: An UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY. Each stage may contribute to the FLOURISHING of sign language interpreters and, indeed, may have relevance to other freelance professions. Each stage conceptualises the experience of ISL/English interpreters in the field and how they deal with the issues they encounter. TRANSITIONING from college through the three stages suggests that ISL/English interpreters look for SUPPORT, MENTORING and NETWORKING due to their lack of experience and know-how. Using insights from the interviews, I was able to outline the SGB model presented here, with concepts grounded on the data of the participants.
Following CGT methodology, in the next chapter I present my review of the literature relevant to the theory PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM.
4. Chapter 4 - Literature review

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the literature looking at key themes that arose during the CGT interviews with ISL/English interpreters within the substantive area. This review of the literature follows from the emergence of the key concepts and the emerged theory in this study, namely, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. Glaser states that ‘When the theory seems sufficiently grounded in a core variable and in an emerging integration of categories and properties, then the researcher may begin to review the literature in the substantive field and relate the literature to his own work in many ways’ (Glaser, 1992, p. 32). By properly following Classical Grounded Theory methodology, this literature review was carried out only when the main categories and the theory emerged so as to avoid influencing the research. Additionally, I wanted to make sure that I was applying Classical Grounded Theory (CGT) correctly during this study so an extensive literature review on CGT and other Grounded Theory versions was carried out in order to learn and understand how to employ the methodology. The main core category and the theory generated in this study guided me towards relevant literature within the substantive area and on other fields. In so doing, this facilitates further development and integration of the theory, thereby creating the lens through which the study should be viewed.

In the first section of this review, I focus on the concept TRANSITIONING specifically regarding the pathway for graduates from college to self-employed professional interpreters. Research shows that the process of TRANSITIONING from college to professional work is a big milestone (Wood et al., 2015; Wall et al., 2018; Ridzwan & Yasin, 2015; Jackson, 2016). As a result, graduates go through a period of adjustment to a new and unfamiliar environment. TRANSITIONING refers to change and start something new therefore it can be very challenging. There is a need to adapt to a new role and to create a new professional identity. Several studies illustrate the role of TRANSITIONING from college to workplace and the impact on graduates when entering the real world
(Wood et al., 2015; Doody et al., 2012; Turner, 2014). However, a small number of studies have been carried out that have looked at transitioning into freelancing careers and in particular to the development of a career for sign language interpreters (Clinton et al., 2006; Nabi et al., 2010). We look at several key concepts that arise in this respect and explore connections within the literature.

We begin by considering Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1981). The process of developing an identity as a freelancer and the transitioning from students to self-employment is still under-explored. This gap is the first milestone for graduates transitioning from education to employment. In any transition, people have to become familiar with the new environment and norms therefore it is essential that organizations and individuals recognise what it is needed when moving into a new field. Indeed, Cooper and Miller (1998) also state that ‘...the mature professionals with whom student affairs practitioners associate and work, especially in their formative years and during transitional phases, can and do have significant influence on the quality and character of their professional development’ (p. 55). Transition Theory process is illustrated in three main stages: moving in, moving through and moving out where an individual is starting something completely new, experiences the changes and adjust to the new situation and continue through the transition. Several studies recognised the turning point where individuals are required to adjust to a new and unfamiliar environment. Schlossberg at al. (1989) state that ‘Many institutions devote a great deal of time to orientation, a process designed to help individuals know what is expected to them’ (p. 15). As soon as graduates complete college, they are not fully aware what they are expected to know when they enter the field. Graduates in this study, and in other professional fields, highlight the importance of work placement before entering the real world as an essential part of the educational programme in order to understand what their future career entails. Work placement provides the opportunity to experience the real professional field with the support of more experienced professionals and organizations.

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is a model that combines traditional academic study with experience in real world professional environments. This model is a method
applied within universities in order to prepare undergraduates before leaving college and enter the real world (Jackson, 2014). Certain skills and knowledge are acquired in the field and are learned through work. Work placement provides the opportunity to develop competence through work-based learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Jackson, 2016). The core aim of WIL is to better prepare undergraduates for entry into the workforce. Work placement is located within the college and the real world in order to facilitate an ‘easy’ transition and illustrate the whole picture and what it is needed when starting to practice their future profession. Through WIL, students access additional learning through work in real-life scenarios and real experiences together with the supervision of more experienced professionals and also mentors. It provides the opportunity to explore their future career in a real scenario (Nabi et al., 2010; Jackson, 2016; McBeath et al., 2018). It provides the opportunity to observe other features and aspects of their career such as settings, people, topics and the whole context where they will practice their profession. This EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING is discussed by Kolb (1984) in his Experiential Learning Theory (ELT).

According to Kolb, learning does not only happen in formal educational settings. He discusses the importance of learning new skills and knowledge through experience and learning by doing a job (Kolb, 1984; Evans et al., 2010; Boud et al., 1993). Kolb states that effective learning is developed through experience. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) emphasises the crucial role of experience within the learning process. ELT is based on the works of Lewin, Piaget and Dewey as regards the perspective on learning and adult development (Kolb, 1984). Kolb’s experiential learning theory is represented in his four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. This ELT cycle of learning created by Kolb is the core principle in his Experiential Learning Theory in which, through active and concrete experience, individuals can observe and reflect about a particular situation which can develop a new experience which can be transformed into new knowledge and therefore additional learning. By providing opportunities, individuals can learn from experience within a specific setting and therefore identify the skills that are transferrable into a future career. In terms of the context of this study, Dean and Pollard’s (2001; 2009; 2013) Demand Control Schema was also essential for its relationship to sign language
interpreters. As part of the literature review, I thus explored existing literature and theories to better understand the experiences and current situation of the participants in this study and each of these theories are relevant to this specific population. I outline these in greater detail below.

4.2. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

TRANSITIONING from education to the ‘real world’ is considered a milestone for new graduates in any professional area. Any transition can be exciting and at the same time very challenging. TRANSITIONING is one of the concepts that emerged from the analysis of my data. In order to better understand the transitional experiences of ISL/English interpreters, it was fundamental to comprehend the transition process of the participants from education to post-education with particular emphasis on self-employment. Both novice and more experienced interpreters recognise the complexity and the pressure attributed to this period of adjustment and not only at entry-level but throughout their journey. Although there are several studies about the process of TRANSITIONING from trainee/student to professional work, very little research exists surrounding the experiences of sign language interpreters and also graduates from other areas that will become freelancers with particular reference to graduate careers and self-employment (Nabi et al., 2010). Because the concept TRANSITIONING is one key theme in this study, it was necessary to link it to the literature review in order to provide a better understanding of this phenomenon. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory was a key point of reference in this regard.

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory was developed because ‘...a need existed to develop a framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they needed to cope with the “ordinary and extraordinary process of living”’ (Evans et al., 2010, p. 213). Schlossberg’s Transition Theory illustrates how individuals react to changes and how they adjust their lives to a new situation and environment focusing, in particular, on adult development and adult transition. According to Schlossberg, a transition can be defined as ‘...any event or non-event that results in change, this having an impact on relationships, routines,
assumptions, and roles’ (Anderson & Goodman, 2014, p. 43). Moving beyond graduation and into professional work is a crucial point of TRANSITIONING for an individual who sets out to engage in a freelance career. Their role will change and a new identity needs to be developed: a FREELANCING IDENTITY. This is the term I use to describe the TRANSITIONING from college to a potential lifelong self-employed career across this study. At the beginning of every career, it is vital that novice professionals are assisted in shaping their professional identity and that they have the opportunity to learn from a cohort, support services or engaging with like-minded professionals with more experience and knowledge. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory has been adopted to understand TRANSITIONING in any stages of an adult’s life. Evans et al. (2010, p. 222) notes that Schlossberg’s theory has been applied to ‘...work with adult learners, as well as traditional undergraduates. In addition, assessment strategies have been proposed for use in helping students understand transitions they are facing’. Transition Theory provides details on how to approach a transition in many areas. Evans et al. (2010) illustrate several examples where Schlossberg’s Transition Theory has been applied as a tool to support individuals in different areas and to understand their experiences. Evans et al. (2010) illustrate a few studies such as professionals losing their jobs at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA); projects that involved the evaluation of programs to cope with transition in the workplace, employees entering the retirement time, higher education students, adult learners going back to college. ‘Significant transitions, such as entering college, graduating from college, addressing relationships issue, and facing career decisions, can all be better understood and approached when using this model...’ (Evans et al., 2010, p. 225). Transition Theory has been used to design program that would provide information and knowledge to develop effective support from organizations and institutional structures in order to build up valuable skills for the future.

Schlossberg’s Transition model proposes three phases: moving-in; moving through, moving out. The three phases can be mirrored to the three phases developed in my theoretical model throughout the TRANSITIONING trajectory in my substantive area: STARTING-UP, GEARING-UP and BRANCHING-OUT.
Schlossberg’s Transition Theory | STARTING-UP – GEARING-UP – BRANCHING-OUT (SGB) Theory
---|---
Moving In | Starting-Up
Moving Through | Gearing-Up
Moving Out | Branching Out

Table 2: Comparing Schlossberg’s Transition Theory with SGB Theoretical framework.

- **Moving-in** is when the individual enters a new context and therefore a new stage where changes and a transition will occur. In this stage, one creates a new life and learns how to navigate new opportunities and experiences. Schlossberg also pays particular attention to the development of a new identity and therefore a new life, new relationships and new behaviour.

- **Moving-through** is when the individual navigates the new field and searches to understand this new and unfamiliar phase. At this stage, the individual needs to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge and information in order to learn how to adjust to the new area. ‘*Once in, adult learners must balance the academic with other parts of their lives and find ways to feel supported and challenged during their learning journey*’ (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 88).

- **Moving-out** when the transition is over or there is a follow-up or when individuals look for the next thing to do. ‘*Learners’ moving out can be seen as ending one series of transitions and beginning to ask what comes next*’ (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 16).

Schlossberg also indicated that dealing with a transition could vary with the individual and that each person can perceive the new adjustment differently. Schlossberg introduced the “4 S’s model”, which accounts for the factors that can influence the transition of an individual:
- **Situation**: what is happening, the trigger of the transition, role change, duration of the transition, who is responsible and how the individual perceives it;
- **Self**: factors influencing the individual such as socioeconomic status, age, stage of life, culture;
- **Support**: the support available to the person during the transition such as networks, institutions, communities;
- **Strategies**: the coping mechanisms employed by the individual.

Schlossberg’s 4 S’s model provides a framework to assess and help an individual cope with TRANSITIONING ‘The four S’s – situation, self, supports, and strategies – provide a framework for helping adult learners cope with their particular ending-beginning situations, identify their strengths to reinforce a positive sense of self, obtain supports as they move into the next transition, and develop strategies to deal with these endings and beginnings’ (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 162). The 4 S’s model has subsequently been applied in several studies where TRANSITIONING is occurring. For example, Anderson and Goodman (2014) have employed Schlossberg’s model to assist veterans during their transition from military life to civilian life. They experience a life/career transition where they need to adjust themselves and also make several decisions in many areas of their lives. ‘Schlossberg’s 4-S model provides a framework to assess and provide treatment tailored to the veteran in transition across the areas of Situation, Self, Support and Strategies’ (Anderson & Goodman, 2014, p. 43). By applying Schlossberg’ 4-S model, it was possible to assess the situation while this particular population was navigating the transition. Within this study, applying 4-S model has assessed several cases. The study highlighted the challenges and illustrated examples where by applying the model it was possible to assess many areas of their lives and how to navigate successfully throughout the TRANSITIONING. Schlossberg’s model in this area was described ‘...to assess and plan interventions related to individual strengths and liabilities, with a central goal of enhancing coping and adaptations for transitioning veterans’ (Anderson & Goodman, 2014, p. 49). Schlossberg’s model was helpful to conceptualize and assess the transition of complex and difficult situations where veterans had to adjust their entire life into a completely new situation.
Goodman and Anderson (2012) apply Schlossberg’s model to retirement. By applying this transition framework, it is possible to analyze how individuals apply strategies when coping with certain changes. The topic of retirement has been popular over the past few decades where professionals (i.e. counselors, associations) are trying to help this population to find strategies to navigate this new pathway. The 4-S model was used to determine how best to facilitate the TRANSITIONING to retirement for professional contractors and helped isolate strategies for those retiring to cope with the change. One of the concepts that emerged from this study was MATTERING and still feeling the need to be useful and essential to others. Changing the situation and try to seek for opportunities to adapt to new surroundings. Goodman and Anderson (2012) illustrate strategies and tools to assist people navigate their new situation and their new opportunities when retiring by using Schlossberg’s 4-S Model. According to the authors, the 4-S model addresses the changes when retiring and potential options and strategies to cope with the new shift. ‘Intentional and mindful attention to each of the 4-S’s can be helpful when working with clients approaching or living in what could be considered a very meaningful life stage’ (p. 17). In both cases, Schlossberg’s model was employed to provide an assessment of the individual during this phase and to direct them to their new pathway. The model can help to examine what needs to be changed and the resources and support that need to be integrated in order to ease the transition of an individual (Schlossberg, 1981; Wall et al., 2018).

4.2.1. Freelancing identity

As previously mentioned, the process of TRANSITIONING from being a student to becoming a qualified professional can be challenging. The transition to professional life entails new changes and the adjustment to a new intricate field. When looking at the TRANSITIONING from education to work, attention was paid to graduate careers and the development of a new identity as a freelancer compared to the traditional employment pathway (i.e. employed within a company). This concept has emerged in other studies when looking at early career academics and researchers in the academic settings working within a less structural system (Collins et al., 2014; Miller, 2014). The focus is on the integration of graduate career development and self-employment in a supported
ECO-SYSTEM. Nabi et al. (2010) recognize the lack of works on graduates’ career pathways in starting their own business or in a context of boundary-less context, ‘...the transition from entrepreneurial intentions of university students to actual graduate start-up is often assumed in the literature’ (p. 2). The new role entails new skills and new knowledge in order to undertake the new profession. In terms of their TRANSITIONING, it requires a different trajectory compared to a traditional job where a company employs the individual. FREELANCING requires more AUTONOMY and being more RESOURCEFUL as it does not only entail the technical knowledge of the profession but all the aspects related to working as a self-employed such as STARTING the business, SEEKING for agencies/clients, LEARNING by doing the job, KNOWING the community of practice and what it needs to be learnt in the long-term (Burke, 2011). When entering the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM there are several factors that need to be learnt apart from the practical part of the career. The construction of identity is not happening in isolation, newcomers need to be involved in new activities and carry out new tasks and engage with people, place and actively participate in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Priest et al., 2016). Participants need to have a good understanding of the meaning of being registered as a self-employed and all the factors involved in order to practice the career.

The new role is mainly adopted once in the field and not when still in education. There are many factors and aspects that will be learnt once entering the field such as registering with the agencies, learning how to manage the business as a sole trader, identifying the support and other professionals needed while still learning. The ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY (Nabi et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2010; Fraiberg, 2017) is mainly starting when they enter the professional field and start exploring how it really works. During this period of time, recent graduates spend time trying to understand and explore their new professional identity by engaging with the field, experiencing unique settings and responsibilities and through the sharing of these new lessons and insights with their fellow graduates. At the beginning, graduates prefer to obtain support from their cohort with whom they have a close relationship after spending together four years in college. When embarking on their first transition into self-employment, challenges emerge and novice graduates have to deal with the unexpected and the unknown. TOOLING UP the freelancing career involves the development of other skills needed for
the development of a FREELANCING IDENTITY. As Glaser states (2010) ‘They often have very little particular or general knowledge based on actual careers’ (p. 1). In order to offer some structure to the career, organizations provide orientation and working conditions that will allow climbing the ladder as ‘...people work to advance their organizational career’ (Glaser, 2010, p. 1). In a FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, self-employed graduates navigate the new field trying to understand what they need to know and what they do not know yet and what they are supposed to know once in the field. Given this concern, novice should relate with more experienced professional and connections with entities in order to create a space where resources are available for learning in practice. Perrone and Vickers (2003) also investigate the reaction of undergraduates when making the TRANSITION from college to work and how they respond to the journey. By understanding this passage, it will be possible to provide assistance or recommendations to educational institutions and companies to better understand and EQUIP graduates.

Currently, there is a lack of research mainly focusing on the career trajectory of non-traditional graduate careers and self-employment (Premand et al., 2016; Nabi et al., 2010). Brandenburg et al. (2016) recognize the importance of the development of entrepreneurial skills among art students. They argue that creative skills should be combined with business skills that will ease students in their professional progress that, in turn, support their career trajectory. EQUIPPING students before leaving colleges would assist them once entering the field. Brandenburg et al. (2016) also in their study illustrate the importance of mastering the entrepreneurial skills among art students and recognise them as the key to the transition from education system to the field of business. The development of these skills would facilitate the TRANSITIONAL for those novice graduates who often have to practice independently and need the knowledge to be autonomous as soon as they leave college. Several studies demonstrated that those skills are needed in order to develop their career ‘This requires courses to facilitate the development of entrepreneurial skills among their students, from recognizing opportunities and possibilities to marketing validation’ (p. 25). The results of the research demonstrated that the following outcomes emerged from the participants during the interviews: Developing personal identity, determining professional value, diverging and converging, communicating visually, exchanging experiences and
validating ideas (Brandenburg et al., 2016). CREATING THE FREELANCING IDENTITY requires COMBINING the practical skills and the entrepreneurial skills that would facilitate the TRANSITIONING but also STRIVING to new career levels along the pathway.

This period of transition was also identified as a main concern by Roderick (2010) who recognised that TRANSITIONING from university is considered very stressful; students feel very anxious and disorientated during this process. Roderick (2010) carried out a CGT study with the aim of identifying the main concern among students in their final year of undergraduate study. One substantial gap is the reduced support network available to students on graduation, specifically when they lack experience and the professional knowledge to be able to manage several aspects within their new business role. The main concern was conceptualized as COMMODIFYING as ‘The pressure to commodify self refers to pressure to turn oneself into a valuable product for the knowledge-based economy’ (Roderick, 2010, p. 41). Young graduates prepare themselves for the real world and the TRANSITIONING is seen as a big pressure when they feel the need to set goals, pursue career achievement and ‘...pressure to transform themselves into marketable products capable of high levels of economic productivity and the acquisition of social status and material goods’ (p. 3). Those in the process of TRANSITIONING from being a student to being a freelancer require more training and support in order to facilitate entry into self-employment professional work.

Professional practice is not only about the practical knowledge and skills, but it entails much more. At this stage in their development, their limited knowledge and experience can affect their career. The need for VALIDATING is extremely important at this point so that they can know what they are doing and how they are doing it while still learning. ‘As you enter the field of sign language interpreting, it is important that you get the kind of guidance and support needed “out in the real world”, particularly in relation to making difficult ethical decisions’ (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007, p. 319). The need for support, mentoring, outline orientation and networking with like-minded people are factors that can assist new graduates in their new field and in their new role (Doody et al., 2012; Premand et al., 2016). MENTORING is considered an essential component for participants within this study but also in many other areas within the
literature review. It is an important aspect at the beginning of the career but also throughout the professional pathway.

MENTORING enhances the exploration of certain areas to enable individuals to learn from more experienced professionals and assist individuals to PROGRESS and reach their potential. For graduates and also more experienced interpreters, MENTORING is seen as an ‘anchor’ where they can get assistance and help during TRANSITIONING, for DEBRIEFING, professional, emotional and personal SUPPORT and also as advisor for MONITORING their PROGRESSION and their career development. At the moment, in the interpreting community, there is no formal MENTORING or SUPERVISION after completing college. As Leeson states ‘New interpreters should set high standards for themselves and constantly strive to increase their skills. One way in which this can be achieved is by maximizing opportunities to work with respected and more experienced colleagues in the field, and seek their feedback on one’s own performance’ (2005, p. 65). Most of the participants in this study raise the importance of having a support visible and available and this literature review confirmed the importance and the impact that can have on the career in any professional field.

4.2.2. Mentoring

Several studies demonstrated the importance of MENTORING during work placement and students recognise the importance of this short window as an opportunity for students heading to their future professional career. A suitable mentor is someone who has more experience and has a better understanding and knowledge within their professional environment because he/she has been working in the field for a long time in a variety of settings (Crocitto et al., 2005). MENTORING is considered an important factor in bridging the gap between the theoretical field and the practical field, as stated, ‘Mentoring delivers career, social and emotional support for self-exploration which leads to academic and personal outcomes for students and guide them to become a successful professional’ (Jain et al., 2016, p. 685). Several studies demonstrated the importance of MENTORING as an essential component when starting a new profession and for the career development in the field and how helpful can be to prepare students
for their future career. Ahsan et al. (2018) demonstrated the challenges when students transition from college to student entrepreneurs and develop a two-stage process model to illustrate ‘…how mentor relationship and student founders affective state impacts entrepreneurial identity and venture progress’ (p. 76). For freelancers, having a mentor is not compulsory or not provided unless the individual requests one. Sign language interpreters have mentors during work placement (while in college) but, once they are qualified interpreters, this support is not provided. In the field of interpreting, mentoring is considered an important part for professional at an entry-level as soon as they are out there in the real world as self-employed qualified professionals. ‘Mentoring by a seasoned colleague is a more formalized means of facilitating such professional development’ (Lee, 2005, p. 65). Receiving mentoring while on work placement and also at an entry-level could provide skills and knowledge that more experienced professionals can transmit to individuals while learning. It is a way to provide the right resources, guidance and share experiences that will help during the career trajectory. Mentors are normally provided in other areas at an entry-level such as nursing, teaching, academics and counselling (Lewis-Pierre et al., 2017; Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Moss et al., 2014; Bolton, 2005). Mentors can be an effective valuable source for feedback and future professional development. For instance, Moss et al. (2014) describe the importance of having an experienced guide in the field of counselling:

‘Counselors at all levels expressed the importance of having a mentor, supervisor, peer supervision, or some form of experienced guide to help them in their professional development. Participants talked about the need to learn from an experienced counselor when discussing what they needed to progress to the next level of development of their professional identity...’ (p. 8).

Most of the participants in this study highlighted the benefits of having a mentor on work placement and requesting one after graduation for at least a few years while setting in the workforce. Debriefing and one-to-one meeting after a job is considered extremely important for recent graduates. Mentoring is an additional tool (not the only one) to upward and progress in the career and assist individuals with less experience in their career development throughout their journey (Marshall & Michael, 1983). Peering
is the strategy applied by participants in this study and BROADENING it to NETWORKING when they start to engage with more professional in the interpreting community. PEER GROUP MENTORING is a strategy stated by Collins et al. (2014) that can assist women academics working in isolation by providing them with the opportunity to explore decisions, support network and assist them in regard to their academic career pathway.

Dangerfield and Napier (2016) suggest that, through COMBINING self-reflective practice and at the same time supported by ongoing MENTORING, training and professional development, interpreters can improve their skills and stay motivated in their profession. Interpreters cannot expect to improve their skills alone, as they might not have the appropriate skills to judge themselves due to the lack of experience and the limited self-reflective skills. Self-reflective practice, MENTORING, NETWORKING, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) are fundamental aspects to better EQUIPPING novice interpreters working within the community. Dangerfield and Napier (2016) demonstrated that there is ‘...a need for interpreters to be motivated to achieve expertise in the field by actively seeking opportunities to develop self-reflective practices and continually assess their work through collaborative and focused discussion with other interpreting professionals’ (p. 21). Graduates reflect on their performance and try to identify how to improve their skills. It is possible that working with a MENTOR would help expedite their transition period, and offer them a framework in which to situate their trajectory. During work placement, students can observe other professionals in their field and can be evaluated in specific and several contexts, and receive feedback to develop and improve their skills needed for a professional success. Novice interpreters and also more experienced interpreters can more easily have better knowledge of the field when entering the field. During placement, graduates have the opportunity to interact with their MENTOR, and a broad range of professional interpreters and get a better understanding of the real world. Work placement should also provide students with the basic skills for work - in our specific substantive area these are the skills critical to being self-employed skills.

Novice interpreters find it challenging to adjust to their new reality mostly on their own, particularly at the beginning of their career. Delk (2013) reflects on this,
noting that mentoring is needed ‘...to address the gap between initial interpreter preparation and job readiness, to improve the quality of interpreting services, to improve availability of interpreting services to underserved populations and areas, and to build an internal network of support within the interpreting community’ (p. 3). MENTORING can be one aspect of the ECO-SYSTEM throughout TRANSITIONING and also in the long-term. It is necessary to have such support to contribute to the development of a strong FREELACING IDENTITY.

4.2.3. Networking and peering

MENTORING is an important component that can be employed within the ECO-SYSTEM for novice and also more experienced interpreters, although it is not the only fundamental component needed to FLOURISH in the field. When working as a freelancer in any professional field, it is crucial to frame some sort of work environment. People working in the same ECO-SYSTEM can share support and information, as stated, ‘...the growth of social networking, also influencing career opportunities through the wider, more influential connections people have come to maintain’ (Arthur, 2014, p. 636). In many studies, the importance of collaboration and NETWORKING has been highlighted. For novice graduates in the arena of self-employment this gap needs to be bridged independently and look for support in the field at the moment by PEERING within the same cohort and later now by BROADENING the NETWORK. ‘Peers also can impact the career success of a protégé...Networks of peers may provide a support alternative or complement to mentorship’ (Marshall & Michael, 1983, p. 480). PEERING is one of the strategies applied by participants in this study and also other studies expressed the importance of PEER MENTORING when navigating their career pathway (Collins et al., 2014).

PEERING is a strategy applied by both novice and more experienced interpreters. They strive to form connections with peers throughout their course and to maintain these links after graduation. This is one of the most accessible types of support that is available to them. It is not easy to separate MENTORING from other essential aspects within the field. This review also includes relevant literature related to the importance
of NETWORKING, peering and BEING PROACTIVE within the field of FREELANCING. All these aspects are important for the development of any career and in particular for self-employed professionals. Participants in this study, when NAVIGATING the field, they will approach their peers from their own cohort as their first point of contact. When assignments are complex and individuals are not certain how to deal with situations, more interaction with other (more experienced) colleagues may be needed. NETWORKING is thus an essential aspect that will help their professional development. With adequate exposure and support novice interpreters can receive the appropriate input they require in order to understand their new responsibilities and strategies in order to bridge the gap. Kim (2013) observed that NETWORKING and interpersonal relationships enhance career advancement and can have positive consequences in terms of career management. Kim writes: ‘...individuals who proactively manage their relationships are more likely to obtain support than those who are passive vis-à-vis their careers’ (p. 122). NETWORKING and PEERING are the strategy that can facilitate the transition at an entry level. The nature of networking is to find connection with like-minded people within the community but also with interrelated organizations and other professionals.

Studies have suggested the critical importance of NETWORKING in the development of individuals’ careers. Chandler and Kram (2005) observed the importance of nurturing and developing a network that can assist individuals during their career development and also the importance of being PROACTIVE and argue that ‘...the current career context actually necessitates that individuals seek to learn from a variety of individuals both inside and outside their work place’ (2005, p. 550). Building certain relationships and identifying the resources available are essential for the development of an individual. De Villiers Scheepers et al. (2018, p. 310) discusses the need for sustained engagement to support career development. They note that ‘...an intensive experience and sustained engagement with the community enables the development of bonding social capital, providing substantive support needed for new venture creations ongoing career mentorship and enhanced professional outcomes’. This need for engagement with peers, as well as mentorship from more advanced colleagues, are key concepts that arise in the literature around new entrants to the world of work (Chandler & Kram, 2005).
Early career academics undergo the same experience. Miller (2015) presents a model emerged using a constructivist grounded theory approach that she calls the ‘Knowledge Eco-System’ emerged from the core category “informed learning”, which illustrates the importance of learning experience and developmental networking and having a support system is a key factor for the professional and personal development. The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of early career academics while creating and building networking for their professional and personal development. A key factor for professional academics is to be able to develop the network involving a range of people and resources. Any activity and people within the ECO-SYSTEM can expand and share the knowledge with others. It is a combination of knowledge from others and self-knowledge (Hermanrud, 2009). Miller’s theory also demonstrates that learning can be developed in many other contexts outside the formal education, which can also contribute to the development of knowledge and learning. This model also included three key elements that are considered crucial for career progression: resources, interactions and learning. These three elements are required to facilitate access to information needed to improve and progress towards a successful career. Miller (2015) also states that ‘In general, experience design strategies and principles to facilitate informal interactions through relationships of mutual benefit are needed. Academic developers...mentors (informal and formal), ECAs and information knowledge managers within higher education, need to collaborate to provide enriching learning experiences within the informal sphere’ (p. 1246). In conclusion, the study suggests that it is essential to work with others and at the same time be able to work independently. This combination would help the development of the individual in the professional sphere.

Mourmant (2012) introduced the core category-SEEDING event, which recognizes the importance of NETWORK creating what he calls Spaces of Entrepreneurial Freedom (SoEF) where institutions, companies and other players can improve and develop of a valuable structural environment. SoEF are spaces where individuals and companies can benefit from bringing together information, knowledge and the opportunity of creating solid NETWORKING. Promoting the ECO-SYSTEM entails the contribution of any player involved in this business field such as agencies, universities, government and stakeholders. ISL/English interpreters work as freelancers and in a niche area; therefore,
NETWORKING is important to get to know the people working in the same community and getting involved to know others that work in the same area. This connectedness can bring knowledge and information that can be shared within a PROACTIVE ECO-SYSTEM. Entering the field also means learning key aspects of a profession. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS is instrumental and provides potential support for career advancement. When working as a freelancer, professionals work for different agencies and clients in a broad range of settings and most of the time they work alone. ‘Networking is one important type of proactive behaviour that is considered pivotal for contemporary career success’ (De Vos et al., 2009, p. 763). BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS can happen while on a work placement, the first connection students have with the professional work, by getting involved in the community and by interacting with people. Borgatti and Cross (2003) state that, ‘...having a positive interaction may reduce access barriers and lead to future interactions, increasing knowledge of that source’s expertise’ (p. 442). Thus, PEERING, NETWORKING and building relationships with organizations are important sources for knowledge and professional development. The experience of occupational stress is compounded by working freelance, without recourse to organizational support structures’ (Hetherington, 2011, p. 139). These are the resources that need to be outlined within the ECO-SYSTEM so that individuals can interact with multiple resources that can nurture their profession.

4.2.4. Employing Proactivity

Brown et al. (2006) discuss the importance of being PROACTIVE before entering the workforce and of retaining a proactive personality thereafter in order to build up a successful career. They suggest that having a ‘proactive personality is an important antecedent of workplace adjustment and performance’ (p. 717). PROACTIVITY is an effective strategy for connecting with relevant professionals and organizations. Brown et al. (2006) investigated the issues among graduating students and the barriers they encounter when they look for employment. Their study explores a theoretical model in relation to having a PROACTIVE PERSONALITY among recent graduating students which reports that ‘...proactive individuals are more successful but also they respond more adaptively to their environment’ (p. 718). The study suggests that being PROACTIVE is an
important factor for the development of a career. The findings show that a proactive behaviour can have an impact on the development of the profession. An active behaviour and approach are effective given the unstructured nature of the profession. De Vos et al. (2009) state that often graduates have not developed the competencies needed when transitioning from college to work and the importance of applying a proactive behaviour in order to facilitate their career just before graduation and during the first year of their employment. Within their study, they were able to observe the implications of a proactive behaviour can have on the career during their first years during their career development.

Both studies underline the importance of being proactive in order to develop important aspects of the career such as networking with other professionals, identify the resources needed and available that will support graduates during their career. Navigating and exploring the real world while still in college is a strategy that can facilitate the transitioning and fill the gap between college and work. However, it is essential that everyone involved in the field has to contribute with support and knowledge that can be integrated within the eco-system and beneficial to people involved. Work placement is considered an essential period of time for students before entering the field. In order to ease the transition and gain a better understanding of the professional work where the students will land, students have recognized the importance and the benefits of work placement during their final year in college in this study and in other areas.

4.3. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)

The Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) model aims at preparing undergraduates entering the workface by combining education study with work practices in the real world. WIL is considered a tool that can guide students to apply knowledge and skills when they enter their professional context (Jackson, 2013; McBeath et al., 2018; de Villiers Scheepers et al., 2018; Dwesini, 2017). WIL is actually considered an instrument for equipping undergraduates with the skills required to function effectively in the work environment and developing ongoing engagement with professionals in the community:
‘The ethos of WIL is based on the theory of active (Bonwell and Eison, 1981) and experiential (Kolb, 1984) learning where learners transition from visualizing and listening and actually attempt to ‘do’ what they are being taught. Once conceptualization of WIL aligns with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) model of situated learning where learning is enhanced when participating in a community of practice, rather than in isolation from it’ (Jackson, 2014, p. 352).

Lave and Wenger (1991) talk about “legitimate peripheral participation” explaining that it is inevitable for the learners to participate in a community of practice in order to acquire knowledge and new skills for the newcomers. It is essential that full participation and engagement with more experienced professionals occurs so that eventually the new recruit can become a full member of a specific community. The aim of WIL is to integrate the academic learning and the specific skills and knowledge of a discipline and apply them in the workplace. WIL provides students with a better understanding of their future career through work placement, mentoring, internship and practical situations in order to gain a better understanding of the responsibilities and professional standards new graduates should acquire in relation to their future profession (Jackson, 2016). Work placement is a practical instrument that will illustrate the real world to students before entering the professional field. Work placement is an opportunity for learning and participants have the possibility to view the whole picture and engage directly. Within work placement, students can observe and acquire specific skills to become full practitioners and learn additional skills and new habits and have a general idea of what their professional field entails.

Students on work placement can experience real-life situations while still in college while having the opportunity to encounter them together with more experienced professionals, their mentors and supervisors. The importance of preparing students for the work place has been highlighted by Wood et al. (2015) “work placement is the most important” part of final-year study. Many other respondents referred to workplace “experience”, “culture”, “dynamics” and “ethics” as being crucial” (p. 8). Based on the personal stories and experience of the participants in this study, work placement is considered extremely important because they have the opportunity
to explore their future professional field and become more familiar with it before leaving education. When on placement, students can observe more experienced professionals and can practice while being evaluated and assessed by them. It is an opportunity for learning and improving, in particular for students entering the freelancing world. Due to the fact that students will be freelancers the work placement should be the place where they receive information and knowledge that can enhance their understanding of what it means to engage within a professional community. It is beneficial for the students who can benefit from feedback and debriefing sessions with colleagues and/or with their mentors.

WIL ensures that skills and knowledge acquired in college are integrated in the workplace but also at the same time, additional skills that are not taught in college can be obtained while on placement directly from employers, organizations, more experienced professionals, mentors and future colleagues. This window of time is essential for students as they can apply their learning from college in real work context under supervision and mentoring ‘...where learning in the workplace is integrated with on-campus learning so students can make links between their learning in different settings and better understand what is required for effective practice of targeted skills and knowledge’ (Jackson, 2014, p. 354). Throughout work placement, students are able to integrate the theory learnt in college and apply it in a practical context where they have the opportunity to develop professional competencies. It is recognised that workplace provides learning opportunity in the real working environment providing the possibility to engage in the community of practice before transitioning into the real world.

Jackson (2014; 2016) emphasises the importance of learning on work placement where host organizations provide appropriate learning and support. While on placement, students should be encouraged to engage with other professionals, reinforce certain skills and knowledge needed for their future career such problem-solving skills, reflection and critical thinking through debriefing and share professional experiences on how to develop and the steps to undertake in order to develop a career pathway. Dwesini (2017) argues that universities should provide students with
knowledge and professional skills required when starting to work and that partners and institutions where students undertake their work placement should contribute to their acquisition of employability skills that would facilitate them during the TRANSITIONING phase. On top of the practical skills needed to carry out the job, entrepreneurial skills are needed to empower the students when working in different contexts. Multiple resources, mentoring, networking, proactivity, experiencing are all contributing to provide assistance to individuals. New skills are not only acquired on site but also by interacting with like-minded people and the appropriate services. Sharing information and knowledge with other people and professionals in the same field is crucial before they enter the field. Work placement should assist the students to get them ready and prepared them for their profession. Students should also be encouraged to start cultivating a network when on placement and understand the importance of creating this potential professional relationship within their professional community. These are additional skills that are needed when working as a self-employed person that can be acquired while on placement when surrounded with professional people with more experience, institutions, peers, mentors and supervisors.

WORK PLACEMENT is an essential component of studying before TRANSITIONING into the ‘real world’. WIL has been integrated in this study as includes important elements that can enrich their work experience and I recommend this phase when students are getting ready for their new role. When entering the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, based on the stories of the participants in this study, it is important that certain features are provided in order to be better prepared for work. The work placement should prepare students entering the field of self-employment to become independent professionals within the eco-system. The WIL model focuses on learning employability skills and the development of skills to enable them to move from being students to practitioners (de Villiers Scheepers et al., 2018). During this pre-professional period, students on placement learn from all parties involved in the environment and through experiences in different settings, the input of experienced professionals at the same time guidance that will EQUIP them in order to be ready for their career.
McBeath et al. (2018) also reported the importance of WIL along with peer support for the transition from education to workforce as being essential. Several studies illustrate that students need access to resources and continued support after graduation to assist with the transition to professional life (Doody et al., 2012; Wood et al., 2015; Dean & Pollard, 2001; González-Davies & Enríquez-Raido, 2016). This is the principle that accentuates the importance of an active eco-system where students learn to work in different contexts where they are able to apply their skills and knowledge but at the same time recognize the importance of networking, collaboration and proactivity. In terms of transition, the authors observed that students feel that they will not have the same support they have when in college once they enter the real world (McBeath et al., 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2015). The participants in this study also show a concern in relation to the support they can receive and with respect to where they can go as there is no real structure in place (although it is possible to identify resources in case of need such as CISLI, agencies, educational institution). ‘When emerging adults exit college and begin their transition to the working world, they are embarking on the first of potentially many career transitions, which will require varying degrees of coping skills and adaptability over time’ (Murphy et al., 2010, p. 174). It is important that students develop their professional identity and increment their network that will enhance them to grow. ‘…the professional community must have a method of sustained interaction and information sharing for students to reap the benefits attributed to the community’ (De Villiers Scheepers et al., 2018, p. 310). This collaborative engagement assists them in reflecting upon their experiences and in terms of what they need to learn to improve.

According to Dean and Pollard (2013) ‘No graduate leaves their professional education program completely prepared for independent practice. That is why all practice professions include a period of internship or practicum experience where newly-educated individuals are allowed to practice under the supervision of a credentialed practitioners’ (p. 144). Leeson and Venturi (2017) also suggest that there are other forms of alternative learning that would be beneficial for progressing. In their report, they suggest that shadowing a colleague, self-study, attending conference and meetings, getting feedback from clients and engaging in a mentoring process can all be considered unstructured CPD that can be helpful for ongoing career development. It is clear from
the literature that work placement is essential in the phase prior to TRANSITIONING. NAVIGATING within the work placement with the appropriate support will enhance students to develop certain skills such understanding the dynamics in the real world, observe more experienced interpreters and learn from them.

4.4. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory of Development

Experiential Learning is the process of learning through experience and emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process of the individual. There is no learning without experience in any area of the life of an individual. ‘Knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner’ (Kolb, 1984, p. 27). Kolb’s work focuses on the four-stage learning cycle which was influenced by the works of the theorists John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget, whose models of learning and development had a great deal of similarities. Kolb’s theory has implications for higher education and it has been used as a foundation in other areas such as career development, staff development and counseling. According to Kolb (1984), knowledge, the development of new concepts and learning are continuously occurring through experiences. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a tool that can assist people to deal with their lives (career, personal life, relationships) for a better understanding of the learning process to a better life.
Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory is represented by a four-stage learning cycle:

Concrete Experience (doing / having an experience)

Active Experimentation (planning / trying out what you have learned)

Reflective Observation (reviewing / reflecting on the experience)

Abstract Conceptualisation (concluding / learning from the experience)

*Figure 4-1: Experiential Learning Cycle.*

*Concrete experience* is when a situation or a new experience is occurring. It is essential to have concrete experience and to learn from a specific situation in a particular environment.

*Reflective Observation* is referring to the importance of observation and reflection of the experience and understands what the individual needs to learn and undertake certain actions.

*Abstract Conceptualization* provides the individual with new knowledge and concepts that the individual has learned from the experience.

*Active Experimentation* is when the individual is taking action in future situations by employing what the learner has acquired from previous settings.

The Four Stages of Competence as discussed in psychology are also pertinent here. The Four Stages of Competence illustrate the development required to excel
within any field. Once individuals accept and recognise what they don’t know, they are able to focus on acquiring and eventually mastering those skills. The four stages of competence are:

- **Unconscious Incompetence**: The individual does not know what the individual does not know. The individual recognises their lack of knowledge or ability, but is unaware of what they need to know.
- **Conscious Incompetence**: the individual knows what he/she does not know. Is aware of the skills that are needed but does not possess them.
- **Conscious Competence**: the individual knows how to do something and has the skill; however, it requires focus and attention to perform competently.
- **Unconscious competence**: the individual has acquired the new skill and keeps applying it. At this stage, their competence no longer requires complete focus and other skills can be developed while competently performing the primary function.

The majority of the participants in my study stated that at the beginning of their career, i.e. upon entering the field, they were surprised that so many aspects of the profession are unknown to them. Therefore, the questions can be ‘What are the known-unknowns and the unknown-unknowns? Specifically, within this research, participants start their profession with the skills and knowledge primarily acquired in education. As previously mentioned, professional life is very different compared to the life of a university student. Once the individual enters the field, they realise how many professional skills were previously unknown or not completely developed before qualifying such as FREELANCING, setting up their own business and NETWORKING.

Kolb (1984) states that learners can gain knowledge through these four different stages. Learners need to be involved in real and new experiences in order to experience a different event or a new topic. From each situation, they need to be able to reflect and observe the experiences analyzing it from different perspectives. From there, learners would be able to conceptualize the experience and integrate their observations into a
new knowledge. Effective learning occurs when the learner goes through the learning cycle.

Boud et al. (1993) illustrate the importance of learning from experience from any setting or any situations. ‘Learning involves much more than an interaction with an extant body of knowledge; learning is all round us, it shapes and helps create our lives – who we are, what we do. It involves dealing with complex and intractable problems, it requires personal commitment, it utilizes interaction with others...’ (p. 1). Learning cannot occur in isolation, people learn from each other in a nurturing environment where every single individual and also institutions can bring knowledge and support for the development and growth of people in various situations. Developing a network and interacting with people who work in the same profession is extremely important. Boud et al. (1993) focus on the idea of experience-based learning which is relevant and significant when learning not only from formal education but by combining all the elements in the environment ‘It is not just an observation, passive undergoing of something, but an active engagement with the environment, of which the learner is an important part’ (p. 6). Every single opportunity is an experience for learning and this is happening only if we create those opportunities. After completing formal education, learning occurs over time and by applying the knowledge and learning from the experience the individual will grow.

It is a constant exploration that would facilitate the career development of an individual. ‘Lifelong learning and career-development programs can find in experiential learning theory a conceptual rationale and guiding philosophy as well as practical educational tools’ (Kolb, 1984, p. 18). The process of learning and developing skills through experience is part of the transition through the stages once the individual enters the “real-world”. Kolb also highlights the importance of a person-environment transaction and in order to learn individuals need to be flexible and adaptable to a new situation. ‘It is this proactive adaptation that is the distinctive characteristic of human learning, a proactive adaptation that is made possible by the use of auxiliary cultural stimuli, social knowledge, to actively transform personal knowledge’ (Kolb, 1984, p. 134). Creating effective opportunities can contribute to the professional development of a
person. In their study about sign language interpreters’ experience working in sensitive areas such as traumatic settings, Darroch and Dempsey (2016, p. 181) state that ‘...interpreters saw working in isolation as a difficult aspect of their work, as they struggled to receive the same emotional support from co-workers...’. They also mention that the lack of support from employers and interpreters express ‘...appreciation of being listened to by the researcher, describing this process as therapeutic’ (p. 181). More experienced interpreters in this study express the need for support when working in specific settings to help them cope with the experience.

Kolb’s theory has been integrated in this study because most of the participants I interviewed mentioned the importance of learning by doing – by learning on the job. They feel that each interpreting assignment is unique and that every single job can be different in relation to setting, topic, event, attendees, clients, and the difficulty of each assignment. Graduates experience the real world while on placement and understand what they can expect to encounter once completing the course. ‘...[S]tudents tend to search for understanding by looking for structure, arguments and making meaningful links between concepts and aspects of the real world’ (Simon, 2010, p.18). When starting out in their profession, interpreters experience the TRANSITIONING phase between college and the real world. This was observed by Schlossberg and restated by Kolb. He acknowledges that ‘...there is a transition point in most career paths where the demands of job roles change, requiring an increasingly integrative perspective on learning’ (Kolb, 1984, p. 192). Although colleges are preparing graduates to have adequate skills for their profession, there appears to be a disconnection between students entering the field with respect to the knowledge they feel they need about being self-employed.

Clinton et al. (2006) conducted a study using grounded theory to explore ‘Portfolio working’ and how individuals organise their work and their careers. According to the participants within Clinton et al. (2006) study, ‘They describe the transition from organizational to portfolio career as an ‘anxious period’, which, if to be sustained successfully, requires a redefinition of career success, the development of professional networks and several ‘safety nets’, such as financial savings and support’ (Clinton et al., 2006, p. 182). Based on my data, participants require professional guidance in order to
successfully integrate into the field of freelance interpreting. A support structure and receiving constructive feedback at the beginning of the journey would help to ease the transition. ‘Highly volatile and unrewarding client relationships, combined with a mismatch between the level of experience and expertise possessed by the portfolio worker and the low level of income that they were able to achieve, led many of her interviewees to become increasingly disenchanted and disenfranchised with a portfolio career’ (Clinton et al., 2006, p. 4). One of the main differences between TRANSITIONING from college to employment and self-employment as a freelancer is the irregularity and unstructured routine of the employment. Doody et al. (2012) talk about the role of TRANSITIONING for final-year student nurses and the need of support during the period of adjustment. Polach (2004) also identified the complexity when making the transition from college to the first job and the importance that organizations understand and support new graduates and their challenges during their first year in work. According to the participants in my study, the situation can be slightly different due to the fact that they are self-employed at an entry-level of their career journey.

Novice interpreters are expected to be able to set up and build-up their own career independently. Most of them start by NAVIGATING the field, asking peers or friends and family how best to approach professional contracting, how to register as a self-employed professional or how to do a tax return, as they are not prepared within the curriculum and have neither the specific EXPERIENCE nor the KNOWLEDGE when starting. These factors have an impact on the career of novice interpreters and indeed for all new entrants to the labor market at the beginning of their journey. It is a steep learning curve that needs to be climbed by looking around and asking around as there are not prepared for this important transition. ‘...many students expressed that they felt “anxious” and “unprepared” for the transition and “feared” they would not have the same level of support once they left university’ (McBeath et al., 2018, p. 47). It was extremely important to explore the transition process and gaining an understanding of the experiences graduates go through when entering the freelance area and the knowledge still needed to be able to undertake the new role. McBeath et al. (2018) also states a strong feeling of belonging and peer support are critical factors for students during the
transition from school to work. I suggest that the presence of a clearly articulated ecosystem is a crucial component for the transition to the labor market after graduation.

As Polach (2004) states ‘This research was interested in hearing the voices of groups of college graduates themselves about their challenges, frustrations, and celebrations during their first year of “real” work’ (p. 9). Going back to Kolb’s theory, participants in my study explained the importance of work placement in final year before entering the field. The limited time within the placements, shortly before completing college, is where graduates can really experience and get a grounding in professional life and includes support from someone from whom they can learn and observe. Pearson and Smith (1989) outline the importance of debriefing in experience-based learning and how, through each experience, individuals can gain new understandings and skills. ‘Debriefing provides the opportunity for structured reflection whereby experiences are used to experience-based learning’ (p. 70). This stage is essential within each stage during the career development of a professional individual. During work placement, graduates recognise the benefit of debriefing after each assignment and how it would be advantageous to be able to have the same session at the beginning of their career journey. A pre-transitioning to the real world is occurring during work placement, where students have the opportunity to learn from the practical experience and gain ‘hands-on’ experience, with feedback loops built-in (from professionals in the field). Graduates have the opportunity to have a better understanding of their future profession in the field and therefore it is essential to include in this section the model ‘Work-Integrated Learning’ (WIL).

4.5. Dean and Pollard’s Demand Control Schema

Having presented Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) model and Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), in this section I will focus on the Demand Control Schema (DC-S). The Demand Control Schema (DC-S) developed by Dean and Pollard was adapted from Karasek’s Job Demand/Control Model (JDC model). According to the JDC model, ‘the mental strain results from the interaction of job
demands and job decision’ (Karasek, 1979, p. 285). The Demand/Control theory examines the stress and challenges linked to a particular profession. This model examines how people who experience high demands at work with little control are more likely than others to voice feelings of stress and anxiety linked with their work. Karasek’s JDC model (Job Demand/Control Model) illustrates the stress factors present in the workplace and the health issues that need to be considered. He further explains that occupational stress in work and satisfaction and effectiveness in work occur between the challenge (demands) and the work and the resources (decisions) in response to the job demands (Karasek, 1979; Dean & Pollard, 2009; Russell & Shaw, 2016). Based on the JDC model, Dean and Pollard developed the Demand Control Schema (DC-S). Dean and Pollard’s model focuses on the work of interpreters and has therefore been applied by interpreters in the field to analyse their work with positive results. The DC-S framework is a model that helps students and professionals to reflect on their experiences (some of the participants mentioned using it after interpreting assignments). This framework is made up of four categories of demands to offer a full experiential insight of the work and experience of interpreters. According to Dean and Pollard (2013) the framework includes four categories of demands:

- Environmental (E): setting where the interpreting assignment is taking place;
- Interpersonal (I): the interaction between the interpreter and the clients;
- Paralinguistic (P): it refers to the communication and language of the consumers;
- Intrapersonal (I): it is specific to the cognitive, physiological, and psychological experience of the interpreter.

In practice, the EIPI framework should assist interpreters in their work and help make decisions. Each category entails aspects of the profession that need to be taken into account in order for an interpreter to deliver an effective and efficient work (Dean & Pollard, 2013). ‘Via the taxonomy of DC-S, we break down the experience of interpreting work into components (i.e., the EIPI demand categories and the pre-, during, and post-assignment control categories) so it becomes easier to learn about interpreting,'
Discuss interpreting, understand interpreting, and analyse interpreting’ (Dean & Pollard, 2013, p. 49). Participants in this study apply the DC-S in particular at the beginning of their career but they feel more constrained when they have nobody to DEBRIEF with. Graduates in this study have recognized the importance of sharing and talking in order to grow and develop the appropriate professional skills and set goals ‘...talking about one’s work with colleagues, in a structured manner, for the purposes of growth and improvement – is accepted and widespread among the practice professions’ (Dean & Pollard, 2013, p. 140). The authors also demonstrate the importance of supervision to support individuals at the beginning of their career. As experienced, novice professionals will receive less mentoring and supervision once entering the field, however ‘...after the internship phase of one’s career, it is important for supervisees to show progress toward individuation, that is, the formation of a distinct professional identity and practice approach or focus...’ (Dean & Pollard, 2013, p. 145).

The work of professional interpreters can be complicated when the individual is alone and difficult when decisions need to be made without real support or guidance. Dean & Pollard (2013) noticed the importance of mentoring and supervising to support professional interpreters throughout the career and also the experiential learning since the on-the-job learning is very common in the interpreting field. Both EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING and SELF-REFLECTION are essential in order to PROGRESS [FLOURISHING] however, all components need to be COMBINED with other resources and skills that will help to improve the ‘control’ practitioners have over their professional lives which can also result in a reduction in stress levels, such as additional skills, decisions and knowledge in relation to the particular job demands (interpreting assignments) (Dean & Pollard, 2009). One of the participants referred to DC-S model and indicated that ‘You use the EIPI framework, you can self-evaluate, that’s fine. What do you do with that then? You can’t discuss it, you can’t get a different perspective, you might enlighten yourself on it, it’s fine. At the end of the day, it is still with you. There should be someone knowledgeable in our field that understands what it is like to interpret to go through the situation...’ (Participant 1). Furthermore, Dean & Pollard (2013) explained that there are no concrete infrastructures to support interpreters during their TRANSITIONING from being a student to being an interpreter in the field, and they also note that there is ‘...no
ready-made network of colleagues, mentors, or supervisors...’ (p. 143). We can add that if this is the case in the United States, where there is an established professionalized field, with tens of thousands of practitioners, then it is unsurprising that in countries where there is a smaller number of practitioners, operating in a more recently established field, experience this challenge too. The successful development of a self-employed interpreter within a thriving ECO-SYSTEM requires a combination of crucial components, not only of individual ability and understanding, but access to advice and support at crucial points along their individual career timeline.

4.6. Incorporating the literature review with the emergent theory

It is important to underline that this finding was new to Bridge Interpreting and the complexity about and how difficult it can be at the beginning of the TRANSITIONING. This is also one of the reasons why CGT was applied ‘This purpose is to integrate his generate theory with the other literature to show its contribution’ (Glaser, 1992, p. 33). Learning from other studies and also from my findings, by knowing the main concern, this can facilitate a more even transition once entered the eco-system.

The aim of the literature review was to determine how this CGT study was best situated in the development of this emergent theory. The theoretical comparison with Schlossberg’ Transition Theory, Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), Dean and Pollard’s Demand Control Schema (DC-S) and key themes is justified through the clear connections with the theory that emerged, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. Aspects of the theory were also largely recognised in the literature review in other areas and within different disciplines. Though the works illustrated in this chapter emerged from other studies, based on other fields, they provide knowledge and additional information that can be integrated within this study due to common factors. This theoretical model encapsulates the experiences of freelance interpreters and integrates theories that can assist them through their UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY. Consistent with previous research into the transition stage from students to professionals, this study suggests that COMBINING crucial
components of guidance and support within the ECO-SYSTEM generates an ideal environment for the FLOURISHING of professional freelancers.

The generated theory, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, and the main key concepts were compared to the literature to evaluate my theory in the context of what has already been published, and contribute to my understanding by providing me with additional data from the substantive field to consider with respect to my theory. A similar theory has been developed by Gynnild (2007) which is called ‘Creative Cycling on New Professional’ which suggests that the main concern is self-fulfillment and that practitioners seek for meaning and during their daily work and states that ‘Creative cycling is the opportunity and basic need for moving in and out, back and forth within and between inner and outer framings in such a way that individual creativity and innovation is invigorating’ (p. 2). The concept of COMBINING was introduced within the ECO-SYSTEM in order to provide a sense of nurturing and growth in the appropriate environment. The ECO-SYSTEM refers to a community where professionals in the field share their knowledge and competencies and assist the novice and also more experienced interpreters during their career adjustment. Many studies explored factors that encourage the success of students when they move to the workforce. Most of the graduates recognize the importance of collaborative support. This supportive ECO-SYSTEM would also help to bridge the gap between the TRANSITIONING from college into the professional world and would create a space where peers and other identities can collaborate and develop strategies that can be beneficial to everyone involved in the interpreter field. The result is that this study should contribute new knowledge and information to the existing literature and in particular to members of this substantive area. The whole, new theory should provide an insight to the career advancement of sign language interpreters and to institutional structures in the community interpreting. Understanding the experiences of the interpreters through this study was also possible to see what the literature can add to help them carry out their role effectively. My research aimed at understanding the experience of interpreters and it also revealed that the role of self-employed professionals is not still well researched.
The theoretical model can be employed in other areas related to the development of a freelancing career, for the transition of students directly from education to a self-employed career. According to CGT the theory has to explain the main concern and the core category in the substantive area and then the same theory has to contribute to the existing literature and it has to be applicable to other areas. As Glaser (1967) states ‘Thus people in situations for which a grounded theory has been generated can apply it in the natural course of daily events’ (p.249). It is through the experience that knowledge is created and new skills are developed that will lead to the development of a successful career ‘The learning process will not stop as soon as it is certified but it continues in different location and design in the workplace’ (Ridzwan & Yasin, 2015, p. 275). As the context and environment in which ISL/English interpreters are prepared is constantly changing, there is a need of combining all the elements previously mentioned in this literature review is fundamental to integrate guidelines to ease the transition from college to novice worker and also to provide guidance for a lifelong career.

Professionalising in a freelance eco-system theory provides a way to integrate crucial components and activities relevant to this substantive field. In doing so, in each stage of the theoretical model relevant goals and resources are provided go through a career pathway as a self-employed professional. Resources, networking, infrastructures, peer connections, career progress and many others are important within an effective eco-system. Learning requires commitments and engagement with other. It requires being proactive and receiving the appropriate contribution within a community of like-minded people. ‘These digital means of community building at the macro level are contributing to a more bonded community of practice in which practitioners can find and encourage other practitioners who are also seeking to improve their skills’ (Smith, 2015, p. 239). It is through real experiences that graduate know what they still do not know and what they still need to learn.

Several studies identified the importance of entailing elements optimal for the development of the individual when entering the workplace. Career transition and adaptability are important stages and students require support to understand their
emerging new identity. Research has also shed the light on how challenging this phase can be and especially for students moving to self-employed professional although studies are still more limited. The WIL plays an important role as it provides opportunities and new experiences by creating the possibility to work with more experienced people in a real context. This literature review was extremely beneficial as it was possible to explore other areas in relation to the emerging of adulthood and analyse factors that can contribute to the complexity of the transition from college to work.

4.7. Summary

In this chapter, I integrated the literature review based on the main key themes and emerged theory from my CGT research study. The main theories were linked to the key concepts emerged from the data. The main existing theories were reviewed and connected to the main concepts such as Transitioning Theory by Schlossberg (1981) was selected when participants mention the complexity when moving from education to workforce and how to bridge the gaps. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) model is linked to the importance of WORK PLACEMENT, having MENTORING before entering the field. The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (1984) by Kolb is linked to the learning by doing the job and the development of new skills and knowledge through experience and practice. The Demand Control Schema (DC-S) was introduced, and we paid particular attention to the work of Dean and Pollard (2013), who applied DC-S to the field of sign language interpreting. This was essential when referring directly to the work of the participants in this substantive area. Together with the existing theory reviewed, additional important concepts were included throughout the literature review in connection with the substantive area: the interpreting community and the career profession of a sign language interpreter. It was possible to find many connections between the concepts emerged from this study and the existing literature that were essential for confirming the theory and fill the gaps of certain topics that haven’t emerged nor researched in the field of interpreting. Future possibilities and how this theory can be integrated in the community interpreting and in the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM will be discussed in Chapter 6 within the Implications.
5. Chapter 5 - Discussion and evaluation of the theory Professionalising in a Freelance Eco-System

5.1. Discussion

The overall purpose of this Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) study was to gain an in-depth understanding of ISL/English interpreters’ primary concerns and their professional needs when practising within the interpreting community. In order to identify the main concern, I started my interviews with the Grand Tour question: ‘What is it like to work as a sign language interpreter?’ Within this chapter, the key concepts and ideas from the literature review are considered with respect to the generated theory: PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. In order to achieve the central purpose of this study, the primary principle of CGT was adopted. I entered the field without any preconceived idea or concern regarding the possible results. By employing CGT, the main concerns and core categories are based solely on the data collected during the interviews, without any directing influence by the researcher.

The theory that emerged is based on the main concern of the participants within the study, incorporating and including not only their factual responses but also their life experiences in order to develop a model that addresses the professional and personal impact of common issues on individuals within the field. Similar observations are noted many times by Glaser (1998). He notes that ‘GT produces a core category that continually resolves a main concern, and through sorting the core category organizes the integration of the theory’ (p. 13). The main concern of ISL/English interpreters that emerged through this study is that of an UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY and the associated theory that was developed on its basis, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, is a way to address this concern. From the theory, came a theoretical framework, the SGB model - STARTING-UP – GEARING-UP – BRANCHING-OUT - which was developed as a grounded theory that could be modelled as a tool for practicing sign language interpreters to use to review their current status, their goals and what is required to achieve them, while offering interpreting agencies, stakeholders and educational entities an opportunity to
gain a greater insight into the life of a freelance interpreter. Within this chapter I will examine the key findings in relation to the literature review, as discussed in chapter 4, and then conclude by evaluating my theory, which emerged by using CGT principles in terms of four criteria: fit, workability, relevance and modifiability.

5.2. Readiness to work

This study has demonstrated that transitioning from being a student to becoming a freelance practitioner is a key milestone. When entering the labour market real world, which in this specific study means entering a FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, novice graduates face several challenges. The initial challenge is the development of a FREELANCING IDENTITY. As Urdal (2019, p.2) notes, ‘Previous research concerning development and construction of professional identity is available in many occupational fields...in the field of translation and interpreting, there is more limited research on professional identity’. When entering the workforce, novice graduates in any professional field have to familiarize themselves with a new environment and try to adjust and adapt to their new life. Walker and Shaw (2011) state that there is a training-to-work gap for sign language interpreters as soon as they begin to work after graduating.

The first time participants in this study experience the real world is during their university training work placement within sign language interpreting agencies. Urdal (2019) utilizes the German term Bildung when talking about the construction of professional identity for interpreters for Deafblind people and states that ‘Bildung is the meeting of the student’s inner strength and capability with the world and refers to the process of self-formation: how students reflect upon their process of becoming professionals’ (p. 1). Relevant organizations within the ECO-SYSTEM provide work placements for students to observe and engage with more experienced interpreters and where they have a MENTOR for the entire period of time. Pearce and Napier (2010) recognise MENTORING as a vital tool for interpreter graduates and notes that a mentoring program is very beneficial for mentors and mentees during the transition from student to practitioner. At the same time, they also recognise that this relationship can
encourage sign language interpreters to remain in the field by creating connectedness. As Walker and Shaw state (2011) ‘...post-graduation mentorship, internship, and extended supervision could mitigate the lingering difficulty of preparing interpreters within academic settings to meet the demand in the field’ (p. 1). Due to the lack of formal MENTORING programmes after college, the main strategy applied by novice graduates is PEERING – that is, they draw on the experiences of and information from their colleagues from college before BROADENING their NETWORK to more experienced interpreters.

González-Davies and Enríquez-Raído (2016) reiterate the same analogy by using the Situated Learning model as an approach that provides learning when exposed to real-life professional environments. They note that ‘...situated Learning entails that knowledge needs to be presented in an authentic context that would normally involve that knowledge’ (p.8). They discuss the invaluable training and experience interpreters and translators receive when exposed to real-life settings and state that ‘...Situated Learning seeks to enhance learners’ capacity to think and act like professionals’ (p. 1).

One of the most common concerns expressed by the participants during the process of TRANSITIONING from college to the workplace is that of FREELANCING. Graduate interpreters start working for different agencies and immediately recognise how ISOLATING the profession can be. Once they enter the field, NAVIGATING and PEERING are the main strategies employed when dealing with unknown territories with their limited knowledge and experience. VALIDATING their professional practice at the very beginning of their career is part of the first stage after starting their career ‘...graduates still started working in these settings soon after beginning their careers and some went into these specialized areas prematurely with a false sense of readiness’ (Walker & Shaw, 2011, p. 11). The study provided me with the opportunity to explore issues that are integral to novice graduates, more experienced professionals, agencies and other entities involved in this field.
5.3. ‘It takes a village’ to bridge the stages

All participants had a desire to continue to FLOURISH as professional interpreters in the long-term. Calvert et al. (2017) also explain the importance of not only progressing one’s individual skills but also the benefits of developing one’s competence through experience in order to practice the profession. In her grounded theory study, she describes how midwives interact within their profession and the efforts made trying to maintain their professional competency and capacity for the required workload. ‘The process is contextual, diverse and is influenced by the practice setting where the salient conditions of resourcing, availability and opportunity for engagement in activities are significant’ (2017, p. 9). Based on this grounded theory study, the aim is to maintain the skills by working and engaging in the professional context within a series of activities such as portfolio, attending courses and peer review process.

During this study, the main three stages that emerged in respect to the professional life of an interpreter were STARTING-UP, GEARING-UP and BRANCHING-OUT. Within these three stages, each category lists what is occurring and how it can be approached. Within each stage, interpreters and stakeholders involved in the interpreting community are encouraged to integrate these three main concepts with the aim of FLOURISHING within the ECO-SYSTEM. Best (2019) states that interpreting agencies play a crucial role but very limited research has been carried out on interpreting agencies. Indeed, research also shows that ‘...interpreters expect more from agencies, such as screening and supporting interpreters...as well as monitoring and supervising front-line services’ (ibid., p,2). At the same time, Best also states that ‘Interpreters working via an agency enjoy advantages such as greater access to a range of clients and work opportunities, facilitation of assignment bookings, and remuneration security if a client fails to pay’ (p. 2). The ECO-SYSTEM represents an environment in which individuals SHARE knowledge and experiences thereby nurturing other professionals. By COMBINING the concepts that emerged from this study, the aim is to provide new knowledge and insight, thereby assisting with the BRIDGING of the stages while PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM.
Both novice graduates and experienced interpreters reported their experience with the difficulties at the beginning of their freelance careers. It is believed that MENTORING is an incredibly important element of the transitioning process and throughout their career when a new situation arises and guidance is needed. Because formal MENTORING is not provided after graduating, novice graduates NAVIGATE the field by PEERING. PEER-TO-PEER MENTORING is a solution used to resolve this issue and is the main strategy applied when someone starts practicing in the field (Collins et al. 2014; Pearce & Napier, 2010). Pearce and Napier (2010) worked on the development of a mentorship programme for sign language interpreters to facilitate their TRANSITIONING and that the programme would not only provide them with opportunities for learning but make them feel part of the professional community and a sense of belonging.

Participants in this study underlined the need for a more structured pathway, with more visible support during their career development. With the aim of FLOURISHING, sign language interpreters seek more EXPERIENCES and at the same time a process for MAPPING OUT and MONITORING their PROGRESS. By SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM, the focus should not only be on the technical and linguistic skillset required but also a focus on ways of BENCHMARKING their trajectory and their career. As mentioned, it has been recognised as an ISOLATING career, therefore it is essential to have personal and professional support in particular at the beginning of their profession, when they are new in the field. NETWORKING is another concept that can BRIDGE the gaps while USING experience for LEARNING in the field (Boud et al., 1993). Creating NETWORKS is ideal in a context where professionals work most of the time on their own. In some cases, if the support is not visible by NAVIGATING and DEMANDING, it is possible to find the solution elsewhere through personal research. Linguistic skills are not the only skills that novice graduates require when starting in the profession, which is highlighted through this research.

The profession of an interpreter is one where demand fluctuates [FLUCTUATING], contributing to the complexity involved in navigating the field and being able to create a stable career. Interpreters learn to a large degree by practising their profession and based on their experience, they are able to MAP OUT their progress. The lack of formal
MONITORING across their career trajectory is challenging when interpreters are SELF-REFLECTING on their PROGRESS in a bubble. PERSISTING in the profession requires the ability to remain motivated [KEEP MOTIVATED], UPSKILL and also eventually master several aspects of the target field [MASTERING] in order to achieve professional and financial STABILITY.

Additionally, I hope the theory, being the first study on the career trajectory within this substantive area in Ireland, will provide new knowledge and information to agencies, stakeholders and other entities around the need to ENGAGE and offer more SUPPORT and have a better understanding of the demands placed on interpreters within the community. PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM can only be introduced and NURTURED if everyone involved is in favour of a new perspective and approach to address the profession as a whole and its UNSTRUCTURED CAREER TRAJECTORY.

5.4. Evaluation of Professionalising in a Freelance Eco-System Theory

Once the goal of Classic Grounded Theory was achieved, developing the theory, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, was the next crucial stage of the research. This CGT study is the first study carried out in this substantive area focusing primarily on ISL/English interpreters’ career trajectory from education towards a life-long professional pathway in the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. This research also helped identify current shortfalls within the literature that will require more research in the future. In this chapter, in order to evaluate the quality of the theory developed, Glaser suggests (1992) that the principles of fit, work, relevance and modifiability be applied. In the following sections, we examine the theory with respect to each of these criteria.

5.4.1. Fit

The principle of fit refers to the categories and concepts directly emerging from the data and not from pre-existing studies or theories. Fit represents what in reality is occurring in the field of study. Neither concepts nor categories were forced to fit this study. Due to my involvement within Bridge Interpreting Ltd., and by working with ISL/English interpreters and students, one of my main goals was to identify the key
concerns of the participants without leading them in any particular direction. By following CGT accurately from day one, the theory, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, emerged.

In order to determine if my theory fits in this substantive area of study, I theoretically sampled my theory at efsli (European Forum of Sign Language interpreters) conference ‘Interpreting in Employment Settings: You are (f/h)ired’ in 2018, with sign language interpreters from other countries during a poster presentation about my study. During my presentation, I asked sign language interpreters the question: ‘Do the three stages reflect your own professional experience?’ Their responses (Chapter 2) confirmed that they have the same shared concern regarding their UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY with all involved aspiring to FLOURISH in their professional lives. ‘The theory must also be readily understandable to sociologists of any viewpoint, to students and to significant laymen. Theory that can meet these requirements must fit the situation being researched, and work when out into use’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3).

At the conference, I also received an invitation from the Association of Sign Language Interpreters UK (ASLI) to collaborate on the development of a webinar based on my research for the members of the organization. The positive feedback and comments confirm my theory fits and is both effective and applicable in this substantive area.

5.4.2. Workability

The theory that emerged works if it explains what it is really occurring in the area of study and how the participants in this study face their main concern. The literature reviewed confirmed that the first obstacle students face is TRANSITIONING. In any TRANSITIONING phase, there is a need to adjust and learn from a new and unfamiliar context, which in this case is entering the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. After the first phase, the literature also illustrated the need of guidance and MENTORING at the beginning of their career (Janzen, 2005; Leeson, 2005; Pearce & Napier, 2010). For SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM, once the course of study and the work placement are completed, as
Kolb (1984) confirms, EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING is essential for the development of additional skills that will broaden their abilities and benefit them throughout their professional career. The Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) model also emphasises the benefits of the period of work placement before entering the real world, as well as what the model should provide in order to best prepare the students for their TRANSITIONING and make sure they are prepared for the professional world. These aspects confirm the theory that emerged from the study, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, explains the main concern of ISL/English interpreters based only on the data collected. ‘...“by work” we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behaviour under study’. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). The effectiveness of PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM theory to demonstrate what is really occurring in the field for ISL/English interpreters and how they all share the main concern will be reflected in future research as initiatives are put into place and further data is gathered. FLOURISHING is part of their career trajectory, understanding how to CLIMB the WINDING STAIR by implementing the main three stages of the SGB model: STARTING-UP – GEARING-UP – BRANCHING-OUT is of paramount importance. The three stages explain the process interpreters go through from that of graduating professional to experienced interpreter to those who have mastered their skill.

Based on the life experiences shared by the participants of the study, I was able to both report the findings to Bridge Interpreting Ltd. as a way for the business to better understand the needs of this growing market and supply a theory to assist in the development of projects capable of addressing concerns raised. By following the CGT methods, the theory that emerged clearly outlines the main concern of ISL/English interpreters based on their lived experiences (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003). It became clear that the theory drawn from the data reflected in large parts on the willingness of participants to share their personal experiences from the time of entering the field at an entry level position and other stages of a career yielded more details that might not have been wrought from direct questions. Based on CGT work and the processing of the data, the theory confirms common misgivings within the field of ISL/English interpreters, providing a better understanding and a new perspective for Bridge Interpreting Ltd and all others engaged in this specific ECO-SYSTEM.
5.4.3. Relevance

The principal of relevance is when the main concern and the core categories are relevant to the participants within the study. Relevance refers to the utility of the theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that the theory is relevant if it can be applied and adjusted to any other area. I sampled my findings through an extensive literature review and in consultation with sign language interpreters from other countries (at the efsli conference 2018) in order to confirm the relevance of my core category and main concern identified. Through the discovery of existing theories within my literature review that supported my theory, it became clear that the core category, main concern and the merged theory were very relevant and reflected the reported reality of the profession both here and abroad.

Furthermore, it can also be considered relevant as the theory reflects and further supports existing theories and literature. Social media was another resource that could confirm my theory was relevant to the participants in this area. While carrying on with this study, comments and questions on Twitter that could confirm that the main concern and core category are relevant were posted. People responded by leaving messages offering insights into their professional and personal experience in the field. The initial comment that developed a list of threads was:

‘How did we (you) get here? I’m curious to read advice for people entering our professions, what individuals can do to make the path smoother for others (or remind them of hard truths). How long does it take to build a viable practice? How to do it?’ (Anonymous, Twitter 21 November 2018 11.45PM).

The comments were remarkably relevant to this study. The following quotes have been extrapolated from my Twitter page.

‘It takes a while to get started. I found myself wondering would I ever get enough clients in my 1 ½ years, then things started to move and by 3rd year I was making choices,
adapting my work tools, and scheduling a whole lot better’ (Anonymous, Twitter 26th November 2018 5.24AM).

As previously mentioned and also from these comments, freelancer interpreters go through the same experience and follow the same stages from the beginning of their career throughout their professional development.

‘How long? It took me 2-3 years to get to the point where I could support myself through freelancing alone (I changed careers from teaching and carried on supply teaching on the side for 2 years). Have some money put aside for those early years’ (Anonymous, Twitter 22nd November 2018 1.43AM).

These quotes together with the theoretical sampling carried out with other sign language interpreters from other countries prove the relevance of the emerged theory. Additionally, the theory can also be considered relevant, as it is applicable to other areas where professionals practice as self-employed.

Glaser and Strauss state ‘What is more, if he has participated in the social life of his subject, then he has been living by his analysis, testing them not only by observation and interview but also by daily living’ (1967, p. 225). The most recent one-to-one meeting with the last group of students on work placement confirmed again the relevance of this study. It was also interesting to listen to their questions, such as ‘How do you MONITOR us when we start working for Bridge Interpreting?’ ‘What do we need to know as soon as we start working? Based on the one-to-one meetings with the students and my current research, I identified the same recurring theme which included the main concern outlined in the theory that had been voiced both from the participants of the study in Ireland and also at the international seminar.

5.4.4. Modiﬁability

In terms of modifiability, it will occur when new data emerges; therefore new categories will modify the theory over time. By applying an ongoing comparison to the
factors emerging from the data, concepts and categories will continually modify until the main categories, sub-categories and properties are selected in order to find the connections by which the main core category can then be conceptualized (Birks & Mills, 2011). The name of the theory has been modified from FLOURISHING to PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, as it best encapsulates the aim of the study and support model the emerged while appreciating the fact that each interpreter strives to FLOURISH in a PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY. By employing CGT, the categories were updated and modified on an ongoing basis in order to achieve the highest possible clarity for the theory that was developed. By constantly comparing the main categories and the relationships among them, the core category, the main concern and the emerged theory were constantly modified until they were theoretically sampled with sign language interpreters from other countries. After the theoretical sampling, I was satisfied with my theory and therefore I started the theoretical writing.

5.5. Summary

This study provided me with the opportunity to identify the key categories in relation to the SUPPORT and ENGAGEMENT needed within this particular field by ISL/English interpreters. This chapter focuses on the discussion of theory emerging from this study, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, together with the integration of existing literature in this important field. The theoretical support framework that has been designed as a result, can be used as a practical model applicable to many different settings within the field and others. Key concepts emerged within each stage flagging the support required at different stages in a career including; TRANSITIONING, MENTORING, MONITORING, MASTERING. Reflecting on these key concepts will allow for a process of support that directly caters for the needs of the freelance interpreter, giving them the best opportunity to FLOURISH within the environment. As previously mentioned, some initiatives have already been implemented based on the key categories emerging from this study within Bridge Interpreting Ltd.

When employing CGT as a research methodology, the final part is to evaluate the quality of the theory that emerged from the study. This will be confirmed by applying
the four principles of fit, workability, relevance and modifiability. In the next chapter, I will illustrate the contributions, limitations, implications and conclusion of this study.
6. Chapter 6 - Contributions, Limitations, Implications and Conclusions

This study provides, for the first time, a theoretical basis for understanding the professional experience of ISL/English interpreters. As interpreters work primarily as freelance contractors and so are required to resource their own employment on a continuing basis, the theoretical model developed can inform a framework that can support the development of a mentoring model. Thus, it would not only streamline the transition from student to professional, but ensure that both those entering the field and those who are more experienced, have resources by which to FLOURISH and develop their careers with the required supports.

Through data gathered using Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) methodology, an insight into the professional landscape of the newly graduated interpreter was gleaned; allowing me to develop a theory based on real world experience within the field and posit possible practical implementable initiatives to contribute to the life of the ISL/English Interpreter. There are many benefits in having more confident and professionally supported interpreters. Without the current concerns and professional distractions outlined in the theory of this study, they would be able to focus on each unique interpreting assignment as it arises, ensuring standards and work practices are not only maintained but improving the experience for all. Many more professional settings require interpreters than ever before, many of which call for bespoke references unique to the field and through which interpreters acquire a practical education in specialised areas.

Through this study, the theory that emerged, PROFESSIONALIZING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM illustrates that within the professional landscape, there are many pitfalls that need to be navigated by ISL/English interpreters in order to FLOURISH within the currently UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY. On completing formal education, they move directly into a life-long career of EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING and development in which both their professional abilities in the field and also their business and marketing insight as a freelance interpreter are constantly tested and enriched.
During the first stage, STARTING-UP, ISL/English interpreters TRANSITIONING from college to the FREELANCING workforce often link together, researching and sharing with fellow students and approaching and questioning those experienced in the field when possible. While CLIMBING the WINDING STAIR of professional development and personal confidence, they look at GEARING-UP through EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING with the aim of being better equipped to overcome the many challenges involved. A lot of time is often spent MAPPING-OUT their journey, with very little MONITORING, and BENCHMARKING their goals by SELF-REFLECTING on experiences as they arise and incorporating lessons from the last job to the next both in a practical sense and also in their appreciation of the experience and how it impacts the direction they wish to take in their career pathway as an ISL/English interpreter.

Within the second stage, SCAFFOLDING PROFESSIONALISM, newly graduated ISL/English interpreters integrate new abilities and knowledge through experience, in order to traverse the myriad of new settings and subjects they will need to encounter competently. It is important to note that each and every professional engagement can affect whether they are considered for future projects, so their career development can be progressed or hindered based on their self-awareness of their abilities and the roles that they are currently suited for versus those they require more experience before approaching. There is a steep learning curve, where the goal is to not only develop the technical skills but also additional competences to operate within the professional freelance environment.

In the final stage of the journey, BRANCHING-OUT, the aim is to reach the point of MASTERING their career pathway through ROUTINIZING the business requirements of the freelancer, in order to ensure an PERSISTING, rewarding and successful career in the field. Through the COMBINATION of experiences of a wide host of professions and settings within the field, the focus is for interpreters to FLOURISH in PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM.
Within this study, I have included the motivation for carrying out this research (Chapter 1). I have explained CGT and how I applied this methodology (Chapter 2). The theory that emerged, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, has been illustrated which is based on the primary concern of sign language interpreters that came from this study, which is professional life in an UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY (Chapter 3). Once the theory and the main concern emerged, I carried out a literature review based on the substantive issues that arose through the CGT analysis of the data (Chapter 4). The theory was also evaluated and discussed (Chapter 5).

Within this chapter, I will present the contributions that the study makes to understanding the lifecycle of an ISL/English interpreter and the limitations of the study. There are also important implications discussed regarding the need for updating the support framework for those within the field. The profession is growing annually with each cohort of graduates, by an expanding number of professional settings where sign language users engage, and in terms of associated specialised vocabulary that we see as a result of the marked increase members of the Deaf Community graduating from third level education in a range of subject areas. The conclusions reached by the study are then outlined along with an overview of the proposed support structures that would assist those at any stage in their careers as ISL/English interpreters.

6.1. Contributions

The main contribution of this study is the theory that emerged by employing CGT to reflect what is actually occurring in the field when ISL/English interpreters practise their profession. The aim was to identify their concerns, how they currently deal with the requirements of the field and any potential insight or ideas that would assist in the development of a working support model. This is the first study in this substantive area focusing on sign language interpreters and the development of their professional career as self-employed interpreters. CGT methodology offered a process by which to discover primary concerns without influencing or forcing the outcomes based on prior research or personal bias within this specific career ECO-SYSTEM. A further outcome that evolved from the results of the research was the development of a theoretical framework to
identify the stages sign language interpreters go through within their pathway. Each stage illustrating the support and resources as well as other elements needed to ensure interpreters are active and engaged with their career pathway and understand what is required of them to operate in a freelance environment and the professional requirements to FLOURISH within the field.

**Contribution 1:** This study provides a theory explaining ISL/English interpreters’ main professional concern, which is rooted in the current need to operate independently in a relatively new and expanding field. The theory that emerged, PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM, illustrates how interpreters operate and attempt to FLOURISH within this UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY. This is the first study undertaken to develop a theory addressing the support needs, personal motivations and required skillsets in order to develop successful FREELANCING careers within sign language interpreting. By understanding the experiences, skillsets and varied competencies required in this field, for interpreters at all stages of career development, support and assistance could be tailored to ensure the concerns raised within the study can be addressed.

**Contribution 2:** Through understanding the main concerns of ISL/English interpreters and what is occurring in the field (this is the reason why I selected CGT), it was possible to create a new perspective, common to participants, on how they go about resolving issues as they arise. This new theoretical framework, STARTING-UP, GEARING-UP, BRANCHING-OUT (SGB Model), is a three-stage journey outlining the process from the TRANSITIONING journey as they enter the field, to the process of continuous professional development (EQUIPPING) through experience and exposure, to MASTERING the range of competencies required for success. Through engagement with a number and variety of interpreting settings, new knowledge in varied fields incorporated, experience in a host of settings has ensured confidence and the ROUTINIZING of both the personal and professional bookwork requirements of the freelance worker has been established. Within each stage there are strategies and factors that outline the process with which participants are engaging.
The SGB Model illustrates factors; strategies and resources that can offer dynamics to assess progress and identify opportunities for actions. This theoretical framework can be employed when practicing a FREELANCING profession and as a model for considering career development planning. It illuminating ways to offer practical assistance and support to interpreters in their daily lives, but also to any other professionals and entities involved in this specific ECO-SYSTEM and what they require to thrive. The importance of PROACTIVITY to the freelance interpreter has also been discussed, since there is a direct impact for the interpreters professional success, but also impacts other participants within the ECO-SYSTEM.

Contribution 3: PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM as a theoretical framework can be utilised by anyone operating in a freelance profession where contracts vary, with many short engagements, throughout their career trajectory, to generate a clear trajectory and find ways to develop a successful professional life. COMBINING strategies and essential components (MENTORING, SELF-REFLECTING, PEER-TO-PEER MENTORING, NETWORKING and EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING) can help support the interpreters to progress within a nurtured ECO-SYSTEM rather than in isolation. Through the study, approaches have been identified and outlined that can be employed by sign language interpreters as independent contractors, which can also help, inform and assist other professionals, stakeholders and institutions engaged in the field.

Contribution 4: Having entered the field without any preconceived idea or concern, Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) allowed me to add new knowledge to this substantive area, including aspects previously omitted from formal reviews that should be incorporated to contain a more complete understanding of professional ISL/English interpreters and the impact on the larger environment in which they operate. Current literature and existing theories provided important sources of material and information that were incorporated into the theory and contributed to a clearer understanding of interdisciplinary areas. A few existing theories and a variety of existing literature supported this study. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory was incorporated as the 4-S model offered within it, can be used during the TRANSITIONING phase for the participants as a new resource. The Demand-Control Schema by Dean and Pollard is the current
theoretical framework used by interpreters for SELF-REFLECTING on their interpreting assignment and confirms the need for interpreters to review their career pathway on an ongoing basis. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (1984) also supported the importance of using the experience of doing the job for learning and how that would contribute to the development of skills and additional knowledge. The Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) model illustrates the importance of work placement for students before entering the workforce. Strategies have already been implemented at Bridge Interpreting Ltd based to the model and these findings, to ensure placement opportunities exist to for students in order to increase their exposure, experience and understanding of their future career.

Contribution 5: As this research has been carried out for Bridge Interpreting Ltd., this study will benefit and contribute to the knowledge, understanding and information for the company and also other agencies and organisations working in the same or similar fields that may have professionals working along a similar contract dynamic. Since undertaking this study and discussing the research with other professionals in the field, the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) in UK approached me and requested the presentation of this study for sign language interpreters working internationally upon its completion. An action plan has been created and is currently under review that could be employed within this substantive area to assist both interpreters and also students on placement through the company.

I have proposed some practical assistance for students during their TRANSITIONING and suggested possible services that could offer expertise that would be valuable to students within the peer support service in Bridge Interpreting Ltd. (See Appendix A). Based on the findings of the study, it appears clear that providing strategies and resources that can support practitioners throughout their career would be beneficial not only to them and services such as Bridge Interpreting Ltd., but also the settings in which the interpreter operates, by relieving concerns that may hinder their ability to incorporate knowledge from their experiences, which is so vital in the development of their professional abilities.
Contribution 6: The theory offers strategies and new knowledge that would be informative to anyone involved in the area. After the development of the theory, other existing theories that were discussed through the research have been integrated, supporting both the results of the study and confirmation of the limited literature currently available in the field. The career trajectory of freelancers in this area is still underrepresented in studies that focus on employed roles for which the data is both more accessible and numerous.

6.2. Limitations

In terms of limitations, time was one of the main issues. My lack of experience and learning to use CGT in the process was also a limitation. Before starting the study, I carried out an extensive literature review in relation to the methodology in order to understand how to apply it and become familiar with the methods. Following a meeting with my supervisor and attendance at both a three-day CGT workshop delivered by the Grounded Theory Institute (at Trinity College Dublin) and monthly Grounded Theory meetings at the Centre for Deaf Studies; I gained a better understanding of this methodology and how to apply it appropriately.

The researcher learns how to use CGT essentially by using it, although I have reviewed the literature about CGT on an ongoing basis in order to ensure it was applied correctly. Simultaneously, the monthly seminars helped me to answer questions when I was not sure about certain CGT tasks as the research continued.

In terms of data collection, I was not able to collect secondary data due to time restrictions and participants’ availability. In following Grounded Theory methodology, in order to determine if my theory made sense in this substantive area of study, I theoretically sampled my theory at the efsli conference ‘Interpreting in Employment Settings: You are (f/h)ired’ in 2018 with sign language interpreters from other countries during a poster presentation about my study. During my presentation, I asked sign language interpreters the question: ‘Do the three stages reflect your own professional experience?’ Their responses (Chapter 2) confirmed that they have the same concerns
regarding the UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY yet they all aspire to FLOURISH within the field and voiced their support for further framework and resources for interpreters internationally.

6.3. Implications

Within this chapter, implications of the study to the career development of sign language interpreters are outlined and the benefits that exist in providing additional supports for practitioners throughout their career trajectory. The SGB model (STARTING-UP – GEARING-UP – BRANCHING-OUT) provides a theoretical framework that illustrates a deeper understanding of the career development of sign language interpreters and what they go through during each stage. Within each stage, both the needs and potential solutions have been discussed to support interpreters and address the main concern of working within a UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY. Other studies encountered during the research process confirmed the complexity of issues when moving from education to work and develop a career as a freelancer. The findings in this study overlap with other studies in regard to the importance of receiving appropriate SUPPORT, MENTORING and GUIDANCE, particularly at the beginning of the profession. The concepts that emerged from this research that are unique to the field of interpreters are important for the participants and also crucial for agencies and stakeholders involved in the interpreting community. The support model that has been created, is based on the findings of the study as well as literature previously published on the subject of freelance work, but which has been specifically developed to assist sign language interpreters at any stage in their career pathway, student, graduate, experienced and veteran.

During their placement, students should be encouraged to actively engage in the community and be provided with access to the support entities currently available, such as CISLI, Bridge Interpreting Ltd. and SLIS. Students should also look to resources available within their own training institutes before completing the studies, including the Career Advisory Services of Trinity College, Tangent, their Student Union, educational advisors, associations expert in freelancing, and establish interpersonal skills in a professional setting in order to develop the necessary networking skills, as they
engage with the community and like-minded people when on work placement or in
discussion associated with field. As we noted in previous chapters, Holton (2007)
explains the importance of networking in the workplace for learning and personal
development. By creating a community where sharing information and learning would
give the opportunity to members to receive new knowledge and skills that might have
not developed yet. The author demonstrated that the core variable of the theory was
‘rehumanising’ which explains ‘…how knowledge worker resolves their concerns with the
dehumanising impact of a changing knowledge workplace – how they restore the human
dimension in their work relationships and working environments’ (p.3). This current
study highlights the particular difficulties experienced when students enter the
freelance eco-system. Professionalising in a freelance eco-system and the theoretical
model developed within this study can be used to support individuals during their career
development, alleviating some of the pressures that students currently experience
when moving from academia to professional life and provide an understanding of the
supports that are needed to help interpreters remain in the field and thrive in the
profession. Based on the findings from this study, activities have already been
implemented within Bridge Interpreting Ltd., within the peer support service.

Based on the concerns that emerged from the study, some additional advice is
now provided to the students before entering the work placement regarding what they
can expect and what can be expected of them (See Appendix A), as well as the benefits
and types of relationships they should have with their mentors to ensure they are
prepared for life of freelance interpreting work. The findings also provided a better
understanding of mentoring, its oversight, effectiveness and the information available
to mentors to assist them. By speaking to the main concerns of students, mentors can
provide knowledge and insight to the novice graduates. We recommend that the aim of
placement is not only the linguistic skills but also all aspects entailed in freelancing.
Bridge Interpreting Ltd. is also planning to organize a workshop on freelancing for
students before they enter the field based on the findings of the study. All the
participants in this study expressed their sincere passion for the profession and the
workplace pride they experience when offering their service within the Deaf community
and other settings in society. Their main aim is understandably to be able to flourish
within the field and have the opportunities to build up through support and guidance in the ever-growing industry of professional interpreting.

In relation to the details revealed through mentoring research, meetings have been organized with current mentors, in order to provide them with information in relation to the concerns of the students while on placement, so that they can better structure their meetings with the students. At the same time, this will also allow us to support them and ask their needs and how we can assist them during the mentoring.

This CGT study is supported by other studies where transitioning for students to the real world has been considered a critical milestone. Most of these studies look at students moving from college to traditional employer-based employment. The theory developed in this study can be used to understand how best to optimise the profession and others that follow the same unregulated career trajectory. It would also benefit anyone who is involved with employment agencies, people in the Deaf community, government institutes or within education.

6.4. Conclusions

Professionalising in a freelance eco-system theory emerged from the data collected from students and ISL/English interpreters who have been practising as freelancers in the field. The aim was to develop a theory that explained the experience of sign language interpreters and discovered that the main concern was their unregulated career trajectory. This theory has been developed while working in Bridge Interpreting Ltd. with the aim of understanding the professional dynamic of sign language interpreters. This theory is grounded on data collected from participants who are all practising sign language interpreters in Ireland. Through the development of this theory, it was possible to identify supporting theories that were useful for the integration of certain gaps in this area and what can be done at Bridge Interpreting Ltd. to fill the gaps. Thanks to this study, it is already possible to apply some actions that follow from the research conducted for this study. Professionalising in a freelancing eco-system is about developing a nurturing environment where everyone can progress and...
where everyone can GROW through the PROACTIVITY of professionals and institutes engaging for the benefit of everyone involved.

Inevitably, this study has opened up additional questions that further research will need to address. For example, we can identify further research questions that map to each of the stages identified in the theory described here.

STARTING-UP:

- What are the conditions that would best support newly graduated interpreters in transitioning into the freelance interpreting economy?
- What are the indicators of successful transition?
- What can educational providers (in this case, CDS and Trinity College Dublin more generally) do to better support students in planning for their transition?
- What kinds of mentoring issues arise for “new” interpreters over the first year of their work in the field?
- What kinds of mentoring issues arise as they progress towards feeling more competent?
- How do new interpreters judge their competence? How does this self-evaluation shift over time? Are there patterns that apply? How do they map to the way experienced professionals in the field and consumers of interpreting services evaluate them?

GEARING-UP

- What kinds of supports do interpreters find useful as they seek to consolidate their career path?
- How do interpreters network? Who do they network with? How do they believe these networks support/inhibit their professional development?
- How do interpreters strategise to develop competence in new domains (e.g. legal interpreting, medical interpreting)? How does the broader context in which interpreting services are provided support or inhibit progress in this regard? How do interpreters negotiate the need for training
in domains where little or no focused training is available on an ongoing basis in Ireland (e.g. legal interpreting, healthcare interpreting).

**BRANCHING-OUT**

- What criteria are used to identify ‘excellent’ interpreters? Are there different criteria used by interpreters at different stages of progression? By different stakeholders (e.g. agencies, registration bodies, deaf people, hearing people)?
- How do successful interpreters describe their work? How does this compare to interpreters who might consider themselves less experienced/less expert?
- How is mastery described (narrative discourse) and passed on (practices)?
- How is mastery rewarded?

Findings could inform how we support and provide resources to sign language interpreters by expanding the engagement on the direction of this primarily freelance profession to stakeholders and entities within the ECO-SYSTEM.
References

AHEAD (2017/18). *Numbers of students with disabilities studying in higher education in Ireland*. Dublin: AHEAD Educational Press.


Appendix A

Application of the theory

As a result of this research study, Bridge Interpreting Ltd. has begun to incorporate the findings into their process for graduating and established interpreters. With the implementation of the findings from this research, the position of Bridge Interpreting Ltd. will also be strengthened with the interpreting profession, given they will be aiding professional development in addition to sourcing work for interpreters. In this document, I present an overview of the key thematic areas that we address.

Student Placement Induction Sessions

An induction day has been designed for student interpreters before they start their work placements at Bridge Interpreting Ltd. Since I began the study, the relevance and importance of the placements has become paramount to a successful start within the profession. I emphatically urge students to make the most of their time on placements and ask MENTORS and other interpreters to share the skills and knowledge needed after graduating, as any insight as to how to approach the field when they start working as FREELANCERS is invaluable and the settings in which one finds oneself can vary greatly. Other studies presented within the literature review also indicated the importance of the work placement before entering the professional field (Jackson 2016). One important aspect of the work placement is the presence of a MENTOR while facing real world scenarios for the first time (first in 3rd year and then in 4th year).

As the Sign Language Support Service Coordinator at Bridge Interpreting Ltd., part of my role is to plan work placement for 3rd and 4th year students from the Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS). The first introduction that students receive into the interpreting workforce is during their 3rd year of work placement. Students frequently mention on completion of their placement that they didn’t know what to expect, so the placements also offer assurance and comfort before engaging on a professional level. Bridge Interpreting Ltd. has also organized a meeting with MENTORS of the students who were
on placement recently. Ideas were shared and brainstormed in order to create ways that a more STRUCTURED MENTORING SERVICE could be established with clearer lines of communication and cooperation between the students, the mentors and colleges.

Indicative content for this session includes some of the comments and feedback that arose during the meeting with the mentors:

- At the beginning of the work placement, it would be beneficial to organise a meeting with not only the line manager from CDS, but also with the mentors and peer support coordinators in order to understand what goals students need to achieve and how to achieve them;

- Provide these goals to mentors before the start of the work placement, so that they can prepare and be ready for what is expected and what they need to do while on placement with the students;

- Offer a list of questions that mentors could ask the students on the basis of the academic curricula and their learning goals. Ethical questions may assist students reflect on the profession while on placement and still in the process of generating a personal outlook;

- Develop guidelines for mentors to follow that can assist them while on placement with the students;

- Final meeting with line-manager, students and agencies to explain the nature of the profession and placement, offering the opportunity to ask additional questions and provide any useful information needed before entering the field.

When 4th year students complete their work placement, one-to-one meetings are organised; firstly between the student and I and then with their line manager from CDS to discuss their experience and whether they have achieved their learning goals.
We also gather feedback from mentors and the other interpreters with whom they have shared placements or professional settings. Based on their comments, an evaluation form is written recommending the next steps, which includes ways to improve and refine certain skills that would be valuable for both their future career and also their final exams. One of the most common concerns is ‘Will we have a mentor when we start?’ In the next section, I discuss how Bridge are planning to fill the ‘mentoring gap’. Bridge Interpreting Ltd. are considering establishing a more structured mentoring arrangements which may include supervision. At the same time, I have drawn their attention to the need to begin to network with their future co-workers. It was also beneficial to create a network of language and subject-specific professionals that would assist interpreters in their upskilling such as engagement of deaf professionals for one-to-one meetings or group sessions.

**Mentoring**

MENTORING is provided during work placement in 3rd and 4th year and is recognised as an essential aspect of training. The relationship that the interpreters develop with their MENTORS is beneficial for both parties, as the experience of mentoring different individuals offers insights for the mentor. Being MENTORED while on work placement allows students to be more at ease and able to focus on the experience and possible learning available, serving as it does as a priceless resource to be considered an essential part of the training required before entering the field. Once in the professional field, formal MENTORING is no longer in place. Based on my findings and the responses from participants, a meeting with the mentors has been organized in order to share important information on how Bridge Interpreting Ltd. can collaborate with them and implement additional supports and/or features with the aim to provide a more efficient and effective work placement.

The feedback received from MENTORS and experienced interpreters has also been very positive. They have reported how well prepared they feel the students are in terms of technicality and linguistics skills when witnessed on placement in different educational settings. Students are provided with the technical skills and knowledge needed for their lifelong career, but they need to also acquire experience and other
professional attributes (Humphrey, 2000). The purpose of the Peer Support Service within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. is to assist and support interpreters throughout their career trajectory. A more structured support system tailored to the specific needs of the interpreters will see a positive impact on the individual as well as the community in general. This research was extremely helpful in updating the service offered, having a focus on the interpreters' main concern and which enabled me to design a model incorporating the main categories that emerged.

The literature on MENTORING for sign language interpreters (Pearce & Napier, 2010; Delk, 2013) differs from that of other professions, such as nursing and teaching where graduates are supervised after they have completed their studies (Dean & Pollard, 2001). Dean and Pollard (2001) also state that there is a lack of professional support after graduation and that interpreters have to manage both the theory and practical skills deftly upon entering the real world. Students appreciate the drawbacks due to their lack of knowledge and often need to learn through NAVIGATING and EXPLORING ways to operate most efficiently and effectively, which often requires support that fits within the field of practice.

**Bridge Interpreting Interpreters’ Handbook**

Based on this CGT research, Bridge Interpreting Ltd. has been working on an internal 'Interpreters’ handbook' (still in progress) which includes recommendations regarding the career of sign language interpreters and further information about the support services available to them. The handbook will also be beneficial for the staff working within Bridge Interpreting Ltd., so that they can better understand what is required and what pressures are felt by freelance interpreters. This need highlights gaps in this substantive field that need to be filled for the benefit of student and practitioner alike. The extensive literature review confirms that the concepts that emerged from this study address the gaps that have been noted in previous research. Martin and Turner (1986) explore specific techniques and strategies, applying grounded theory methodology within organizations and state that ‘This theoretical account not only aids the investigator’s understanding, but provides a means of communicating findings to those in the area studied, either as a basis for discussion or as a vehicle for implementing
change’ (p. 143). For instance, TRANSITIONING was an important category that emerged from this study and was confirmed to be a very common challenge within other areas discovered through the literature review. Schlossberg’s transition theory as well as other existing theories illustrated in this study, were extremely important to confirm my theory held water and in order to generate possible plugs to fill the aforementioned gaps. The possibility of creating an Interpreter Assistance Programme which would include all of the above as well as more specialist support during times of interpreting in distressing circumstances.

Participants have mentioned the importance of having a more structured career trajectory and a more linear profession, where they are able to REFINE their professional role to a place they feel they are FLOURISHING in the field. At the end of the first year in the interpreting community, it would be beneficial to have a one-to-one meeting to review not only how they have experienced their first year but also to record any feedback and offer any advice that may be required. The theoretical framework presented here is based solely on my participants responses, which can also be a valuable model for interpreters and also anyone involved in the interpreting community. Some associations have already requested copies once the research is complete, as it is an invaluable resource for novice and experienced interpreters alike.

With the forthcoming National Register for ISL/English interpreters, this CGT research can serve as a practical theoretical framework to help interpreters when MAPPING OUT their PROGRESS on the WINDING STAIR of ISL/English interpreters. As the main concern emerged from this study is UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY and most of the time interpreters are MONITORING their PROGRESS based on their experiences through SELF-REFLECTING. This research study can assist them to BENCHMARK their steps and also measure, as previously mentioned in the literature review, the ‘known unknowns’ and the ‘unknown unknowns’. Clinton et al. (2006) demonstrated the importance of the usage of a ‘portfolio’ in order to map out [MAPPING OUT] the career trajectory in particular when working as a freelancer. Bridge Interpreting Ltd. would like to identify signposts and ‘pit stops’ along the interpreter’s career trajectory as contractors with the company and support the interpreter within the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. For instance, the Sign
Language Support Service Coordinator recently sent an email to the interpreters asking for their availability and inquiring about how/if they are planning to work across new domains as part of their professional work [MAPPING OUT] for the new academic year. Some of the interpreters replied that they have been working in new settings. We can think of this as the interpreters developing their professional skills and knowledge [EQUIPPING] in other settings [GEARING UP]. Bridge Interpreting Ltd. was not always aware of the interpreters’ intentions with regard to working in other settings until this point. This approach can be considered a support and part of findings of this research that can be already implemented within the company. Bridge Interpreting Ltd. was also thinking to implement the theory as a plan for the first twelve months post-graduation, provide with more support plan for more seasoned practitioners who wish to BRANCHING OUT into other specialist fields (i.e. mental health, theatre, TV/media). This technique can be COMBINED with the support of other entities and organisations within the ECO-SYSTEM. ‘It takes a village’ therefore collaborating with like-minded people, stakeholders, associations (i.e. Bridge Interpreting Ltd., CISLI, SLIS and any other organizations within the ECO-SYSTEM) would help give graduates the opportunity of FLOURISHING within the ECO-SYSTEM, by making the support service more visible and properly outline what additional services can be provided to ISL/English interpreters. Bridge Interpreting Ltd. intends to apply the findings as part of the register system and would like to see a clearly structured support service which includes activities that count towards CPD points (e.g. Leeson and Venturi 2017, ISL Act 2017). Given that this research study has been grounded in interpreter input, the findings and points that have bearing for implementation in practice would help endorse the register. Both the register and interpreters are seeking to establish CPD as a normative part of the interpreting landscape, and as a result, moves to instantiate same are welcomed. Therefore, it would be beneficial to create a training calendar for interpreters in collaboration with other relevant organizations.

This CGT study has been extremely helpful in the development of the support service at Bridge Interpreting Ltd. as well in understanding the implications for the ISL/English interpreting community, specifically relating to freelance interpreter. By ascertaining the main concerns from participants’ responses to the idea of an UNREGULATED CAREER TRAJECTORY, it was possible to generate a discussion with people,
stakeholders and institutions (i.e. education) that can create a wider understanding of the pressures and demands put on interpreters. The aim of this CGT study was to find out the main concern and generate a theory that would not only help explain it but help resolve it. The theory that emerged from this CGT study, has already in part been implemented within the field through the incorporation of aspects within Bridge Interpreting Ltd. For instance, it would be beneficial for new graduates to arrange a meeting to discuss the steps to undertake when entering the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM as this is not really addressed when still in college. While on work placement with the agencies, many more aspects of the career path undertaken by the students can be taken into consideration which may not be examined through the curriculum. By discovering the reality on the ground directly from the participants within this substantive area, strategies can be provided and implemented for potential changes (Olson, 2008). The goal is to present a supportive framework within the FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM that could be helpful to anyone involved in the field, from education towards the TRANSITIONING into the real world.

This CGT study also provided original information that Bridge Interpreting Ltd. was not previously aware of and therefore a better understanding of the concerns of ISL/English interpreters and students was achieved. This original work can be considered the beginning of a new reflection on an established field but success is only achievable by being PROACTIVE and positive within a PROFESSIONALISING IN A FREELANCE ECO-SYSTEM. New aspects and approaches have already been incorporated into Bridge Interpreting Ltd. programmes based on the results of this study, which will undoubtedly draw interest from other fields that operate with freelance professionals as the need for solid support structures and mentoring becomes more important to ensure the most optimum outcomes.
Appendix B

Participant Information Leaflet

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

The Development of Peer Support: A service supporting Irish Sign Language/English interpreters

Centre for Deaf Studies, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, The University of Dublin, Trinity College.

Researcher: Lucia Venturi

Supervisor: Professor Lorraine Leeson

You are invited to participate in this research project, which is being carried out by Lucia Venturi, an M. Litt. Scholar at the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Science. Your participation is voluntary. Even if you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

This research is the result of the ‘Employment Based Postgraduate Scholarship 2017’ awarded by the Irish Research Council (IRC). The purpose of this study is to discuss about the advance development of the Peer Support Service for ISL/English interpreters. Participants’ responses form the basis for a set of recommendations on how the researcher can implement purposeful and proactive ‘Interpreter-Centred-Design’ service within Bridge Interpreting. This study will also explore the integration of the service focusing on professional interpreters’ perspective and the implications of introducing a service within the interpreting field.

You will participate in an interview that will last approximately one hour and will be audio/video recorded. Any information or personal details gathered during the data collection and in the course of this study are confidential. Only the researcher, Lucia Venturi, and the supervisor, Professor Lorraine Leeson, will know the identity of the participants and will have access to the information collected. Bridge Interpreting will not know the names of the interpreters that will be interviewed and will not have access to the data.
Once your interview is completed, Lucia Venturi will transcribe the data, making sure to anonymise all references that might identify individual participants. This transcript will be sent to participants within 14 days of the interview taking place and participants will be invited to make any amendments to that record within 7 days. Participants can also request a copy of the digital recording of the interview within one month of the interview taking place. **After this time, digital video/audio records will not be accessible, however the researcher is obliged to store all data (video/audio records and anonymized transcripts) for 5 years.**

If you have any questions about this research you can ask Lucia Venturi. You are also free, however, to contact any of the other people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information. Please contact the person in charge for additional information: luciav@tcd.ie Mobile 0872495273.
Appendix C

Consent Form

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

The Development of Peer Support: A service supporting Irish Sign Language/English interpreters

Centre for Deaf Studies, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, The University of Dublin, Trinity College.

Researcher: Lucia Venturi

Supervisor: Professor Lorraine Leeson

I am invited to participate in this research project that is being carried out by Lucia Venturi, an M. Litt. Scholar at the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, and supervised by Professor Lorraine Leeson. My participation is voluntary. Even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

This research is the result of the ‘Employment Based Postgraduate Scholarship 2017’ awarded by the Irish Research Council (IRC). I understand that the purpose of this study is to discuss about the advance development of the Peer Support Service for ISL/English interpreters. Participants’ responses form the basis for a set of recommendations on how the researcher can implement a purposeful and proactive ‘Interpreter-Centred-Design’ service within Bridge Interpreting. This study will also explore the integration of the service and the implications of introducing a service within the interpreting field.

My participation will entail taking part in an interview that will last approximately one hour at the Centre for Deaf Studies (TCD) at a time mutually convenient for the participant and researcher. The interview will consist of open-ended questions related to the development of a Peer Support Service within the agency. I will have at least 14 days to decide if I wish to participate.
I agree to this interview being audio/video recorded for data collection purposes only and later on transcribed for an in-depth analysis. Any information or personal details gathered during the data collection and in the course of this study are confidential. Only the researcher, Lucia Venturi, and her supervisor, will know the identity of the participants and will have access to the information collected. Bridge Interpreting will not know the names of the interpreters that will be interviewed throughout the study and will not have access to the data.

I will also have the opportunity to receive the transcript within 14 days of the interview taking place and I will be invited to make any amendments to that record within 7 days. I can also request a copy of the digital recording of the interview within one month of the interviews taking place. After this time, I understand that the digital video/audio records will not be accessible, however the researcher is obliged to store all data (video/audio records and anonymized transcripts) for 5 years.

If I have any questions about this research I can ask Lucia Venturi. I am also free, however, to contact any of the other people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information. Please contact the person in charge for additional information: luciav@tcd.ie Mobile 0872495273.

Signature of research participant
I understand what is involved in this research and I agree to participate in the study. [I have been given a copy of the Participant Information Leaflet and a copy of this consent form to keep.]

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Signature of participant
Date

Signature of researcher
I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

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Signature of researcher
Date
Appendix D

Proposed interview questions

Lucia Venturi

10727753

M. Litt. Student

1. What is it like working as a sign language interpreter?

2. How would you compare working as a freelancer to working as an employee?

3. What were your expectations when you have started working as an interpreter? Are there any aspects of this profession completely new to you?

4. How does the word peer support service match up with your experience working as an interpreter?

5. How can interpreting agencies come up with ways to support the work of their contracted interpreters?

6. In what type of situation do you think you might need more support from your company?

7. From your perspective, how important is the role of peer support or a sign language coordinator?

8. How can the organization encourage to participate?

9. What is your current process of support service in different settings?

10. What impact would a support service for interpreters have as regards their professional life?

11. What components would you add/change to a support service designed mainly for interpreters?
12. Could you describe the most important lessons you have learned through working as an interpreter?

13. Can you recall any assignment where you had to undertake actions and strategies to face a particular challenge?

14. Could you describe an event where you needed assistance and you had to contact an external organization/association or a colleague? Could you instead contact the agency you were working for?

15. Who has been the most helpful to you?

16. Based on your professional experience, how might the peer support service assist interpreters in their field?

17. What could peer support service offer to interpreters?

18. What kind of service would you like to have from interpreting agencies?

19. What advice would you give to new interpreters?

20. What else is there that you think I should know so that I can better understand the things we have just talked about?

21. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

22. What are the major challenges or opportunity in the field?
23. Do you believe that an additional service can be helpful in the field?

24. Can you tell me about the things that make it enjoyable for you to work?

25. Do you think interpreters need more support?

26. What type of service would you like to see?

27. Can you tell me what you think when you hear the word ‘support service’ for interpreters?
Dear Lucia,

Your revised application for ethics approval for the research project above was considered by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin, on Monday 8th January 2018, and was approved in full. Good luck with the project,

Best wishes,

Professor John Saeed

Chair, Research Ethics Committee
School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences