Book Section:

Chapter 14
Conclusions

Introduction

In writing this book, I have sought to engage with Zeichner & Noffke's call for investigations of the "the conditions that facilitate and obstruct the ability of educators to conduct research on their own practice: (2001: 324). The challenges of practitioner research are many and varied, and EP is not exempt. We grapple with beliefs about practice and pedagogy, about methodology, and about research. Questions about what 'counts' as research, who does it, who reports on it, and who benefits from it, are a necessary ethical as well as practical part of any research, and they are thrown into sharp relief by the work reported on here.

On taking an Exploratory Practice approach teachers and learners become deeply involved in explorations of their lived experiences in the classroom. Throughout the book I have addressed questions about what puzzles practitioners, and the knotty question of the difference between 'puzzlement' and 'problem'. Central to these issues is a critical analysis of what 'understanding' means, and what it means to practitioners situated in linguistically and culturally complex educational settings. By inviting you to consider puzzling; working to develop understanding(s), both individually and with others; exploring ways of integrating research and pedagogy, the Case Studies and Vignettes exemplify the spirit of Exploratory Practice. In sum, this book is an extended invitation to readers to join exactly the kind of dialogue that Exploratory Practice is all about.

From research-as-practice to practice-as-research

I began by using Allwright's (2003) more inclusive definition of 'practitioner' to include the notion of learners, as well as teachers, teacher trainers and others as researchers. I have examined this proposition and found that not only are practitioners capable of engaging in actively working to develop their understandings of questions

or puzzles they have themselves set out, but that the field can gain immeasurably from such work. In foregrounding the perspectives of learners, in reconceptualising researchers and teachers and teacher educators as people who continue to learn, while practicing as language education professionals, we stand to gain a unique insight into the cognitive dissonances (Festinger, 1957) surrounding the practice of research and pedagogy in what are (and always were) linguistically and culturally diverse contexts.

In Part One, I surveyed the existing literature on practitioner research, ending with a particular emphasis on Exploratory Practice, the notion of understanding, and its relationship with Dasein (Heidegger, 1962). As I did so, I raised a number of questions about the practicalities of investigating practitioner research. I also noted the often entrenched ontological and epistemological perspectives regarding research. Research has cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) which is politically and contextually situated. Some will never be convinced of the value of practitioner research, simply because it does not fit their conception of what research is. Others, however, not only accept it, they enthusiastically promote it, because it is an expression of their own deeply-held beliefs about what constitutes research. As I surveyed the historical background to, and the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of, the principles of Exploratory Practice, I argued that EP has a strong individual identity, which distinguishes it as a distinctive member of the practitioner research 'family'. Part One of this volume, then, placed Exploratory Practice firmly in the tradition of practitioner research and critically examined the EP framework.

> Meta-puzzling: Why has understanding become so important? Why should teaching/learning languages take understanding so seriously?

Part Two looked at potential understanding(s) from practice. I asked: 'What have we learned from the practice(s) of Exploratory Practice?', examining this question from a variety of viewpoints and contexts. These contexts were not only international (ranging from Brazil to China and between, including Japan, Turkey, the USA and the UK), but also inter-institutional, considering examples of Exploratory Practice in state secondary schools, colleges and universities, as well as private language teaching institutions, and included EP as enacted in continuing personal and professional

development; in General English, English for Academic Purposes, and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL).

Meta-puzzling: It is interesting to note that English as a Foreign Language seems generally to be categorised separately from Modern Foreign Languages. Why? Is it not modern? Not foreign? Not a language?

The Case Studies and Vignettes both illustrated and interrogated the EP principled framework. In charting the participant responses and analysing their contributions alongside them, I traced the lived experiences of practitioners engaging with EP within their own practice. The learners and teachers did more than respond positively to the notion of combining research and pedagogy: they were alternately thrilled, excited, fascinated. They brought renewed creativity, energy and enthusiasm to their classes. Since they were investigating their own questions, and since they were concurrently practising the skills they needed, in the language of their choice, the work was, in one person's words "entirely relevant to them".

Meta-puzzling: How do we need to understand Exploratory Practice now? It is, by definition, evolving; in response to and against understandings of the nexus of practice-participation-research perspectives. So what are we to make of it in the current climate?

In Part Three I argued that EP is not a panacea for all our ills. Far from it. But the same is true of any other form of practice or, indeed, of the outcomes of any research: at best they can only develop our understandings in small, incremental steps. In bending to societal demands to seek 'quick fixes' we (practitioners of research, of teaching, of learning) are pushed into superficial solutions which meet neither the demands of rigorous research, nor the urgent needs of pedagogy and practice. So the EP principle of stepping back, resisting the pull towards 'solving' problems, and instead investigating deeply, questioning, critiquing, is worth examining in more depth. How does it relate to pedagogy? How does it relate to research? And how can both research and pedagogy benefit from such integration?

It is clear that trust, and indeed, what Candlin & Crichton call 'trust-in-action' (see Quote Box 14.1) is central to such questions. The stories of practitioners: learners,

teachers, teacher trainers, educational psychologists, were narratives of trust.
Exploratory Practice invokes the understanding of others, and in doing so, it both
requires and encourages trust.

Quote 14.1 Candlin & Crichton on 'trust-in-action'

The analysis of trust-in-action does not end with its effects; it is always dynamic and
reflexive, a form of *praxis* that mutually implicates the concepts of the Conceptual
Framework [of Trust] in the lives of individuals across micro and macro scales of
social order – including the interpretations, actions and agendas of researchers.

(2013a: 15)

According to Wright: "learners are more aware about their learning and are more
deeply concerned about learning than is often portrayed" (2006: 84), and it is evident
that both teachers and learners (and others) have profound, serious concerns about
teaching and learning. In the stories of the learners and teachers (etc) in Part Three,
we saw a range of puzzled questions, which probe deeply into the complexities of
language classrooms. Exploratory Practice, through PEPAs, takes this a step further;
going beyond the notion of research-as-practice, I propose practice-as-research.

Language, culture and identity in Exploratory Practice

Questions about identity, language, culture and power (who does what, to whom,
where, and when) arise when we engage in Exploratory Practice. Learners are
included as researchers alongside teachers (Allwright, 2003), but we have also seen
that teachers may be learners. Identity is fluid: teachers become learners; learners
become teachers, and both learners and teachers become researchers. This is well
expressed in Tajino & Smith's notion of 'team learning' where teachers and learners
jointly construe their learning and teaching:

> … the practice of team learning can be a sustainable way to promote
> improvements in language learning through the growth of better
> understandings by teachers and students of classroom teaching and learning
> processes. When teachers and students share the construction of their learning
> environment in a harmonious team-learning partnership, the full collaborative
> potential of team teaching may be realised.
>
> (Tajino & Smith, 2016: 23)

Meta-puzzling: What makes Exploratory Practice special?

If, as I have argued, puzzlement is to do with understanding how classrooms are, the 'being' of classrooms, of how students and teachers (etc) are in the world, then one of the things that makes EP special is the combination of epistemological, methodological and ethical understandings of pedagogy. It is the notion of understanding, and therefore puzzlement, as a way of bringing together pedagogic research and perspectives; of participation and empowerment of those who are usually disempowered and unable to participate in the 'big decisions' about education.

All these questions and questioning processes bring the wider remit of language, culture, education and research into play. As Kramsch (2009) argues in Quote Box 14.2, it is a highly complex scene.

Quote 14.2: Kramsch on subject positions in multilingual, multicultural situations

The negotiation and power struggle that surround subject positions in published work as well as in private written or spoken communication are not special to the multilingual subject. Every language variety, dialect or sociolect carries with it memories of personal experiences attached to each of its variations, and for every author, positioning oneself within a discipline, a field, or across readerships, is a challenge. But multilingual and multicultural situations increase exponentially the semiotic resources available – as well as the risks of miscommunication.

(2009: 21)

This brings us back to the notion of Dasein; Heidegger's term for human 'being'; a kind of being that is characterised by being an issue (a puzzlement) for itself. As he argued:

> Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. […] Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of *Dasein's being.*
>
> (Heidegger, 1962: 32)

And this, as Dreyfus (1991) explains, is an integral part of what it is to be human: to try to understand understanding is to engage unconsciously or consciously in/with/through our humanity.

But the tension of the unknown can be uncomfortable. There is a drive to solve problems, find answers, resolve the unknown by turning it into a quantifiable known. A naïve response to the puzzles raised by the practitioners in this book would be to argue that the teacher should simply tell the students how to improve their speaking (or vocabulary, or concentration, or whatever else was puzzling them). This is a powerful temptation for teachers, teacher educators and academics; perhaps too powerful for them to resist - after years in the field, the 'answers' often appear obvious, and it seems heartless to refuse to provide them. But on careful reflection it is clear that 'telling' the answers is not satisfactory. Solutions might range from seeking out more opportunities to practise with others (whether native speakers or not) to focussing on improving pronunciation or accuracy or fluency, or developing vocabulary. Developing understandings, on the other hand, begin to capture the complexity of speaking in a foreign language: the social, personal, political and cultural issues that need attention. So Exploratory Practice presents epistemological challenges to the cultural norms and expectations of education and research. In gaining understanding of the different perspectives of all those in the classroom, and in treating puzzled questions with respect, greater trust between the participants is engendered.

> Meta-*puzzling: Why is the 'problem-to-solution' paradigm so attractive? Why is* Exploratory Practice so keen to promote understanding instead?

Problematising problem-solving

Solutions are seductive, and problem-solving is clearly deeply attractive. Staying within the problem-to-solution paradigm means that problems can be identified relatively easily (there is a societal pull towards such a technicist approach), and 'fixes' are sought ever more avidly. So a question like '**how** can I improve my vocabulary learning?' (or speaking skills, or writing ability), begs for technical,

practical solutions, which are clear, thorough, and based on evidence of previous successes, as researched by distant experts. This sounds ideal, and for many (teachers, learners, and researchers) it is enough. But as Wright points out, such an approach

> … tends to be problem-focused, setting up a professional discourse of problem-solving. This has the danger of limiting the practitioner to the status of 'trouble-shooter'
>
> (Wright, 2005: 429)

Despite EP's emphasis on understanding, many of the questions in the stories in this book were initially framed in such a way as to promote a problem-to-solution approach. Even when the questions began with '*Why…*' (a way of trying to encourage an attitude of developing understandings rather than problem-solving) some participants returned to the problem-to-solution paradigm. It requires some effort to refocus on trying to understand rather than leaping to problem-solving. Exploratory Practice suggests a much deeper, and potentially subversive change in thinking about research, teaching, learning and language. Enabling teachers to see themselves as learners, and learners to see themselves as teachers, and encouraging all to propose and investigate their own questions in an approach of puzzled inquiry, means a move from acquiescence to active (and at times challenging) practitioners. In Freirean terms, this is 'problematising' rather than technical problem-solving, to put his earlier quote in its context:

> We needed, then, an education which would lead men [sic] to take a new stance towards their problems – that of intimacy with those problems, one oriented toward research instead of repeating irrelevant principle. An education of 'I wonder,' instead of merely 'I do'.
>
> (Freire, 1973: 36)

Questions, particularly questions that ask 'why', are concomitant for understanding. In Exploratory Practice, the difference is that we are no longer driven by methods; no longer entrapped in a machine; no longer focused on change and change-for-change's sake. By focussing on questions rather than solutions, we (re-)discover how necessary understanding is for humanity. But how can we get understanding that is shared and communicated? How to set up our practice to make understanding visible?

This raises the Aristotelian notion of phronesis. This form of "practical wisdom" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 57), has a strong ethical and pragmatic orientation which "focuses

on what is variable, on that which cannot be encapsulated by universal rules" (ibid.). Practitioner research more generally, and Exploratory Practice specifically, may therefore be conceived as a form of phronesis: ethical, practical and concerned with values in praxis. Although Flyvbjerg goes on to say that phronesis is oriented towards action, I would frame this as 'action for understanding' more than anything else.

Talking about safety research in healthcare contexts, Iedema et al. maintain:

> Safety research does not just require the enquirer to participate (as researcher) in practice, but also requires the practitioner to participate (as practitioner) in the enquiry.
>
> (2013: 65)

They go on to challenge the prevailing discourse of 'objective' knowledge, also referring to phronesis:

> Of course, important knowledge may be acquired and negotiated 'objectively', as I can read a treatment guideline, a care pathway or a medication administration protocol. But knowing-that exists at one or removes from in situ practice. Knowing-how – phronesis – needs to complement knowing-that. Knowing how involves doing, but doing without understanding actors' reasonings, trade-offs, workarounds and shortcuts does not engender phronesis. […] Could it be that in the marginalisation of phronesis, and attendant inattention to what we do and say in the here and now, are behind organisations 'drift into failure'?
>
> (ibid.: 184)

From this discussion, further puzzling, and 'meta-puzzling' (puzzling about puzzlement, about puzzles and puzzlers, and about systems, cultures and beliefs), is engendered. As Holliday (2013) points out, we are all travelling with/through/around society; we bring our baggage with us, but we are not fixed: we cross boundaries (even the very subtle ones) that others in society might seek to establish as barriers.

Quote 14.3: Holliday on crossing boundaries

…**personal trajectories** comprise the individual's personal travel through society, bringing histories from their ancestors and origins. Through these trajectories, they are able to step out from and dialogue with the **particular social and political structures** that surround them and even cross into new and foreign domains. This domain thus crosses the subtle boundary with **underlying universal cultural processes**.

(2013: 3)

Holliday continues:

> [I make it a theme]… that individuals are not only very capable of crossing intercultural lines, but that they can do this creatively and innovatively given the potential.
>
> <div align="right">Holliday, 2013: 168</div>

What these individuals in multilingual, multicultural classrooms need, though, is the space to engage in dialogue, as Chick maintains (see Quote Box 14.4).

Quote 14.4: Chick on dialogic spaces

Despite the challenges inherent in creating dialogic spaces on courses that require formal assessment, viewing the feedback discussion as reflective conversation, can nevertheless assist in alerting learner teachers to the importance of socio-cultural factors, to an appreciation of what learners bring to a classroom, and to the fact that the path to language teaching expertise is a lifelong endeavour.

(2015: 306)

Too often, practitioners (of teaching, of learning, of research itself) have accepted very traditional descriptions of what research is. Typically, as Borg (2013) has depicted, it is seen as consisting of large-scale surveys or projects involving intensive and time-consuming observation schemes, with high-profile outcomes such as giving conference presentations or writing articles for academic journals. This creates a problem for practitioner research, with practitioners peering anxiously at the depths, and wondering "How on earth am I going to manage to do this on top of my normal workload?"

Many practitioners are hampered by the net of beliefs that surround research; their work is often downgraded by themselves as 'it's just what I think', and by others as 'it doesn't really count'. In other words, it is given little value. So what 'counts' as research in an educational context? What are the beliefs about research itself as a social practice, and can we unpack them?

Looking ahead: what next for Exploratory Practice?

Calls for alternative ways of doing research in education proliferate (eg Allwright, 2009; Burns, 2010; Borg 2013; Freeman, 2006), and it is clear that there are options available for practitioners wishing to essay practitioner research. But if the practitioners have taken over the role of judging what research is relevant, and doing the research themselves, then where is the space for the academics? Are the criticisms noted above masking the protection of "vested interests" as Breen, (2006: 220) has argued? Practitioner research, and EP in particular, has the potential to be subversive, challenging the right of academics to adjudicate knowledge from afar, and may even be perceived as a threat. So trust is needed not only inside the classroom, between teachers and learners, and between and through the languages and cultures that they bring, but also more broadly in the field. Although Exploratory Practice was initially conceived within an educational context, its principles may have a broader appeal, wider applications.

Exploratory Practice as a form of research

Interestingly, there have been recent developments in seeing EP not only as a form of pedagogy, but also as a form of research. In my own doctoral studies, I was attempting to bring my own 'lived experiences' not only as a teacher but also as a researcher, together. But recently this has been extended even further.

Case Study 14.1: 'What happens when Exploratory Practice moves beyond the *classroom?' –* a story of explorations in research

What happens when those principles are taken away from their original 'home' of the language classroom and used in a different context? Richard Fay and Susan Dawson explore just such an undertaking in Case Study 14.1.

Richard Fay
University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
I'm a Lecturer in Education (TESOL and Intercultural Communication) at the University of Manchester with a long-standing interest in practitioner-oriented, collaborative research, and in researcher thinking and development. Exploratory Practice has been on my radar for some time but the extension of it for a researcher

learning context (i.e. for the AHRC-funded project outlined in this case study) represents my first real foray with it.

Susan Dawson
University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
I'm a final year PhD student at the University of Manchester. My doctoral research uses Exploratory Practice as both methodology and pedagogy, with a particular focus on the different types of knowledge that are generated through inclusive practitioner research. As part of my studentship, I get to do lots of interesting things, such as being affiliated to the AHRC project in this case study.

What happens when EP moves beyond the classroom?

The Research Project Context

The possibility of extending EP - from its concern with understanding the life of the language classroom to a concern for understanding the life (or work and workings) of a complex research project – occurred to us in the early stages of a particular project: Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State (AH/L006936/1 – www.researching-multilingually-at-borders.com) or 'RM@Borders' for short. This project is large in scale, lengthy in duration (2014-17) and complex in character being multi-sited, multi-disciplinary, multi-modal, and multi-lingual (this explains why we call it a 'multi-multi' project). It has 5 case studies, each with different sites of operation, different disciplinary anchors and practices, different sets of researchers spread across different institutions, and different research questions. It also has two 'hubs' which interact with the case studies as well as with each other – the Creative Arts and Translating Cultures (CATC) and the Researching Multilingually and Translating Cultures (RMTC) Hubs. We are part of the RMTC Hub, and we suggested EP as a way of enabling it to fulfil its remit within the larger project.

A Role for EP?

Through our shared work outside the RM@Borders project (ie for Susan's PhD), we were already in the habit of discussing EP and its applications, and doing so from a position of comfort, ie EP was something we not only felt we knew something about, but also felt that its underlying principles were ones we largely shared. EP was thus readily available to us as a resource which might be extended (and adapted) for the RM@Borders project. EP was not, however, familiar (to any large extent) to other members of the team.

The RMTC Hub is an Education/Critical Applied Linguistics unit within the overall project. It is charged with advising and supporting the 5 case studies and the CATC (creative arts) hub with regard to Researching Multilingually (RM-ly) practice, but it also seeks to learn with and from these other project units about RM-ly practice. Thus, the project proposal states that: *"… the members of the RMTC 'hub' will lead* the development of integrated conceptual and methodological approaches, tools, and

methods for researching translation processes and practices at borders where bodies *are often at risk, in pain and/or in transition.*" and "*... together with the CATC 'hub'* they will work with all researchers in the team, both in the field and remotely, at strategic stages and milestones throughout the project, to collate, consolidate and *improve research practices in multilingual contexts.*"

However, the initial (and unhelpfully enduring) project discourse of 'shadowing' and 'researching the researchers' was at odds with this remit, and raised many ethical concerns. Consequently, we were achieving only partial success in developing a shared understanding (across the project) of this bilateral relationship between the RMTC Hub team and the case study researchers and CATC Hub colleagues. This partial understanding of the remit was the source of an operationalization stumble but it also provided an opportunity for proposing the extension and adaptation of EP for Exploratory RM-ly Practice. We argued that, if EP *"is an indefinitely sustainable way* for classroom language teachers and learners, while getting on with their learning *and teaching, to develop their own understandings of life in the language classroom"* (Allwright, 2005: 361), then for our RM@Borders project, "Exploratory RM-ly can provide a sustainable way for all RM-ly project researchers (including those in the CATC Hub and in the 5 case studies), while getting on with their project activities, to develop their own understandings of life in the RM-ly field of activity".

Exploratory RM-ly Practice – initial steps
Initially, our team (RMTC Hub) developed our own curiosities [sometimes also called 'puzzles'] and identified the 'data' being naturalistically generated which might help us explore these curiosities. Then we invited everyone in the project (ie case study researchers and hub members) to develop their curiosities, puzzles or research questions (there were differing preferences regarding terminology). Susan's notes (in italics below) provide an initial critical analysis of these questions:
Sustainability – *some of these 'puzzles' are huge; research questions in their own right. How will they develop understandings of them through their 'normal' research* activities?
Relevance – some of them seem more concerned with the intricacies of their individual projects and mostly unrelated (in my limited understanding) to the whole process of researching multilingually, which is your main aim, no? Does this matter?
Technical problem-solving or understanding? *– which comes first? In EP it's the* understanding, but a lot of these questions seem primarily technical ones. EP is exploring **practice**, whereas some of these puzzles seem more about exploring theoretical and technical issues. So does your EP base need extending/broadening?
Quality of life – the CATC Hub pick up on the idea of well-being which I think is related to QoL issues. They ask (last puzzle) if this could be a link between all case studies. Interesting.

Researcher/Project development - it seems to me that this whole process has enabled all to articulate concerns at an individual and group level that might not have surfaced in any other way, or at least might not have made it onto paper. Many of the puzzles seem related to ways of working together across different case studies and Hubs which is positive for the whole concept of **mutual development and collegiality.**

For Richard, the key questions (prompted by his reflections on our EP activity to date) were: *"Will our extended use of* EP enable us – collaboratively, sustainably, an dwith consideration of quality of life issues including ethics – to develop insights into the Researching RM-ly practice strand of the overall project and, thereby, make a contribution to the objectives of the project more generally?

Taking Stock
A year or so after EP was introduced as a way of negotiating an implementational obstacle, talk of puzzles or curiosities or research questions is largely absent in the project. In that sense, the experiment of extending EP from the language classroom to a research project has not been successful. Initial attempts to understand 'why' include reflections around the nature of interdisciplinary (as opposed to multi-disciplinary) research and the different levels of what might be termed disciplinary porosity or academic hospitality (vis-à-vis new ideas coming from other disciplines) of each of the project's contributing disciplines. However it did enable us to get past that initial operational obstacle, and it did provide a new discourse (replacing talk of 'shadowing' etc) for our shared project endeavours, one which recognised the collaborative and exploratory character of this 'life and work of the research project'.

A substantial body of work critiques practitioner research from a range of perspectives. Common criticisms emanating from professional academics cite the lack of rigorous training, and naïve approaches of novice (practitioner-) researchers which, it is argued, lead to flawed investigations. In addition, there are expectations of large-scale, time-consuming, and rigorous methods, which aim to prove/disprove hypotheses using statistical analyses. The results of these are finally published in (rarified) academic journals or (expensive) academic books, to be reviewed and read by other academics, and, on occasion, practising teachers. For a teacher (or a learner), this is understandably off-putting. But if, as Dawson and Fay indicate, new conceptions of research itself can be brought into play, then a world of possibilities opens up.

Exploratory Practice as a form of scholarship

The overwhelming message from EP is one of inquiry/ exploration/ research forming a vibrant part of the teaching and learning lives of the participants. But this paints a rosy picture, which, even with some thorns noted, needs filling out. What about

teachers and learners researching their own practices? It could be a form of scholarship as defined by van Manen:

> Perhaps the best answer to the question of what is involved in a hermeneutic phenomenological human science research method is 'scholarship!'. A human science researcher is a scholar: a sensitive observer of the subtleties of everyday life, and an avid reader of relevant texts in the human science tradition of the humanities, history, philosophy, anthropology, and in the social sciences as they pertain to his or her domain of interest – in our case the practical and theoretical demands of pedagogy, of living with children. So in a serious sense there is not really a 'method' understood as a set of investigative procedures that one can master relatively quickly.
>
> Van Manen, 1990: 29

In Vignette 14.1, Bee Bond reflects on her experiences of Exploratory Practice with colleagues (learners and teachers) in her workplace. These exemplify EP as a form of sustainable scholarship, for both teachers and learners.

Vignette 14.1 Thoughts on Exploratory Practice

For teachers, EP is a way of taking those staff kitchen conversations beyond the experiential 'well it works for me' into a more thought-out and questioning approach to practice. Frequently this stops when the kettle has boiled; sometimes the spark fizzes for a bit longer. Every now and then it develops into a slow burning and sustainable interest in an aspect of teaching and learning that leads to real scholarly outputs and enhanced understanding.

For students, at its base level it is student initiated task-based learning. However, it can also be more than this. For EAP students, entering a research intensive university it is a way in to research cultures. It breaks down hierarchical teacher/ student barriers and creates a truly collaborative learning environment where students are required to take the initiative, to question and to think critically, and see this behaviour modelled and mirrored in their teacher.

Bee Bond, Leeds, 2016

The explorations of practitioners leads us to question long-held beliefs about research and pedagogy, with very fruitful results, not only for our own practice as teachers, learners, researchers and scholars, but also for the field more broadly. In my own work, I link this to the notion (currently very popular in British universities) of 'research led teaching':

In an age of 'research led teaching' (as promoted by my own institution), EP's focus on integrating pedagogy and research suggests a rich area for further study. […] by positioning learners alongside teachers as legitimate investigators of classroom language learning and teaching, EP enhances the potential for understandings in pedagogy and research alike.

(Hanks, 2015b: 19)

This view is echoed by Bond (2016), who argues that Exploratory Practice is at once scholarly exploration, and a form of continuing professional development (see Quote Box 14.5).

Quote 14.5: Bond on scholarly exploration

Approaching practice through scholarly exploration encourages (re-)engagement but does so as a manageable, continuous enterprise where quality of life is at the forefront, thus meeting the social and academic needs of both students and teachers.

(2016)

If practitioners are entrusted with the responsibilities of investigating their own practices, the resulting contributions are of pedagogic and epistemological value. Because EP explicitly includes learners as well as teachers, and teacher trainers, educational psychologists, curriculum developers, as people who are, and should be, involved in researching language learning and teaching practices, and because EP explicitly encourages the integration of pedagogy and research, it affords creative possibilities for all those involved in language education to engage in "the multiplicity of meaning-making of contemporary societies" (Byrnes, 2013: 236). This happens not just in/through texts, but in/through the "rhythmic alternation between constraining and releasing (structure and process), almost a discursive dance" (van Lier, 2013: 249). But they need to trust one-another, and they need to trust the 'system' (which so often lets them down), in order to proceed.

Redefining notions of pedagogy, scholarship, research

As this discussion shows, there are a number of issues to be negotiated. Beliefs around pedagogy; beliefs around research; tensions around the integration of pedagogy and research, swirl and coalesce as practitioners bring their own perspectives (conscious and unconscious) to bear. Classrooms are not only nurturing, supportive environments, but also sites of potential misunderstandings. The experiences described in this book are examples of the on-going struggle between these concurrent and conflicting views, often held by the same person at the same time in the same space. Attempts to reconcile these views are expressions of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), and the complexities of thought this requires can make life uncomfortable.

The notions of 'pedagogy', 'research', 'practitioner research' are contested territory and giants in the field of education have grappled with such issues for decades. There are those, for example, who would dispute the characterisation of what has been described here as 'research'. But others would strongly endorse it as precisely the kind of 'deeply contextual' work that Zeichner & Noffke (2001: 315) have advocated. The potential that EP offers is clear: a way of empowering learners, teachers, teacher educators and all those involved in education, to take their rightful place as 'knowers' and 'researchers' of their own language learning and teaching lives. An approach very much in line with that described by Iedema et al.:

> … the approach […] embeds and manifests complexity thinking and complexity talking. It does so by acknowledging that the common practice of maintaining an objective distance and producing research knowledge in abstracto needs to be counterbalanced by a new and more dialogic research paradigm. This new paradigm allows – no, capitalises –on closeness, on meshing researcher and practitioner interests and practices.
>
> (2013: 64)

For an example of this from Exploratory Practice, I return to Jess Poole (who first appeared in Chapter 1). Vignette 14.2 describes how her engagement in this dialogic research paradigm has re-awakened her creativity, and her interest in learning and teaching; in her words it 'is giving me back my mojo'.

Vignette 14.2 Reflections on Exploratory Practice

When I first thought about this question ('What EP have you been doing?') I felt a bit despondent. I'd been feeling stuck for while, and for various reasons like I had lost my mojo. I hadn't been 'doing' any Exploratory Practice. For ages. Well, I'd been to a Poster presentation given by our students – which was inspiring and uplifting. I'd participated in a staff development session with colleagues from Leeds and Leicester - which was motivating and re-affirming. I'd been doing a lot of talking about EP, but I hadn't actually been 'doing' any EP, so I was feeling like a bit of a fraud.

I felt stuck for a long time. I wasn't teaching on an EP module in our centre. There was no space in the timetable for EP on the busy summer pre-sessional. How could I do EP?

But, I had creative yearnings. Feeling bored and fed up (perhaps dried up by too much serious EAP?) I started daydreaming as a means of escape. I wondered: 'What makes me tick right now? What gets my juices flowing? What do I love?'

And then I suppose I started … well wondering, exploring. I had an itch about Graphic novels. I started to wonder whether graphic novels could be used in EAP – I don't really know how, I just have a very strong hunch that they can. So I had a puzzle. I haven't really got very far with that, but it is bubbling away. The beauty of EP means I feel I can dip in and out of it when the time is right (for me and for my students).

Then came the call for papers for the NFEAP (2016) conference on EAP and Creativity. People contacted me: 'Have you seen this?' 'This is right up your street'. Again they met with a grumpy response. 'I haven't been creative for ages! Maybe I'm not creative any more.' But then, I started wondering, 'Well what does it mean to be creative? That's the whole issue! Maybe what we are doing is creative? Could it be more creative? What will the students think if I ask them to be creative? What does creativity mean for them? What can they teach me about creativity?' So again, I was suddenly puzzling and then I just thought 'Well, let's do this in class.' So I have.

I've been exploring with students what it means to do note-taking more creatively. I've been giving them choices about what kind of task they'd like to do in response to a text. I've been asking them what creativity means to them and why or even if we should try to be more creative when we are studying. And then I've been thinking about how I can teach more creatively.

I think what I have realised overall that Exploratory Practice is, for me at least, a philosophy rather than always an activity. I don't always have to do EP, but I can be explorative. It is an approach, a way in. I find it very affirmative - it somehow gives me both the permission and the means to look at something /work on something deeply interesting to me, but in a very doable way. It is giving me back my mojo.

Jess Poole, April 2016

I end by wondering if questioning whether the work that the teachers and learners do 'counts' as research is to ask the wrong question. Those who embrace EP, or other forms of practitioner research such as Action Research, Reflective Practice, and so on, do so because of the immediate relevance of the agenda and findings to the practitioners themselves. EP can incorporate elements of research as part of the explorations, but it does not claim to be 'Research' (with a capital 'R'). This may be seen in the emphasis in EP publications, workshops, talks, on the phrases 'working for understanding', or 'developing understandings', and the deliberate attempts to reduce obfuscation by writing in a more accessible style about the work of practitioners. Such an approach is gaining hold across the field.

Implications and Impact

As I have continued examining EP over years, it has become clear that EP has taken off in a big way. The possibility, for example, of doing EP now seems an entirely viable proposition in all sorts of contexts. The fact that EP has spread across the UK (in the influential field of EAP) and across the world (as CPD or as pedagogy or as pedagogically-rooted research) in China, Japan, Turkey, the USA as well as, of course, Brazil, indicates a growing impact on/in the fields of applied linguistics and language education.

As I disseminate my own work in conferences, workshops, through social media and publications, as well as simply by living my professional life, I have found that others are adopting EP in their work. Perhaps as a result, more and more practitioners are getting in touch saying they want to try EP. I conclude that the landscape has changed since EP began in the early 1990s. EP is a living framework, one which is capable of growing, of developing, and one which has been incorporated into the curricula of many different types of language education. It therefore merits further attention.

So what do we know now that we did not know before? First, that EP can be successfully implemented in a variety of contexts, despite, perhaps even at times because of, the goal-oriented nature of such contexts, but that this is dependent upon a flexible interpretation of the framework, which applies the principles appropriately, rather than imposing a 'model'. Second, that these EP principles are deeply interconnected, with the notions of working for quality of life, of understanding, and of relevance to the participants, at the very centre of the network. Third, that whether EP is positioned as research or as pedagogy is immaterial: it is a growing force in the field, with multiple possibilities for nuanced and multi-layered interpretations. Fourth, that the shift from a paradigm of technicist problem-solving to one of open-ended puzzling offers greater potential for seeing and seeking the solutions to problems, of explorations and investigations of language learning and teaching as well as research itself. Fifth, EP's empowerment of practitioners enables them to find ways of investigating their own experiences, while also promoting the goals of language learning and teaching. And this provides opportunities for co-creation of educational understandings as well as knowledge, with learners teaching their teachers, as much as the other way around.

In sum, the contributions of learners and teachers may lead to greater understanding of the processes of learning, teaching, and researching. Traditional beliefs about research and pedagogy may, in the past, have been holding practitioners back, but if alternative definitions such as the ones afforded by EP can be accepted, even embraced, there is huge potential for practitioners to engage in small-scale, locally and globally relevant, research or scholarship, and this offers significant contributions to the development of pedagogy itself as well as the field more broadly.

Suggestions for future research

In keeping with the EP principle of sustainability, I end this book with thoughts of 'what next?'.

The issue of **affect**, and its contribution to well-being, begs further investigation. For example, although I have provided case studies, vignettes, from work in EAP and teacher development, these merely scratch the surface of what might be investigated. The cycles I have described of pre-innovation anxiety, followed by relief, followed by wave upon wave of enthusiasm, seemed common, but would others experience the same, or different emotions? And how does attending to the quality of life of practitioners contribute to their **motivation** (or address **demotivation and burnout**)? EP can take place over a relatively long time (three years, in Alison Stewart's case, much longer in the case of the EP Rio Group) or a short time (just a few lessons, as in Darren Elliott's, or in Yasmin Dar's, case), or anything in-between. But was the enthusiasm of participants predicated on the novelty of the approach? This links to questions of **longevity** and **motivation**: what happens to practitioners, and their feelings, over a longer period of time (see Brandes & Ginnis, 1990)? My own experience (over almost twenty years) is that my interest, and enthusiasm, has remained constant, though my activity has ebbed and flowed, sometimes involving periods of intense work, at others just bubbling away on the back burner. But is this the same for others?

What happens if/when EP is institutionalised? If EP becomes a part of institutional procedures and practices, then the practitioners may lose the very power we have been talking about: it is in danger of becoming a management tool. Is practitioner research, whether EP, or another approach, dependent on the interest, activity and liberty of the participants? What if it is imposed as an integral part of a course (of learning, of CPD, or research methods?): would individuals be able to object? Would EP, or indeed any form of practitioner research, lose its allure? Where do we draw the line between encouraging practitioners to try something for themselves, and forcing them to do something (eg as part of the criteria for promotion) that they don't really want to do?

In the field of **Second Language Acquisition**, there are interesting possibilities offered by EP (as discussed by Tarone & Swierzbin, 2009). How might EP contribute to the development of our understandings of SLA? What can learners, as well as teachers and researchers, tell us about the processes, the difficulties, and the

triumphs? This book has barely touched upon such issues, but it would surely be a relevant area to explore further.

Similarly, the question of how EP as an educational process relates to **assessment**. Can the work produced by EP practitioners (students or teachers) be assessed? If yes, how? As long as appropriate assessment criteria are used, and in appropriate ways, the answer is likely to be in the affirmative, but this needs to be interrogated. As the assessment of students becomes more and more associated with political gatekeeping, can we retain a sense of the true aims and processes of assessment?

Within EP itself, an area of potentially fruitful research would be to investigate further **the relationships between principles and practice**. My discussion has opened up a range of questions which merit deeper investigation. For example, in empowering learners to investigate their puzzles, are teachers inevitably going to prioritise the learners, leaving their own questions to one side? Or is it possible for learners and teachers to do EP concurrently? And in this case we immediately see rising in front of us the question of how each and is to understand and be understood through the diverse linguistic and cultural lenses that define our classrooms. As we have seen, this question is inseparable for questions around trust. These in turn lead us to questions about collegiality: do we need to work in groups to be collegial? Are there other ways in which collegial working can take place? The principle of sustainable research is also of interest. Does EP continue for all participants all of the time? What happens if/when someone gets to the end of puzzling about something? Do they just stop?

The beliefs of learners, as well as teachers and researchers (not to mention society as a whole) are omnipresent in any discussion of practitioner research. The **intersections between conflicting beliefs held by practitioners** (of learning, of teaching, of research) are sites of particular interest, revealing as they do, not only the palimpsest of beliefs held by any one individual, but also the social, political and ideological pressures that exist in a world (described so eloquently by Breen, 2006) of bureaucratic surveillance, control measures such as checklists and so-called competency frameworks, and all too common mismatch between the rhetoric of

education, and the mechanisms which we have to survive. We struggle to resolve the cognitive dissonance that this causes, and a better understanding of the forces at work here, would go some way to relieve the pressures currently oppressing those who labour in education.

The challenges of implementing practitioner research (whether Exploratory Practice or any of its siblings) are many and varied, and certainly worth investigating in more depth. And the **relationships between research, scholarship and pedagogy** need teasing out, particularly since no-one seems able to provide a clear definition of scholarship. This last, is of great importance, as it is now being included in the job descriptions of teachers. Often disappointingly presented as an alternative or watered-down version of 'research', the notion of scholarship is beginning to take on a life of its own, and generate a whole new discourse. But without a clear definition, a cynical interpretation would be that this is merely another way to move the goalposts to wherever is convenient for those in power. The EP framework could provide a potentially very helpful, definition of scholarship, but this needs further investigation.

There are, of course, those who would be most unwilling to accept practitioner research of any kind, and EP in particular, as research. Such arguments have dominated the field for decades, and yet there is, inamongst the disputes, a small patch of common ground. When we consider what research is for, it seems uncontroversial to say that (good) research is for developing human understandings of the world (or indeed the universe), of practice(s), and of the relationships that are governed by, and govern, them. So, considering research and pedagogy as central pillars in any educational institution, we need to put critical questions to pedagogy, to research and to integrated research and pedagogy. Hence there are questions about EP and research that would potentially bear fruit. What are the challenges for practitioners, of teaching, of learning, of research, as well as the potential benefits?

Finally, **the lure of problems** is another area worthy of investigation. I have alluded several times to the knottiness of the problem/puzzle issue. It does seem that problems, and technical problem-solving, are deeply attractive, while puzzling, with its open-endedness and aim of developing understandings too deep for words may not

always suit everyone. I have suggested that problem-solving is seductive, and I argue that actively puzzling in the ways suggested by EP interrupts that seduction, by asking awkward questions at awkward times. But what does this mean? And why does it matter? My own beliefs (based on years of puzzling over this question) suggest that it matters little in the end – as long as the attitude is one of curious inquiry. Such an attitude takes time to develop (there is always that temptation to leap to solutions), and this, too, would bear further scrutiny.

To sum up, more studies in different institutions, different contexts, and over varying periods of time are needed to see if the potential of EP is a viable, even desirable, form of practitioner research. Each of the areas outlined above requires scrutiny, analysis and discussion. As EP has begun to impact globally, it requires further examination. Further studies are needed to uncover the deeper relationships between the everyday practices and the principles of all those involved in education and research or scholarship.

Conclusion

Zeichner & Noffke (2001) argued that practitioner research is, and should be, justified by the relevance it has to practitioners themselves. The stories in this volume demonstrate that in doing so they (learners, teachers, teacher educators) gained personal satisfaction, as well as, perhaps even as a consequence of, developing their own understandings while engaging in normal classroom practices.

Teachers and learners (and researchers) are continuously engaged in negotiating conflicting beliefs around pedagogy and research. Attempts to reconcile such beliefs in practice lead to forms of cognitive dissonance as a range of varied, often unexpressed or inexpressible, understandings seem to be at odds with practices. Pre-conceptions of pedagogy and/or research may, therefore, play a role in preventing the potential offered by practitioner research. If on the other hand, alternative visions, such as EP, with its deeper requirements for interrogating practice and developing understandings, are accessed, then, perhaps, such potential might be reached.

Academics as well as teachers, teacher educators and learners need to respond to Freeman's (2006) call to think differently about professional learning and professional development. It is clear from the EP experience that learners as well as teachers are interested, and they will inquire deeply into learning and teaching, as long as they are given the space and liberty to do so, and as long as they set the agenda, thus making the work relevant to their needs. As Freire (1973) suggests, the only one to learn is the person who owns the learning, and frames it for themselves. This applies not only to learners, but also to teachers, who are also learning as they continue to teach, in a fruitful cycle of professional development. All too often, practitioner-researchers are pulled in opposite directions: should they give attention and energy to research or to pedagogy? The elegance of Exploratory Practice resides in the opportunity it affords to shift those opposing movements back into a coherent, productively complex and dynamic whole.