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Chapter 2

Mentoring Language Teaching Professionals in/through Exploratory Practice

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Abstract

This chapter tells the story of our experiences of starting Exploratory Practice (EP) in a new and vibrant setting (Professional Development in Turkey and Northern Cyprus). We explore in-service language teacher education with the introduction of EP as an inquiry-based tool for professional development. Engaging teachers as learners of 'doing-being' research can be a catalyst for developing from a focus on practitioners as passive recipients of knowledge to active generators of understandings and knowledge. However, this shift poses epistemological challenges for teachers who do not yet have or are still developing a researcher identity. Together with teachers, teacher educators and curriculum developers, we work to understand the complexities of our various educational contexts.

Key Words: Exploratory Practice, Mentoring, Practitioner Research, Inquiry-based Continuous Professional Development

Introduction

Exploratory Practice (EP) is a form of practitioner research with potential for personal and professional development. Underpinned by a philosophical framework of principles (see Allwright, 2003, 2005a; Allwright & Hanks, 2009), it promotes the idea of teachers and learners working collaboratively to understand their learning and teaching worlds. Crucially, it steps out of the popular 'problem-to-solution' paradigm, arguing that before pedagogical conundrums can be solved, they need first to be understood (Hanks, 2017a), and they need to be understood by the practitioners themselves. By insisting on an attitude of puzzlement, or of 'being puzzled', opportunities for deeper understanding are opened up. And, in an original move, by utilising normal pedagogic activities as investigative tools (Allwright, 1993; Hanks, 2017b) research and practice are brought together.

The chapter discusses how mentoring through EP, as an initial research experience, can help practitioners develop knowledge of research and understanding of their own teaching, educating and training practices. We outline the challenges as well as the benefits of setting up an Exploratory Practice Network in Turkey and Northern Cyprus to connect with pre-existing EP networks in other parts of the world. As we proceed through the chapter we

consider practical as well as theoretical questions such as: Where to begin? What does one do? How much (or how little) guidance might practitioners need? To answer these questions, we draw on our mentoring experience in three Case Studies of teachers, teacher educators and teacher trainers from local contexts engaging in EP for the first time.

Exploratory Practice and Mentoring

We begin by considering Exploratory Practice itself. A flexible, constantly evolving framework is built around a core of principles for practitioner research first outlined in the early 1990s (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). These are perhaps most succinctly expressed as follows:

> *Exploratory Practice involves:*
>
> 1. practitioners (eg: preferably teachers *and* learners together) working to understand:
>   a. what *they* want to understand, following their own agendas;
>   b. not necessarily *in order to* bring about change;
>   c. not primarily *by* changing;
>   d. but by *using* normal pedagogic practices as investigative tools, so that working for understanding is *part of* the teaching and learning, not extra to it;
>   e. in a way that does not lead to 'burn-out', but that is *indefinitely sustainable;*
> 2. in order to contribute to:
>   f. *teaching and learning themselves;*
>   g. *professional development, both individual and collective.*
>
> (Allwright, 2003: 127-8 original emphases)

It is the last part of this definition that interests us in this chapter. We make a connection between the EP framework and a Vygotskian approach to professional development in language teacher development, as outlined by Johnson & Golombek: "…a sociocultural perspective allows us to not only *see* teacher professional development but also to articulate the various ways in which teacher educators can intervene in, support, and enhance teacher professional development." (2011: 11).

Since EP is basically focused on the idea that context-specific knowledge needs to be explored through normal pedagogical activities, we pay special attention to the active use of dialectical thinking, a concept that refers to "the logic of interconnectivity" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016: 172) of shared or opposing experiences, knowledge, and understandings. Central to the Exploratory Practice framework is the notion of puzzlement, of puzzling about learning and teaching practices. As Slimani-Rolls & Kiely point out, this is "a starting point, a focused question to put to the data [which] thus established the teacher's agenda for the CPD journey" (2014: 432).

Of equal importance is the EP principle of sustainability (Allwright, 1997). Wyatt & Dikilitas (2016) point to the need for networks of support for those engaging in practitioner research. It does seem that making links between people in different geographical regions or institutions helps to sustain the initial commitment. This can also be seen in our sister publication (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, Forthcoming), where novice practitioner researchers (and experienced teachers) were mentored through their first experiences of Exploratory Practice, continuing over a period of years. Similarly, Tajino, Stewart & Dalsky (2016) advocate the notion of collegiality, while Mercado & Mann (2015) suggest that "mentoring can result in personal and professional growth for mentors" (2015: 52) as well as for mentees, if the role of the teacher as an insider, with access to information crucial to understanding classroom learning and teaching, is taken seriously. Likewise, Hanks (In Press) argues that practitioners already possess much of the knowledge and expertise needed to engage in research, and calls for trust in their capabilities and their findings.

Clearly, the field of mentoring in language teacher education is enjoying a renaissance of interest in the field. Yet little has been written about mentoring experienced professionals as they take their first steps into a new arena: that of practitioner research (here, Exploratory Practice) as a form of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). We present, therefore, three Case Studies which trace the implementations, along with the challenges and opportunities (for us as mentors, as well as for the participants themselves) involved.

Where did we begin?

We began with a brief contact in 2014, when Kenan Dikilitaş asked Judith Hanks to write the preface for his edited book of chapters written by teachers engaging in research. Following this first interaction, we applied for a British Council / Newton / Katip Çelebi Researcher Links Travel Grant. Our proposal was to develop a new branch of the EP Network in Izmir, Turkey, focusing on EP as a form of CPD for language teaching professionals. An important aspect of the proposal was to ensure the sustainability of our enterprise, and to make sure that it was not just a 'one-stop shop' with a 'foreign expert' flown in briefly, never to be seen again. We therefore constructed a programme of interactive, hands-on activities, tasks, and workshops which stretched from June to September 2015. This activity in Izmir is presented below as Case Study 1.

Objectives were to establish a vibrant programme of EP in Izmir and to help participants to engage in personal and professional development. We aimed to (a) encourage them to initiate their own small-scale research, collecting/generating data from their classrooms and workplaces; (b) motivate them to develop own understandings of English language

teaching/learning; (c) create sustainable pathways for them to continue researching their pedagogy; (d) encourage national and international dissemination of their EP work by engaging with global networks available via social media, conferences and webinars.

Turkey has a vibrant culture of conferences, workshops and seminars (both face-to-face and on-line) centred on language education and applied linguistics. Because of the active engagement of language education professionals in such arenas, this incipient branch of the EP network began to grow. People saw photographs and comments on the Teachers Research! Facebook page, and became curious. At conferences they asked participants about EP.Consequently, we were then invited to lead CPD sessions in Northern Cyprus (Case Study 2) and Eskişehir (Case Study 3).

In each case, we followed up the direct EP activity by encouraging participants to disseminate their work at national or international conferences, and further, with an invitation to write up their work in the form of chapters for this book. We now turn to look at each Case Study in depth.

Case Study 1: Izmir

We had initially decided to work with teachers, teacher trainers and teacher educators, because we wanted to initiate a cascade which would make it possible to create further impact on the local level. Therefore, Kenan Dikilitaş made use of his extensive network of language teacher education contacts in İzmir, Turkey. He invited participants from universities and language institutions across the city. Interestingly, however, the participants who arrived on the first day were not all teacher trainers. Two attendees were in fact working in the Curriculum Development Office of their institution – they had stepped in to replace the teacher trainers who were unable to attend. Moreover, others were mainly teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or general English Language Teaching (ELT), just beginning to branch out into CPD roles.

There were 17 participants from 8 universities and 1 school in Izmir, and from the start they evinced enthusiasm for the project. They were keen to make contact with likeminded teachers and teacher educators in other parts of the world, and to disseminate their work at both national and international level. However, their enthusiasm was mixed with caution, as the following excerpts from their written feedback show:

- *"I was curious and excited of course and a little quizzical perhaps as I did not possess a lot of information [about EP]. I was very motivated and committed already."*

- *"I felt very excited and honoured to be in this project. I have always been fascinated with all kinds of teacher research. After a satisfactory action research and lesson study experience, it was worth to try another form of teacher research"*

There were 10 workshops in total: 6 in June and 4 in September. The timing was deliberate, as we wanted participants to take time to reflect, and try out some of the ideas over the summer (many of them worked in summer schools or with colleagues in July/August). In Table 1 we provide the initial plan for the workshops, showing the focus of each one, and how it linked to the EP principles. In addition to the workshops, participants met (both face-to-face and virtually via digital media) to discuss ideas and strengthen social ties inside and outside the workshops.

Table 1: Schedule for the first round of workshops (Izmir).

	Focus	Comments
Workshop 1 15 June (17.00-19.00)	Introductions. Aims of the project. EP theories and practice: the importance of understanding. Ethics in educational research: introduce ethical and principled classroom research. Invite participants to think about: What puzzles you?	Link to EP principles as presented in Allwright (2003: 128-130): *Principle 1: Put 'quality of life' first. Principle 2: Work primarily to understand language classroom life.*
Workshop 2 17 June (17.00-19.00)	Refining puzzles. Developing and analysing narratives. Considering methodologies.	*Principle 2: Work primarily to understand language classroom life. Principle 3: involve everybody*
Conference 18-19 June	IATEFL ReSIG Teachers Research! Conference.	*Principle 4: work to bring people together*
Workshop 3 22 June (17.00-19.00)	Developing Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs) Research Design	*Principle 6: integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice*
Workshop 4 24 June (17.00-19.00)	PEPAs as data collection/generation tools. Strategies and techniques for conducting investigations.	*Practical corollary to Principle 6: let the need to integrate guide the conduct of the work for understanding*
Workshop 5 29 June (17.00-19.00)	Refining Puzzles and Research Questions. Refining Research Design.	*Principle 5: work also for mutual development*
Workshop 6 1 July (17.00-19.00)	Preparing for data collection/ generation. Discussing ways of doing data analysis. What next??	*Principle 7: make the work a continuous enterprise*

The workshops took place in the evenings, after a full day's work. Participants attended as many of the workshops as possible, despite the conflicting demands of work and family, and by the end of the first month some had already begun to disseminate this work via their roles

as teacher trainers, curriculum developers, and teachers with responsibility for CPD in their workplaces. Nevertheless, there were still a number of questions – an entirely normal response for those wishing to try something new. In the final week, therefore, we also met participants individually if they wished, to talk through their plans for what they wanted to do over the summer months. It was important to allocate time to clarify, illuminate and try things out in their own time, without us looming over them. They needed to find their own pathways, and, crucially, they needed to prioritise their own quality of life.

The workshop series started with input on EP principles to help participants develop an understanding of Exploratory Practice. We briefly showed them puzzled questions from practitioners in the UK and Brazil (eg Lyra, Fish Braga, & Braga, 2003) and this sparked off questions that puzzled participants in their own contexts; their classrooms, CPD sessions and curriculum development offices. A selection of participants' puzzles is listed below:

- *Why do my students have difficulty in learning/acquiring new vocabulary?*
- *Why are my students not able to retain newly learned vocabulary*
- *Why are some language learners more successful than others?*
- *Why can some students not learn the language as effectively as some others?*
- *Why don't we integrate learner training into our curriculum?*
- *Why are my students so unwilling to read?*
- *Why are they bored in reading lessons?*
- *Why do students avoid attending extracurricular activities?*
- *To what extent do their hobbies direct them to participate in these clubs, or is anxiety a reason not to attend them?*
- *Why do they [students] assume the main course lesson as a grammar-oriented vocabulary course rather than a course which integrates all the skills?*
- *Why is it some teachers are resistant to developing themselves?*
- *Why is CPD seen as a burden?*

A critical point in the first sessions was when participants tried to articulate their puzzles. Many of the questions came with a set of assumptions that needed to be unpicked, and some participants focused on 'how' questions rather than 'why'. In other words, they were very focused on a 'problem-to-solution' approach. It took time to work through this, to really establish the need for *understanding* the issue before attempting problem-solving.

Each participant wrote a short narrative or backstory to their puzzle, and we spent time analysing these narratives using a form of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989). Many of the stories they had written conveyed deep emotions, with one memorably describing a student on the point of crying because he could not learn new words; even though he felt he studied harder than his classmates, they seemed to do better. The teacher described her resulting puzzle: *"Why can some students not learn the language as effectively as others? Why are some more successful than others?"*.

Some practitioners blamed themselves, some blamed the students, and some even described crises with students or colleagues. It was essential to work through this culture of blaming (so common in education around the world, as Breen, 2006, has pointed out) to be able to work positively towards understanding. One participant in particular exclaimed as she realised that her whole narrative was geared towards negativity; it was a revelation when she recognised the sheer volume of self-and-other-criticism that was involved in one short paragraph. She had described how the students "hated" the lesson and the coursebook; noted students who were "complaining about the course's difficulty", and added that "they never showed up for office hours and their exam results were terrible". Naturally, her first questions were "how can I manage such a demanding course?" and "how can I motivate my students?", yet through the analytic process, we realised that this would simply lead into a blind alley of seeking technicist solutions, without actually addressing the underlying issues. As she unpacked her narrative, and the underlying assumptions within it, she was released from the grip of negativity, and began to consider questions about student (and staff) motivation (see Hanks, 2017a: 243-5 for further discussion).

A second critical moment involved grappling with the different forms of practitioner research in the field. Some participants automatically assumed that since EP requires some kind of *investigation* in the classroom, then this must be Action Research (Burns, 2010). Others found it more akin to Reflective Practice (Edge, 2011; Farrell, 2007) since it involves *reflection* upon experiences. It took time to unpick the differences, as well as acknowledging the family relationships (see Hanks, 2016; Trotman, this volume, for further discussion). This generated a significant questioning in and out of the sessions. The participants started to convey their experiences and asked insightful questions regarding the specific aspects of EP, which led to participant-driven pedagogy. The workshops coincided with the Teachers Research! IATEFL ReSIG conference in Izmir. Two presenters at this conference were Yasmin Dar and Mark Wyatt, both of whom also had some experience of Exploratory Practice. Working on the EP principles of 'work to bring people together' and 'involve everybody' we invited them to join us for the short time they were in the country. Yasmin shared her experiences of trying out EP with learners in her EAP classroom in the UK, and was able to devote some time to answering practical as well as theoretical questions about what she had done (see Dar, 2015). Mark, too, joined a session and helpfully contributed to discussions both in the workshop and beyond about Exploratory Practice (see Wyatt, 2011; Wyatt & Dikilitas, 2015; Wyatt & Pasamar Marquez, 2016).

A third critical moment was the introduction of Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities, or PEPAs. The notion of using usual classroom activities as methodological instruments for

collecting or generating data may seem simple, but identifying suitable activities that could be bent towards investigating the participant's puzzle took some time. Participants broke the process down into a detailed step-by-step approach. For example, one participant described how she had identified brainstorming, mind-mapping and group discussion in an English writing class as tools to investigate her puzzle *'Why are some language learners more successful than others?'*. She involved her learners in investigating a puzzle that was relevant to them as well as their teacher. Another participant described getting teachers to role-play an interview with a student, with colleagues utilising empathy as they gained insights into attitudes to learning and teaching by acting out those roles.

As with refining puzzles, it should not be thought that designing a PEPA is an easy process. Identifying appropriate pedagogic activities, which are at once helpful to the learning/teaching, and useful for research, and thus for gaining understanding, is a complex intellectual exercise, and some participants reported struggles with this: *"I learnt that it is not as easy as it seems. Creating PEPA was the hardest part, especially PEPAs that are in line with the syllabus".* Nevertheless, others cited PEPAs as crucial in the sustainability of the work:

- *"Another thing I loved was that we could make use of PEPAs during our research […] that is also very encouraging because we do not need to use or design any other different research tools to make research."*
- *"The most valuable experience I had was […] perspective I gained, as in my opinion, EP is a perfect match for instructors, teacher-researchers that are to be intrigued by the sheer and subtle simplicity and urgency of some teaching and learning puzzles and their deep and multi-layered roots and the philosophical and humanistic perspective EP has to offer in return"*
- *"I knew that due to heavy work load and tight schedules many teachers see teacher research as a heavy weight on their shoulders and I was personally looking for something which doesn't involve extra work on the part of the teachers. I needed something more handy and something that I'm not going to use my precious teaching time on doing research. I think, a teacher who is teaching 24 hours per week can only conduct traditional teacher research once or twice a year and this seems quite inefficient when we consider the problems that we encounter during teaching. However, when we integrate research into normal teaching routines, find the correct PEPA for our puzzles, it is easier to create a continuous research culture in our classrooms."*

At the beginning of July, we returned to our workplaces. Some continued with their teaching, or moved into the Summer School phase of teaching, a few went on holiday, while others worked with colleagues as a part of their curriculum development or CPD activities. This meant they had an opportunity to step back, and think about their experiences with EP, and consider how to incorporate PEPAs.

In September we reconvened for 4 more workshops in which participants reported back on their thinking and activities, and raised further questions for discussion. We invited them to consider writing up their work as well as presenting at a conference. Table 2 provides the planned outline for these workshops:

Table 2: Schedule for the second round of workshops (Izmir)

	Focus	Comments
16 September Workshop 7 (17.00-19.00	Review of the Principles of EP Report back: what happened over the summer? Evaluating data collection, collation and analysis	*EP principles of collegiality* *Working for understandings*
17 September Workshop 8 17.00-19.00	Documenting findings Reporting on your work Disseminating understandings	*EP principles of mutual development* *Importance of relevance*
21 September Workshop 9 17.00-19.00	In-group presentations Sharing experiences of EP Considering publications? Conferences?	*EP principles of Working to bring people together* *Involving everyone*
22 September Workshop 10 17.00-19.00	Plans for the future: seeking sustainable ways for future collaborations	*EP principles of disseminating understandings, sustainability, and quality of life*

Inevitably, however, all plans are subject to change, and the schedules needed to flexibly respond to matters beyond our control. Personal issues such as funerals as well as national issues such as an unexpected extension of a national holiday, meant that our initial plans changed. This was not a problem, but it is worth noting that any schedule needs to be flexible enough to accommodate change. So, for example, sessions 9 and 10 could not be delivered on the dates originally intended. Instead, Workshop 8 was extended, and individual or small group tutorials were offered to participants. In the event, this was a helpful development, as it allowed us to read and comment on written drafts in detail with the authors.

Immediately after the workshop series, we elicited participant opinions about their experiences of engaging in EP as a form of research for CPD. We end Case Study 1 with their reflections on their experiences of Exploratory Practice:

What is the most significant thing that you have learned?

- *"…I learned from this EP project is that we can explore our puzzles in the same way that we do in our normal pedagogic practices. It is a really practical way to conduct research without worrying about the research methodology and designing new instruments. […] Furthermore, using PEPAs in a more effective way was another contribution of the workshops. So that we could understand how to make use of our normal pedagogic practices effectively to find out the reasons that lay behind our puzzles. Finally, with the collegiality we could see that there are teachers from*

> *different schools who have the same or similar puzzles with us. This is a relief for us to see that these problems are normal and we are not doing things wrong."*
> * *"The most significant thing that this project taught me was how to work collaboratively with all the shareholders on our puzzles and how to understand and identify the reason or the source of the problem without destroying your life quality and making the research an extra burden on your shoulders. I really liked and appreciated receiving some feedback from colleagues working at different institutions. That gave me fresh ideas about my puzzle. For instance, one of the participants in the workshop pointed out that I was missing the point of view of teachers in my puzzle and that changed my way of looking at the puzzle. Till that moment, I had only concentrated on the student perspective of the puzzle, but then, I decided to question this from teachers' perspective, as well. "*

Case study 1 had already been reported on Facebook teachers research page (https://www.facebook.com/groups/teachersresearch/) and there it had attracted the interest of people in Northern Cyprus. Fortuitously, at this moment Kenan Dikilitaş gave a presentation at an event in Ankara. The head of the professional development unit invited us to lead CPD sessions at her institution. This led to Case Study 2. In contrast with the Izmir work, Case Study 2 the participants all worked in the same institution; and, crucially, the participants *themselves* had asked for the workshops, and were supported by their Director.

Case Study 2: Northern Cyprus

We delivered a series of EP workshops for 17 EAP teachers at Middle East Technical University (METU) in Northern Cyprus in September 2015. This had a different time scale: three days of intensive work as opposed to three-four months. We therefore adapted the program to meet the contextual requirements of Case 2, covering the same content though with a different pace and flow. Table 3 below provides the planned schedule:

Table 3: Schedule for Workshops (Northern Cyprus)

Day	Time	Focus
Monday		
	10.00-11.30	Welcome; introductions
	11.45-13.00	What is EP? What do you normally do in your teaching/learning?
	14.00-15.30	What puzzles you about your learning/teaching?
	15.45-17.00	EP principles and practices: what puzzles teachers/teacher educators?
Tuesday		
	10.00-13.00	Staff were required to attend institutional meetings regarding marking so no EP workshops in the morning
	13.30-14.45	What could we do in our classrooms to investigate?
	15.00-16.30	Designing PEPAs

Wednesday		
	9.15-11.00	Discovering the EP principled framework
	11.15-12.30	Ethics
	14.00-15.30	Dissemination
	15.45-16.30	Planning ahead, making links. Any questions?
	16.30-17.00	Closing remarks

Here we found teachers, teacher educators and testing and assessment staff who were also extremely enthusiastic, and who also worked over the coming months in their own classrooms and workplaces to investigate their EP puzzles. During the first phase, the teachers explored what puzzles them, drafted 'why' questions, and wrote their backstory to their puzzles. Initial puzzles included the following:

- *Why are students bored so easily?*
- *Why aren't students motivated?*
- *Why do they give up so easily?*
- *Why aren't they interested in some lessons?(What makes them interested in some lessons?)*
- *Why do students not want to be in Cyprus/on campus/ at university/ in classrooms?*
- *Why is N Cyprus demotivating for the students?*
- *Why don't they just do things?*
- *Why do the students not read more? Why can't I get/help them to read more in English?*
- *Why do students have resistance towards learning?*
- *Why is there such a huge difference between learners?*
- *Why do we teach learners as if they are all the same?*
- *Why aren't some students (more) willing to study outside class?*

In contrast with the previous group, the participants grasped the notion of puzzling and using 'why' (rather than 'how') questions very quickly and there was very little need for discussion about the differences between Action Research and Exploratory Practice.

Participants then made links between their puzzles and PEPAs, considering ways of collecting/generating data through normal pedagogical activities. During this process, an interesting event occurred. Two colleagues who did not normally work closely together were in the same group: one expressed her puzzlement about the use of a 'pop quiz' or unannounced tests as a means of assessing students (and perhaps controlling student behaviour). As we talked about this in the session, her colleague exclaimed: *"This is just what I have been working on for my Assessment project!"*. This critical incident (Flanagan, 1954) led to a deep collaboration (Chapter 6 by Oncul & Webb, was the result) as they teased out the intricacies of assumptions about assessment and testing, and how these related to student (and teacher) expectations. This first moment of sharing in the session exemplifies the importance that EP gives to the notion of collegiality – so puzzles may be

puzzling to the individual, but they may also lead to a burst of excitement for others as teachers (or learners) discover that they are not alone.

A variety of interaction patterns were used during the sessions including individual writing, pair- and group work, buzz groups, and jigsaw readings, which seemed to increase the efficiency of interaction among them. We also used movement, sticking texts and puzzles on the walls, as a way of generating energy and inviting discussion. Participant-driven exploration was implemented throughout in order to help teachers develop autonomous stances to discovery-based learning not only about puzzles but also about EP as a methodology to investigate these puzzles. The participants created multi-layered PEPAs involving interrelated activities to ensure triangulation of data collection tools such speaking, writing and peer feedback. In this way, the EP practitioners turned normal pedagogic activities into data collection procedures. Such flexibility allowed for greater commitment and developing ownership of their EP work.

Again, we invited feedback and reflections from the participants before we left. A selection of their comments is given below:

- *"I like the idea of EP as I've found it practical, feasible, which is encouraging people (teachers) to do research"*
- *"… it is encouraging in terms of doing research, at least to get started for (possibly) something wider"*
- *"Working on our research in a collaborative environment has been really helpful in our progress."*
- *"This has definitely given us a different perspective towards doing research."*
- *Personally, I found it (EP) a very practical way to data gathering."*
- *"It is really good to know that we can conduct research in our classrooms in a practical / flexible way using PEPAs"*
- *"These three days have been very motivating for me. EP has encouraged me to explore something that really bothered me during my lessons."*

One of the critical characteristics of this work was that it was a good example of bottom-up in-service teacher development in that the request for the EP workshops was made by the teachers themselves. Following their request, the Director went through the documents about the program and decided to support and fund it. She later indicated (personal communication) that she had liked the idea of EP not only because it was new and promising but also because it was based on a bottom-up initiation as opposed to top-down professional development.

Having completed the sessions in Northern Cyprus and disseminated it in social media, the network expanded further. We now turn to the third case study.

Case Study 3: Eskişehir

Instructors from Eskisehir Osman Gazi University, Turkey, contacted Kenan to invite him to lead a 1-day workshop on Exploratory Practice and the EP network we had been creating. At the end of the workshop, Kenan invited them to write up their experiences of EP, and one person took up the challenge (see Chapter 4). Once again, the initial schedule was adapted, this time to fit into one day.

Table 4: Schedule for workshop (Eskişehir)

Day	Time	Focus
Friday	10.00-11.30	Welcome; introductions 'What is EP? What do you normally do in your teaching/learning?'
	11.45-13.00	What could we do in our classrooms to investigate?
	14.00-15.30	Ethics; Designing PEPAs
	15.45-17.00	Planning ahead; making links

This workshop was shorter than the others and was a bottom-up initiation in that the instructors themselves organised the day with all the logistics and formal procedures. The participants included three instructors from the neighbouring university. The workshops were participant-driven and involved a great deal of active involvement with interaction in pairs or groups. The participants had already done some reading on EP and were familiar with the idea of EP though quite superficial, but this helped the trainer to build on the existing knowledge more easily. The participants were curious to engage in practices since (1) they initiated the workshop and organised all the details as a group, (2) they felt they neede to discuss their pedagogical issues that they encountered and reflected from time to time though not systematically. The workshop was a timely initiative, which can also be realised from the puzzles they developed interactively.

The puzzles developed and discussed by the participants included:

- *Why do I feel I have more teacher talking time than students talking time?*
- *Why are my students not interested in the lessons?*
- *Why are my students reluctant to speak in the target language?*
- *Why don't my students like group and pair work?*
- *Why do my students have difficulty in comprehending reading texts? (see Chapter 5 for details)*
- *Why don't my students want to develop their English skills but to get a good grade?*
- *Why do my students have difficulty in speaking and how can we improve their speaking skills?*

- *Why do my students get bored in lessons?*
- *Why aren't my students eager to participate in speaking activities?*
- *What are the reasons for low student motivation?*
- *Why do my students use L1 during discussions in roel-plays, group work and pair work?*
- *Why do my students struggle in reading in L2?*

After the puzzles were developed and shred, the next step was to discuss normal pedagogical activities in their classroom and see which of them could be feasible for accessing students' views regarding the content of the puzzle. This process helped them question their practices with a critical look with others too. The participants developed a research plan in which the puzzle could be investigated with more than one research tool.

What happened after the workshops?

After the workshops, participants from all three Case Studies continued researching, writing, and thinking. Some presented their work at the IATEFL ReSIG Teachers Research! Conference (2016) in Bahcesehir University, Istanbul, others presented at the IATEFL Annual Conference in Glasgow (2017). For many (though not all) this was a major step in their professional development: standing in front of peers and presenting their EP work and responding to questions, engaging in discussions was both challenging and rewarding.

At the end of each series of workshops, we floated the idea of publication. Some participants were eager to write up their work in the form of chapters for this book. Thinking that guidance and reassurance might be needed, especially for novice writers, we shared a template of headings for them to consider (though they were also free to structure the chapters in ways that seemed best to them). We also provided sustained support with the drafting, revision, and editing process. Some writers were surprised by the number of cycles of drafting and re-drafting which took longer than they had expected. We took the view that "writing is itself part of the process of qualitative investigation" (Holliday, 2002: 130), and, indeed, as the chapter drafts progressed, we could see the thinking: ideas coalescing, understandings developing, in ways that only became clear over time, and through the effort of writing, re-writing, cutting and/or expanding, to clarify argument. We believe that writing benefits us (teachers, teacher educators, curriculum developers), like all researchers, in that it gives a clearer sense of the overall purpose of what was being investigated; puzzles were clarified, as was EP itself (often through references to the relevant literature). Like Zhang

(2004), authors often engaged with the literature more extensively *after* they had begun their own EP work, and in this way, it was more meaningful.

Critical Reflections

The three case studies share a number of characteristics (eg the format of moving from eliciting 'normal pedagogic activities' to 'puzzling', and from this to establishing possible PEPAs). However, each was also very distinctive, raising challenges for us as mentors and teacher educators to consider.

An epistemological challenge lay in the fact that some participants had experience with other forms of practitioner research, and needed time to distinguish one from another. For example, some participants (particularly in Case Study 1), whilst motivated to attend, were resistant to puzzling; they struggled to see the difference between a problem and 'being puzzled', and wanted to conceptualise everything as 'Action Research' or 'Reflective Practice'. This may have been because AR, or RP, was a more familiar construct, or because stepping outside the 'problem-to-solution' paradigm demanded the unpicking of pre-conceived ideas, which may have been a challenge to the self. Our insistence on 'puzzling' and 'why-' questions drew attention to dissonances between traditional ideas about research and what we were introducing through EP. Although this was difficult for some, others could use their pre-existing knowledge, as another participant noted: "*As I had enough background information about action research I could easily grasp the aim of EP and mentality behind it. Making comparisons across these two teacher research forms has helped me a lot to feel more connected with the project*". For those who made the effort, teasing out the differences led to a renewed burst of enthusiasm. It also helped us (the mentors) in developing our own thinking (see, for example, Hanks, 2016, In Press; Dikilitas, 2015a, 2015b). Participants in Case Study 2 and 3 seemed to grasp these concepts more easily, and, although we had prepared ourselves for similar long discussions about the meanings of 'problem' and 'puzzlement', or the need for 'why-questions', these were not required. One of our own emerging puzzles, then, is: *"Why do some people 'get' the differences (between problem and puzzle; between AR, RP and EP) quickly, while others do not?"*

We also needed to challenge our own pre-conceptions about who would be interested and who would find EP helpful. We needed to be self-critical and flexible enough to welcome the unexpected people who joined the group. These included those who were not on the original

list of teacher trainers, but whose presence added depth and breadth to discussions, and whose contributions were therefore extremely valuable.

In terms of the need for *guidance*, the practitioners varied. Those who grasped EP concepts quickly, seemed able to move relatively smoothly from puzzling, to PEPAs, and beyond. Others needed to spend time and energy deconstructing the principles, or even combatting their own resistance. It should be noted that while we were happy to discuss the differences, and pass on our own enthusiasm, we were keen to ensure that participants were free to adapt or withdraw from EP if it did not suit their purposes, their styles, or their thinking at that time.

Methodologically, the question of how to create PEPAs was another challenge. It was disconcerting for participants to have to work out for themselves what were their normal pedagogical activities, which could be utilized as investigative tools. Particularly in the field of teacher education and/or CPD, this required careful thought. One participant commented: "*We really needed to see the source of the problem from every angle and this is difficult to realize when you are so deep into your own puzzle. However, working in collaboration helped us to overcome this challenge, we all helped each other a lot and discussed on each other's puzzles during the sessions. And without the help of PEPAs which took all the burden away, making a research would be really challenging.*" Another participant commented: "*At first, it was difficult to add different points of view into our puzzle while we are trying to refine our questions. However, it was really helpful to work in collaboration with the participants and their contribution improved us and our puzzle a lot. Also, the workshops and its content was designed in a way to develop our puzzles and further EP practices slowly.*"

These language teaching professionals did not have any extra time, nor did they have a reduced teaching load, and it was surely challenging for them. And yet, because of their own interest, their own dedication, they *made* time to present at conferences, give teacher development sessions, and write up their work. Our experience suggests that mentoring experienced teachers to take part in practitioner research (here EP) needs to comprise longer and sustained support (see EP Principle 7) rather than very limited periods. In our case, we spent more than two-and-half years working with the participants, going beyond face-to-face workshops, to practitioners independently researching their own classrooms (whether as teacher educators, teacher trainers, teachers, or curriculum developers), to disseminating the findings. We provided intensive mentoring including discussions and meetings, at the beginning, followed by asynchronous interaction through emails and written feedback and even sometimes synchronous interaction through skype or face-to-face

conversations. We were encouraged by the dedication and enthusiasm of the teachers, teacher educators and curriculum developers who have, alongside their teaching duties, managed to make time to write, draft, re-write their chapters. Of course, not everybody had the time or the inclination to write for publication. This is entirely natural, and we respected the competing demands of their jobs, personal lives or agendas. For those who did choose to write, though, interpreting, evaluating and reflecting on EP through presenting or writing added a further dimension to their, and our, thinking.

We see writing not as a separate process of teacher development but an organic part of practitioner development which kept the practitioner-researchers thinking about their puzzles as they wrote their chapters, responded to the reviews, drafted and re-drafted their chapters. Writing became an integral part of development through engaging in Exploratory Practice. The engagement in EP and writing an account of it for this book gave participants an opportunity not only to reconsider EP as a professional learning tool but also experience the process of engagement before they introduced it to the teachers in their institutions.

Discussion

In introducing EP as a new form of inquiry in the case studies, we automatically undertook the role of *subject-specialists* (Halai, 2006). As the people most familiar with the EP principles, we were able to provide access to key texts that might be useful for practitioners new to this approach, such as Allwright (2001, 2003, 2005a), chapters from Allwright & Hanks (2009) and Gieve & Miller (2006) where the principles themselves are discussed. Just as important, though, was the need for us to share our own experiences (eg Dikilitas, 2016; Hanks, 2015a, 2015b) of Exploratory Practice, along with those of others (eg Dar, 2015; Lyra, Fish Braga & Braga, 2003, Miller, Cortes, de Oliveira, & Braga, 2015; Slimani-Rolls, 2003, 2005) and offer opportunities to discuss both practical and theoretical issues. We felt strongly that to be merely a subject-specialist would be limiting, not only because this would contravene the egalitarian principles of EP, but also because this would push participants away from their own independent explorations of their own puzzles in their own ways relevant to their own situations. Whenever possible, therefore, we avoided taking on the *expert-coach* (Halai, 2006) role.

Instead, we aimed for more joint reflection to co-construct knowledge through "interthinking" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016: 81) with subject-specific support which we provided when required. We provided opportunities for collaborative reflection (Malderez & Bodóczky, 1999; Malderez & Wedell, 2007), created learning opportunities (Allwright, 2005b; Orland-Barak &

Rachamim, 2009; Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2014) and prepared opportunities for them to become critical friends (Child & Merrill, 2003).

EP-sensitive mentoring requires us to explore our puzzles by exposing untouched or unchallenged ideas likely to be deeply rooted in our learners', our colleagues', or our own, minds. Practitioners may be so absorbed in teaching that they may not even think of 'unpacking' their puzzles long held in the mind but continue with the rationales that they develop without actual evidence. We wanted to keep to the principle of prioritising Quality of Life (Allwright, 2003; Allwright & Hanks, 2009), and that meant having the freedom to *not* engage, or to engage *in one's own time*, at one's own pace, in one's own way. This gave participants a chance to conceptualise their own understandings of what EP is and how to implement the principles relating to their own contexts and with reference to the published literature.

We also undertook the mentoring role of *acculturators* by introducing participants into the research community (Hobson & Sharp, 2005) of Exploratory Practice not only by providing them with articles and book chapters that they might need to read, but also by introducing them to Exploratory Practitioners and other researchers working in the same field of language teacher education, but different geographical/institutional contexts (eg messages from Carolina Apolinário in Brazil and Jess Poole in the UK; physical visits from Yasmin Dar, who was based in the UK and Mark Wyatt based in the United Arab Emirates). This was complemented by the role of *sponsor* (Malderez and Bodóczky, 1999) in that we encouraged participants to present at relevant conferences, which then paved the way to writing and preparing for publication. A systematic, coherent, yet flexible, implementation of these roles by both of us during the training helped participants in sustaining their motivation and developing and exploring the meanings of EP. As the professionals we were working with had already accrued experience in language teaching (in some cases over many years), we had no intention of attempting to tell them what to do, but rather aimed to stimulate discussion and provide opportunities for further learning to take place. For some, this was disconcerting, while for others it was liberating.

Conclusion

We have deliberately avoided the term 'training' in this chapter, because we were working with experienced teachers, teacher trainers, teacher educators and curriculum developers, each of whom came with a wealth of ideas, knowledge, skills and expertise. Moving away from the discourse of 'improvement'; challenging assumptions about the 'deficit model' of teachers/teaching (see Breen, 2006; Hanks, 2017a), and articulating and refining the

puzzles, was crucial. By taking a more practitioner-led approach to mentoring research by language teaching professionals, we turned the 'cascade training model' upside down. In doing so, we encountered a wellspring of curiosity, enthusiasm and motivation that bodes well for the field as a whole. The teachers, teacher educators, teacher trainers and curriculum developers had untapped reserves of relevant puzzles, and a range of expertise which could be drawn on to investigate classroom language learning/teaching systematically, rigorously, in original ways.

We see mentoring language teaching professionals in/through EP as a form of collaborative learning based on socio-constructivist theory, in that the teachers were not directly instructed but encouraged to explore issues related to EP as a form of practitioner research. Akin to the process of refining research questions (which can take a year or more for doctoral students) and, although sometimes frustrating, puzzling is an essential step which is too often overlooked in the rush to action. The participants were encouraged to take control of their learning about EP to design their PEPAs. Another pedagogical decision we took was the simultaneous reflecting and writing which allowed teachers to put together the parts of their EP work: puzzles, backstory and PEPAs. As EP was a new concept and practice for them, a natural curiosity emerged among the teachers, which also promoted deeper, participant-driven, reflection for co-constructing knowledge about EP.

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