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# Involving Everyone in Enhancing Quality of Life in Language Education: Explorations and Insights from Praxis

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## Abstract

This paper probes the potential of practitioner research (specifically Exploratory Practice) to contribute to theoretical and practical developments in quality learning outcomes in language teaching for a globalized world. It considers approaches to learning, teaching and researching in language classrooms in diverse situations, and examines the ways in which practitioner researchers have worked towards their goals of encouraging quality learning outcomes. It concludes that there is no 'one solution for all', arguing instead that the highest quality learning outcomes must focus on motivation, agency, active learning, self-efficacy and the desire to continue learning. Successful outcomes are then predicated on the co-production of knowledge with/by learners, teachers, and researchers as they explore their own praxis.

Dedicated to the memory of Craig Smith. He was a warm and gentle man with delightful humor and keen intelligence. He is greatly missed.

**Keywords:** Practitioner research, exploratory practice, quality of life, wellbeing, collegiality

## Introduction

Debates around ensuring quality of learning outcomes in language teaching in an era of globalization are of urgent concern for the field. Yet until recently, the potential of practitioner research to contribute to theoretical and practical developments has been overlooked. In this paper I orient my discussion to the theme of the 57th JACET Convention: 'Assuring Quality Learning Outcomes in Primary to Tertiary English Education for Globalization.' I examine how quality learning outcomes in English education might be encouraged and explore ways in which practitioner researchers around the world have worked towards this goal. In doing so, I highlight the fact that there is no one solution to fit all situations, but rather a range of contextually appropriate approaches which might productively be explored for and by the practitioners most affected by any changes: learners and teachers.

An initial question to consider concerns what is meant by quality learning outcomes. How quality is defined, how learning is defined, and how outcomes are decided upon and measured, are central to the debate. Each definition is at once influenced by, and a reflection of, a cultural construct: in other words, they reflect / are influenced by the ways in which quality of learning, and of outcomes, are constructed. I posit that the highest quality learning outcomes are integral to, and emanate from, highly motivated learners and teachers investigating praxis. Such outcomes include active learning, confident use of language, and the desire to continue. Quality learning outcomes, then, are enticing, empowering, and sustainable. They are intimately connected to notions of respect, mutual development, and collegiality as knowledge is co-produced with, by, and for the learners themselves.

These themes are explicitly expressed in the Exploratory Practice framework of principles for practitioner research as described below (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). This framework prioritizes enhancing quality of life and working for understanding as learners, teachers, and all those involved in language learning share their puzzles, their investigations, and their findings (see Hanks, 2017a, 2019). Including all participants (learners, teachers, curriculum

developers, teacher educators and policy-makers) working together to investigate pedagogic practices in primary, secondary and tertiary education thus provides an innovative approach to analyzing the processes of learning and teaching.

**Seven principles for inclusive practitioner research**

*The 'what' issues*:

1. Focus on quality of life as the fundamental issue.
2. Work to understand it, before thinking about solving problems.

*The 'who' issues*:

3. Involve everybody as practitioners developing their own understandings.
4. Work to bring people together in a common enterprise.
5. Work cooperatively for mutual development.

*The 'how' issues*:

6. Make it a continuous enterprise.
7. Minimise the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice.

(Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 260)

This paper examines how we might involve everyone in enhancing not only quality of learning outcomes, but also quality of life in language education. It shines a light on the insights that practitioners have gained from exploring practices, and their contributions to theorizing their pedagogy in different institutions in different parts of the world. The paper encompasses work ongoing in in Brazil, China, Japan, Turkey, the UK and other geographically situated cultures. Concurrently, it includes institutional cultures: primary schools, secondary schools, universities and teacher training colleges (tertiary) and private

language schools. The broader literature (see Hanks, 2019, for a state-of-the-art overview) encompasses a range of disciplinary cultures, e.g. teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL); English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), Second Language Acquisition, and Teacher Education as well as Business Studies, Healthcare, and Psychology. Studies encompassing institutional and disciplinary distinctions are included, as I consider here the conference theme of ways in which quality learning outcomes in primary to tertiary education for globalization may be assured.

## Quality of learning outcomes; Quality of life

Historically, the field has moved from ideas about teachers researching their classrooms as part of curriculum development (Stenhouse, 1975), to those linking research and pedagogy (Prabhu, 1987; Allwright, 1993; Hanks, 2017b). Powerful arguments have been made for the value of practitioner research (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; Johnson & Golombek, 2011), since it is contextually relevant to educators and theoretically grounded, tethering theory to practice.

Borg (2013) rightly suggests that practitioner research "has undeniable transformative potential to enrich and improve the work of teachers, the experience of learners, and the effectiveness and credibility of organizations" (p. 230). However, Borg's focus is narrow, focusing only on the contribution of teachers as practitioner-researchers. He overlooks the agency potential (Gieve & Miller, 2006) of learners involved in learning and teaching. We know, for example, that learners are "not just communicators and problem solvers, but whole persons with hearts, bodies, and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities" (Kramsch, 2006, p. 251). This has begun to have a significant impact on the way we now view learning, teaching, and practitioner research. Arguably, the quality of learning outcomes is governed by the commitment of practitioners to fully engaging with pedagogy, and exploring their praxis to the fullest, with curious and open minds.

In the search for enhanced quality of learning outcomes, the notion of competence in language teaching and learning has frequently been cited. The field has moved from a focus on communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) which dominated discussions in Applied Linguistics for decades, and remains relevant in language teaching/learning today, to symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006) and intercultural competence. Understanding intercultural competence is part of a complex, nuanced view of the world which encompasses classrooms, and language classrooms in particular. As Kramsch (2011) argues that "While communicative competence is characterized by the negotiation of intended meanings in authentic contexts of language use, intercultural competence has to do with far less negotiable discourse worlds"(p. 354).

For quality learning outcomes in language teaching/learning to be assured, these different competences need to be kept in play. Learners, and their teachers, navigate their way through these 'less negotiable discourse worlds' with difficulty, if they attempt to do so separately as individuals. If, on the other hand, we can acknowledge the complexities of this matrix, and collaborate actively, then there is a greater chance of success in the attempts of learners, teachers and researchers to understand these dynamic interactions.

Such a perspective is influenced by recent work on intercultural communication (Holliday et al., 2010). Holliday (2013) posits that 'small cultures' are created by people locally, where they co-create rules of behavior, in keeping with their (newly formed) social group. Language classes are examples of such small cultures in the process of formation. Each class is unique in terms of the people within it, their interests, concerns and enthusiasms. They may accept international, national, and institutional assumptions about what constitutes a 'class' or what consists of appropriate classroom behavior from learners or teachers. And they create their own rules of behavior and interaction. These are unique to each group of people as they work co-operatively to co-produce their knowledge of learning and teaching.

As Allwright and Hanks (2009) argue, “learners are both unique individuals and social beings who are capable of taking learning seriously, of taking independent decisions, and of developing as practitioners of learning” (p. 15). This proposition foregrounds the agency of learners in assuring quality learning outcomes in language education. It is only with or through the learners’ contributions that learning/teaching goals can be achieved. In other words, the learners, alongside the teachers (and others), make a significant contribution to the ways in which a class is conducted, hence to the learning and teaching within it, and thus to the quality of learning outcomes.

The notion of teachers and learners working together as practitioners who are not the objects of study, but rather active agents in developing understandings of learning and teaching (see Allwright, 2003; Tajino, 2009) is crucial if learning outcomes are to go beyond mechanical (and possibly unrealistic) statements of ‘by the end of the lesson they will have learned the present perfect’ or similar. Co-production of knowledge, with the aim of developing mutual understandings, is encapsulated in Exploratory Practice, where "students and teachers [and others] engage in constructing rules of interaction, social positioning and social interaction, and mutually acceptable/ understandable ways of behaving" (Hanks, 2017a, p. 276). As they do so, and as they begin to articulate their ideas to one another, practitioners are “developing an enriched ‘classroom awareness’, by which the nature of the experience of classroom life becomes positively enhanced” (Gieve & Miller, 2006, p. 41). Hence the drive for all those involved in language education to develop their understandings from practice; and share their understandings for practice (see Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Yoshida et al., 2009). The goal of ‘quality learning outcomes’, then, is nothing less than enhanced Quality of Life in the classroom, for quality of life, in the shape of motivation (Ushioda, 2016), self-efficacy (Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2015) and wellbeing (Hanks, 2019) is the key to learning effectively.

The following section discusses examples of studies which involved learners, teachers, teacher educators, curriculum developers in different institutions around the world. Ranging from primary to secondary to tertiary education, and including curriculum design and teacher education as well as learning and teaching in EAP, EFL, and MFL, the studies show learners and teachers using their agency to theorize their own practice, whilst prioritizing learning and teaching.

## Methodology

The methodology used in these Exploratory Practice studies was flexible and adaptable enough to be contextually appropriate for each setting. Essentially qualitative in conception, the approach exemplifies van Manen's (1990) argument that "to do research is always to question the way we experience the world" (p. 5), and to "investigate experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it" (p. 30). It welcomes the "socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 13), and this results in the prize of "messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts" (p. 38) which reflect the complexities of research in language education.

As a methodological approach, Exploratory Practice also builds on Soft Systems Methodology or SSM (see Checkland & Poulter, 2006; Tajino, 2019). The latter promotes a flexible and culturally sensitive approach to research which is deliberately holistic. According to Tajino & Smith (2005), SSM encourages a view of research methodology which emphasizes people and processes as complex and dynamic, and which includes all rather than selecting a few. As Kato and Dalsky (2019) point out, SSM has clear resonances with Exploratory Practice: they both share "respect for the participants and seek to elicit their voices in the process of creating a shared understanding among them" (Kato & Dalsky, 2019,

p. 125). Developing understanding is prioritized as a guiding principle of Exploratory Practice, as Hanks (1999; 2009; 2017a) has elucidated, with the aim of encouraging curiosity-driven, practitioner-led research which inquires into contextually-appropriate puzzles set by the learners and teachers themselves.

Exploratory Practice aims to integrate research and pedagogy (see Hanks, 2017b) so that learning and teaching are not interrupted, but are rather foregrounded as practitioners (learners and teachers, curriculum designers, and others) use their normal pedagogic activities to include puzzlement and explorations. This is done by using 'Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities' or PEPAs, as explained by Moraes Bezerra & Miller (2015). By taking a familiar classroom activity such as a class survey or poster presentation, and re-purposing it to illuminate a puzzle as identified and investigated by the practitioners themselves, enquiries are qualitatively and creatively conducted to gain deeper understanding of the issue at hand (see also Miller, 2009; Soares, 2008). In the case studies below, I will explore the methods used and the insights gained as practitioners engage in this process-oriented form of research.

Exploratory Practice, then, is a methodological innovation: one whereby, in an actively co-produced enterprise, practitioners set the research agenda, work together to investigate what puzzles them, collaborate on collating and analyzing the findings, and discuss their interpretations. Phenomenological and interpretive in conception, it is subtly radical in the way it levels the playing field to include learners as well as teachers to abrogate the act of research and own not only the methods, but also the findings (see Wyatt et al., 2016). Exploratory Practice is a developmental step on from Freire's (1973) ideas of critical pedagogy in that despite its mild appearance, Exploratory Practice promises a radical re-think of the ontology and epistemology of research itself.

In each of the cases discussed below, practitioners were invited to provide their accounts of their research. They started by puzzling about their own experiences of language learning

or teaching and began to form research questions. This enacts Principle 2 above “Work to understand [classroom life], before thinking about solving problems” (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 260). In line with Principles 5, 6 and 7, participants then worked “cooperatively for mutual development" making it a sustainable and ongoing activity which was integrated into their “normal pedagogic practice” (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 260). Practitioners talked about, and in many cases wrote about, their work in a thoroughly dialogic (see Bakhtin, 1986) approach to collaboratively analyzing and disseminating their findings.

**New views on ethics**

As with all research, there were ethical dilemmas to address which went beyond the usual issues of informed consent, voluntary participation, right to withdraw, confidentiality and anonymity. For example, students and teachers were keen to use their own names and wanted to be recognized as the authors of their own work. To anonymize them would be to deny their agency and reinforce the old hierarchy of research structures.

On the other hand, some neophyte researchers (particularly learners) may not have been fully aware of the consequences of being named. And even though they were given ample information, they may not have fully understood that in giving consent, their words might be cited in different contexts (e.g. large international conferences). Therefore, they were invited to select their preferred pseudonyms, and before publication, I revisited individuals to check that they were still willing to be published. One student in particular, who told a deeply personal story, had originally suggested the use of her real name, but readily agreed to a pseudonym. Three years later (as she was embarking on a PhD of her own) she told me she had a better understanding of the wider ethical/practical implications and was pleased with the choice of the moniker.

I posit that there is a rarely-considered ethical principle of ensuring that the contributions of learners, teachers, teacher educators, and curriculum developers, are fully recognized. The informed insights from these practitioners are as useful, if not more so, than those of a third-party researcher who can only scratch the surface of the complex world of classroom learning and teaching. A more egalitarian approach is needed: one which promotes the co-production of knowledge as a joint enterprise, and which fully acknowledges the contributions of those taking part. Following discussions with the participants I therefore provide here practitioner-researcher names as they themselves wished them to be published.

## Education for globalization: Studies from around the world

In considering the notion of language education for globalization, I discuss a number of studies situated in schools and universities in Brazil, Japan, Turkey, and the UK. Exploratory Practice invites learners, alongside teachers, curriculum developers, teacher educators and policy-makers, to puzzle about their experiences and this surfaces important questions about motivation, learning and wellbeing.

### Primary education

Caroline de Andrade is a teacher working in a primary school in a community in Rio de Janeiro which struggled with issues of crime, drugs, gang warfare and poverty. Caroline started by describing her situation as a young teacher endeavouring to teach English to her pupils: “They used to say that they hated me and they hated English too. It was the strongest resistance that I had ever seen” (Andrade, 2017, p. 150). She was puzzled about the behavior of her pupils, asking: Why are some students not interested in learning English? Some of the problems surrounding this issue appeared intractable, yet familiar to many teachers. Nevertheless she wanted to understand what was happening.

She therefore proposed a ‘Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity’ or PEPA (see Moraes, Bezerra & Miller, 2015) to her class. This followed the Exploratory Practice principles of involving everyone to work for mutual development to understand before attempting to problem-solve. Caroline integrated her investigation into the pedagogy, by adapting a revision activity for language items that students had previously studied as part of the syllabus: ‘expressing likes and dislikes’. Here, she adapted the activity by sharing her puzzle, and asking them to write their likes and dislikes related to the classroom. Their answers were surprising. She had assumed that they were inured to the ongoing noise, mess, and even fighting, in the class, but their responses indicated a desire for calm; she had assumed that their destructive behavior towards the course book (tearing out pages or throwing the book on the floor) indicated a dislike for the book. Yet they said they found the characters interesting and fun. Tellingly, the students expressed surprise that their teacher genuinely wanted to listen to their opinions, and, perhaps as a result of being given space to share their views, their motivation gradually appeared to increase. As Caroline puts it, "The group finally had a voice in the English class and they started to show some motivation. […] They kept on misbehaving at the school, but observing the small changes, I started to feel more motivated too" (Andrade, 2017a, p. 152).

Despite their difficult circumstances, the children and the teachers came to school: education still continued, and although nothing could solve these major problems, they could gain understanding of one another’s perspectives. In doing so they developed a mutual respect and a basis for making these small, but incremental changes towards a more hopeful way of engaging with learning and teaching, actively using their collective and separate agencies to make life in the classroom more liveable.

A defining characteristic of Exploratory Practice is to promote puzzling over problem-solving (see Hanks, 1999, 2009, 2017a for further discussion of the differences between

puzzlement and problems). One outcome, sharply relevant for learning, is that puzzles can go beyond negative settings to incorporate positive thinking, as above, as the following narrative from Walewska Braga shows.

Also working as a teacher in Rio de Janeiro, Walewska describes her work with 11-year old children in her class. Their puzzle was: Why do we have English classes only once a week? (Braga in Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 186). Walewska was a seasoned Exploratory Practice teacher and therefore invited the children to investigate. The children prepared questions as a group, and went to interview the school principal and the person in charge of curriculum and scheduling. Interestingly, although these two were willing to be interviewed, the children felt that "students' opinions on their schedules were not welcomed" (Braga, 2009, p. 187). Nevertheless, the class continued working to understand the issue of timetabling, and even used their English lessons (they were learning English lexis for days of the week and school subjects) to create their own idealized timetables. Research and language learning were integrated in order to probe the question, develop the children's understandings of language and real-world issues. Motivated learners, relevant language learning and developing self-efficacy, were the truly high quality learning outcomes.

**Secondary education**

There is a rich seam of work reporting Exploratory Practice in secondary education in various contexts, most notably Brazil, Japan, Jordan, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates (see Gunn, 2003; Gunn, 2009; Hanks, 2019; Miller et al., 2015; Tajino et al., 2016). I will focus here on one story only: one told, in part, in the students' own words.

Carlos Magno and Daniela Lemos da Silva were high school students studying English at a state secondary school in Rio de Janeiro. They became interested in Exploratory Practice, and wanted to present their work at a local event for learners and teachers held at a nearby

university. Their puzzle, which intrigued many others, was: Why do we cheat? They began by interviewing their classmates, and found a wealth of information, not only about methods of cheating in exams but also about the consequences of being caught. Not satisfied with this, they also interviewed teachers, who also admitted cheating to help some students for a variety of reasons. As Carlos (translated by Walewska Braga) put it:

> For some students the subject is difficult to study and learn and they cheat, for others cheating is a habit […]. Good grades are important: no one wants to fail. We all agreed that cheating is wrong, students have to study. It is important for our future.
>
> (Magno & Braga, 2009, p. 210)

It is worth noting, again, that the aim in Exploratory Practice is to understand the phenomenon under scrutiny, not necessarily to solve the problem. In this case, understanding the reasons for cheating was far more important, for both learners and teachers.

Carlos and Daniela did not stop there, however. Their group continued their work to understand the phenomenon of cheating, and the narrative was extended to consider society at large:

> We also noticed that a lot of people misbehave outside the school. There are a lot of wrong things happening and we may compare them to cheating in tests […] people parking their cars on the sidewalks, people throwing papers and cans through the windows, on the streets, the elderly being disrespected, so many wrong things
>
> (Magno & Braga, 2009, p. 210)

When the time came to present their poster, Daniela reported that she and another pupil (Patricia) did the talking because Carlos was uncomfortable or shy with the public performance aspect of a presentation.

The learning outcomes from this activity may not have been ones that were directly specified in the curriculum in terms of language, but formation of questions, and the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing were clearly being practised. In addition, the learning outcomes encompassed higher level skills of critical thinking, citizenship and engaging with wider issues in society.

**Tertiary education**

The bulk of recent developments in Exploratory Practice have taken place in studies situated in higher education institutions. Space precludes extensive discussion here but see Dikilitaş and Hanks (2018); Hanks (2015a; 2015b; 2019); Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2018) for details of more studies. Here, I will focus on the stories of just a few from empirical work co-produced with learners and teachers of EAP.

Working as a teacher, director, researcher, on a 10-week summer pre-sessional programme, I encountered Val (a pseudonym). She was an Iranian student in a class of international students preparing for post-graduate studies at a British university. The students and their teacher had embraced the notion of Exploratory Practice and were keen to try it out. In the first week, they began puzzling about their experiences of learning languages; they shared their puzzles and began to refine their questions in small groups. Val, however, was one of two students who wanted to work alone. She stated that she wished to investigate her puzzle: Why do I feel anxiety about studying at a British university? She appeared painfully shy, and had difficulty in expressing her feelings – in fact when listening to the audio

recording of her interview, there were many hesitations, and some parts were so quiet or muffled that it was impossible to hear:

> **Val:** As a general … [indecipherable]… anxiety. … Now, er, I, er, because I'm studying in Britain… anxiety. Whether I can do my… can I understand my lecturers in class… when my course start… because that time, er, professors just er, expect us to do a lot of works in essays, research. [Speaking clearly and firmly:] This is another language. It is not my own language. That's why… I'm worried … the other reason for my anxiety is that: can I do my assessment in my essays, my research correctly if I… [trails off into silence].
>
> (Hanks, 2017a, p. 286)

Val and her teachers wondered if anxiety was contributing to her difficulties in speaking. But rather than trying to 'solve' the problem of speaking fluently (see Hanks, 2017a, on the need to move away from 'quick-fix solutions' and towards understanding), we worked to comprehend the issue of debilitating anxiety.

Supported by her teachers (myself included) Val read more about issues of anxiety – why was it so prevalent? She arranged appointments to interview her future lecturers to find out what would be expected of her once she began her Master's degree, and she talked to her pre-sessional teachers and classmates. The fact that they took her question seriously, and supported her in her quest to understand more, seemed to give her more confidence. After four weeks, she had already developed more fluency and was accessing her considerable store of language more easily. She even gave a poster presentation to the rest of the class, in which she spoke eloquently about her findings thus far:

> **Val:** This poster is … depend on my, my background about IELTS exam which I re-sat it twice and be-became the same [result]… and so … that time I … missed my self-confidence about English language. But at the moment I, er, I feel much better.
>
> (Hanks, 2017a, p. 287)

She noted that the anxiety other students had reported to her during her research activity stemmed from differences in environment, teaching methods, accents, and cultures. This she contrasted with her readings of the literature, which indicated that students typically experience cycles of anxiety. In a small epiphany, she pinpointed her own disappointing results in an English language examination (IELTS) as having undermined her confidence. When she found that others had also suffered anxiety, and was supported by her classmates and teachers in taking the issue seriously, she was able to move from a debilitating sense of self-criticism, towards becoming active in this new environment. She developed her own agency by grappling with anxiety as a very real emotion and beginning to understand where it came from.

The micro learning outcome was a deeper understanding of the anxiety she (and many other students) struggled with; she established ownership of those enmeshed emotions, and she began a journey towards empowerment of, and by, herself, in conjunction with others. The macro learning outcome was an enhanced quality of life for Val in particular, as her anxiety decreased, and confidence increased, and for all those who were able to learn from her experience through her presentations and discussions.

In Japan, there are examples of work at the forefront of developing praxis in EAP. Stewart et al. (2014), for example, examined the notion of Exploratory Practice as process-oriented explorations conducted by learners and their teachers. Stewart worked over several years with her learners in tertiary education (undergraduate English-major students at a university) who

used their ‘Zemi’ class to investigate their puzzles, develop their research skills, and, ultimately, write their graduation thesis. The students had read a combination of research texts, both traditional and those promoting more radical ideas, and began to engage in the kind of critical questioning that is all too rare in the academic world. The Exploratory Practice (EP) framework of principles for practitioner research particularly intrigued them, "the students were also surprised by EP terminology. “What do they mean by ‘Quality of Life?’ asked Junsei. ‘ And why do they use ‘working for understanding’ when they mean research? ’ added Kazu" (Stewart et al., 2014, p. 137). The students began to probe these questions, with a robust and rigorous intellectual approach. Their findings were not only relevant to their own development; the students also explicitly stated that they wanted to collaborate with the incoming cohort (a year junior to them) to help them grapple with issues relevant to novice researchers.

In this thoroughly dialogic study, Stewart went beyond reporting her work, to engage in dialogue with her students and with two commentators: Croker and Hanks. She wove into the argument their responses to questions posed by the students and herself. For example, Croker was asked to consider the question of whether Exploratory Practice should be defined as research or practice. He concluded that it is different from traditional definitions of both and proposed a broader definition which could be more inclusive of non-mainstream approaches to research. Meanwhile Hanks was asked about the meaning of Quality of Life (QoL), which had deeply puzzled the students. She responded by highlighting the inclusivity and sustainability of the work, which had aided these neophyte researchers in their journey of discovery:

> What you say about the feelings of ownership and belonging that you and your students ‘cherished’ is (to me) the essence of QoL. […] EP’s approach empowered

> them to make their own decisions about learning with a view to developing not only as language learners, but also as budding researchers.
>
> (Stewart et al., 2014, p. 143)

Stewart concludes the chapter with a critical reflection on a process that took more than two years with several cohorts of students in her ‘Zemi’ class. They stumbled, as all researchers do; but, like all good researchers, they learned from these missteps for the future. The learning outcomes encompassed a high level of critical thinking; questioning and analyzing as a sustainable and ongoing process integrated into language learning.

Moreover, Stewart discovered that the students had been continuing their work unbeknownst to her, and without any instructions, over their summer holidays. They had continued in their ‘research circles’ working independently, to gather and analyze data, and to provide peer feedback to one another on their drafts of their theses. Stewart concludes, "‘Quality’ whether of life or learning, is elusive and ephemeral […] What [EP] does offer, given time for frank and open discussion, is a principled approach to democratic and inclusive learner development" (Stewart et al., 2014, p. 146).

**Curriculum design**

Work has begun to investigate the potential of including learners and teachers in the processes of curriculum design. Writers have discussed ways in which teachers and learners puzzled about, and contributed to, the construction of the syllabus and, more broadly, the curriculum, in their various institutions.

In Turkey, Biçer (2018) began by wondering why learners’ voices were not included in the design of a Foundation Year course at his university. He encouraged his colleagues to attend presentations given by his students, and highlighted a major advantage, "it was really

satisfying to practice alongside my students as one big investigation unit and probe into such a problematic but often avoided subject. I began to see it through their eyes"(Biçer, 2018, p. 154)

Meanwhile, in the UK, Bond (2017) began by investigating her own puzzle about curriculum design. Explicating her own position as an influential person in the (re-)design of the curriculum in her institution, she argues that the curriculum can, through Exploratory Practice, become “a dynamic space for empowerment and for dialogic and dialectic learning” (p. 11). Like Biçer above, she involved pre-sessional students as key developing practitioners (see Allwright & Hanks, 2009) who helped colleagues (learners, teachers, and curriculum designers) in developing clear learning outcomes, discussing core aims, values and principles as a new curriculum was jointly developed. Bond claims that the learning outcomes included a built-in reflexivity to the new syllabus, and a responsiveness to student needs. These, she argues, led to greater student ownership, and more teacher engagement, which, in turn, led to improved relationships and better understandings of different points of view.

Their work is built on a much earlier study in Japan. Here, Smith (2009) worked with undergraduate students to collaborate in building a new syllabus in their university. These learners contributed to the design of a new EAP curriculum over four iterations, as they met key personnel who were designing and implementing a new syllabus. The students reported positive reactions to their suggestions, and experienced a renewed sense of self-efficacy since their voices had clearly been heard, and changes could be traced to their influence. Smith highlights the potential for positive co-production of knowledge that this inclusive approach to curriculum design promises.

In each of the above cases, it is noteworthy that the quality of learning outcomes were significantly affected by mutually respectful collaboration, and this affected their quality of life. For example, Bond cites better understanding and improved relationships, while Biçer

notes more empathy and mutual comprehension. Smith breaks new ground and concludes that there is "joy in the companionship of a few kindred spirits working together on projects that they believe in" (Smith, 2009, p. 110).

## Conclusions

In considering ways of assuring quality learning outcomes in this increasingly globalized world, we need to question our own pre-conceived ideas about who does what in language education. Teachers, learners, curriculum designers and all those involved in language education, can develop their own agency as key players in the game. The insights that practitioners can provide are essential for a deep understanding of the educative process. The studies cited above exemplify ways in which teachers and learners can set the research agenda, investigate collaboratively, and disseminate findings of immediate relevance to their own settings. What emerges, though, is a need to re-conceptualize the very essence of 'quality learning outcomes'. No longer focusing on surface-level linguistic items or interactions, these outcomes can now be conceptualized as higher level skills such as advanced critical thinking, nuanced interpersonal negotiations, and thorough, well-reasoned argument.

Too often we read of learners' debilitating anxiety, or teachers' lack of wellbeing, yet the global search for solutions is found wanting. Traditional third-party research means that both learners and teachers are positioned as powerless in making decisions about what happens in the classroom. As a result, they "do not dare reflect on macro discourses which they believe are beyond their control" (Hiratsuka, 2016, p. 110). But they can, and do, manage to make independent decisions and implement changes within their sphere of influence. As Hiratsuka also argues, these micro-level shifts through Exploratory Practice can "enrich their lessons" (Hiratsuka, 2016, p. 110) and lead to a more critically aware approach.

Motivation is cited as central to successful language learning, and Ushioda (2016) argues that engaging learners as active agents in exploring their learning experiences is one way of encouraging highly motivated students. This chimes with Tajino and Smith, who explain, "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 realized" (Tajino & Smith, 2016, p. 23). I would go even further, arguing that we might position learners as experienced 'knowers' who can pass on their knowledge of what it is to be a learner so that others may benefit. In order for this to successfully be implemented, an atmosphere of trust is required. This is because Exploratory Practice "re-conceptualizes the epistemology of research itself as more than a search for solutions; EP reminds us of the endeavor to understand (Heidegger, 1962; Dreyfus, 1991) language, culture and education" (Hanks, 2019, p. 35). Although this may be a difficult step for more entrenched researchers to accept, it points the way to the kind of creative, dynamic, dialogic research that the 21st century requires.

I conclude that the communicative, symbolic, and intercultural issues encountered whilst working for deeper understandings across cultural borders are central to quality of life, and hence learning opportunities, for all those involved in language education. Involving everyone in collegial, curious inquiry not only develops a sense of self-efficacy and wellbeing, but also enhances Quality of Life. These are, in fact, the quality learning outcomes needed for education in a globalized world.

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