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## De-mystifying the nimbus of research: re-igniting practitioners' interest in exploring EAP.

### 1. Introduction

The idea of practitioners engaging in research has long dominated the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). However, traditional notions of research are often shrouded in the mysteries of power, creating a nimbus which excludes the uninitiated. Although research has been recognised as a transformative force for professional development, questions remain unanswered. In what ways might professionals engage in research? How does research aid development? For this Special Issue celebrating twenty years since the inception of the *Journal of EAP (JEAP)*, and fifty years of BALEAP (known as the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes until 2010, and since then only as BALEAP), I consider these questions, discussing the ways in which EAP practitioners have engaged in practitioner research, thus benefitting themselves and field alike. I argue that Exploratory Practice (a form of practitioner research) can contribute to the continuing professional development (CPD) of EAP practitioners, as recommended by the Teaching English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) Competencies Framework (BALEAP, 2008, 2014). I conclude that research and pedagogy can, through Exploratory Practice, be integrated to encourage sustainable scholarship in EAP.

Two terms are used here: research and scholarship. I posit that they are two aspects of the same intellectually curious activity, in which practitioners are reflexive about their work, investigating pedagogy and theorising practice. In some institutions this is called 'research' (or 'practitioner research'), while in other institutions it is 'scholarship', and often associated with individuals on teaching-track careers. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the complex arguments around similarities and differences between the two (for detailed discussion see Hanks 2017a, which devotes a full chapter to defining research and practitioner research, Hanks 2019a, which further discusses the nexus of research and scholarship, Hanks, 2019b, which discusses the shifting/developing identities of teachers, learners and teacher educators as they begin researching their practice, and Hanks, 2022, which examines the notion of learners and teachers co-researching praxis). Here, I merely

hope to show that Exploratory Practice (EP) is one way for EAP professionals to meaningfully engage in scholarly research activity within the confines of their roles.

Exploratory Practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2017a) is a form of inclusive practitioner research which has become established in EAP over the past two decades (see <https://www.fullyinclusivepr.com/>). As practitioner-led inquiry, EP aids teachers in researching their contexts and developing their understandings of teaching/learning in EAP, while also preparing students for the demands of study in their academic careers. Studies from EAP contexts around the world indicate ways in which research and scholarship are enacted by, and for, practitioners using the Exploratory Practice framework. They show how practitioners, who might otherwise feel excluded from traditional notions of research, can generate robust research questions, co-produce investigations and provide multimodal disseminations of their insights which enhance their/our understandings of EAP and CPD. In this paper a review of specifically EAP-related Exploratory Practice studies provides tangible examples of EP in practice and how Exploratory Practice contributes to EAP teacher development. Given the limited amount of published research specifically foregrounding CPD in EAP, this is much-needed information for scholars.

Exploratory Practice explicitly seeks to integrate research and pedagogy with learners and teachers as co-researchers (see Hanks, 2009, 2022). Arguably, EP exemplifies research-based teaching, inquiry-based learning, and scholarship in Higher Education (HE) as advocated by Healey (2005) and Shulman (1986) and is therefore relevant to EAP. Over the past 20 years, a large body of literature of EP specifically in EAP contexts has developed (see Appendix, Table 1). However, despite these affordances, a search revealed that only one article addressing EP existed in the *Journal of EAP (JEAP)*, and this was published in 2021. This paradoxical lacuna in *JEAP* is puzzling, when EP is clearly an important part of EAP and CPD. The conspicuous absence of EP from the flagship of EAP has resulted in knowledge gaps, as evidenced by the lack of reference to EP work by authors across the field. This article seeks to address resulting misconceptions about EP, by providing a systematic review of the research and scholarship conducted by EAP practitioners (teachers, teacher educators, and learners) incorporating and enacting the Exploratory Practice principles.

I began by introducing the main aims of the article. Section 2 considers research and scholarship and defines EP. The EP principles are summarised and linked to the BALEAP

TEAP Competency Framework (hereafter TEAP CF). Section 3 surveys the literature of EP in EAP, noting the different, international, contexts in which studies have taken place. In doing so, areas specific to EAP pedagogy (e.g. teaching/learning academic writing, reading, speaking; curriculum design) are identified, as well as elements germane to the field such as motivation (of learners and teachers), mentoring, and professional development. Section 4 turns to specific examples (vignettes) which demonstrate the ways in which engagement with research/scholarship has enhanced the professional development of individual EAP teachers. These vignettes provide examples of the TEAP teacher development competencies, specifically: “engaging individually and collaboratively in continuing professional development, research and scholarship in the TEAP discipline” (BALEAP, 2014, p.23). The importance of BALEAP Professional Issues Meetings (PIMs), Research Training Event Series (ResTES) and Conferences in encouraging EAP practitioners’ research is noteworthy. I conclude, in Section 5, that the evidence shows Exploratory Practice in EAP is proliferating, with consequent impact on teacher and learner development. It dispels the nimbus surrounding research by empowering practitioners, and (re-)igniting teachers’ interest in critically reflecting on their EAP practice.

## **2. Background**

In the first edition of *JEAP*, Jordan argued that the “sharing of experiences and the discussion of ideas, as well as involvement in research, are all positive aspects of [BALEAP]” (Jordan, 2002, p.77). Research by and for teachers is accepted as a central plank of academic practice. Yet it is the subject of contested definitions. This is due to different ontological and epistemological standpoints, as many have pointed out (e.g. Borg, 2009; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Hanks, 2016, 2019a, 2022; Wyatt et al., 2016). Drawing on these debates across the field, Hanks defines research as:

purposeful, systematic, ethical, and critical investigation, which takes place in a socially constructed world, with the aim of deepening human understanding (Hanks, 2017a, p.35).

She goes on to define practitioner research as:

Practitioners (teachers, teacher educators, learners, etc.) conducting purposeful, systematic, ethical, and critical enquiries into their own practices, in their own contexts, with the aim of extending understanding(s) of educational processes and human behaviour.

(ibid., p.41)

Her vision encompasses Borg's (2009, p.366) notion of "epistemological pluralism" for research. Allied to this, a further concept, scholarship (see Healey et al., 2014a, 2014b; Shulman, 2000, for extended discussion), has also been proposed, with Healey et al. (2014a, p.11) positing that "the university is one where research and teaching are linked exercises, where each enriches the other". I align myself with this stance, arguing that research, pedagogy and scholarship are deeply intertwined.

The importance of EAP practitioners engaging in research and/or scholarship is increasingly foregrounded, as EAP teachers in Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998) move from the periphery to more central roles in Higher Education and academia. Concurrently, the need for sustainable approaches to practitioner research (here, EP) has become ever-more-urgent so that those on more precarious contracts can, within the confines of their roles, meaningfully engage in exploring praxis. This is especially relevant when considering continuing professional (and career) development in EAP, as the vignettes in Section 4 will show.

Many practitioners (teachers, researchers, learners) are deeply rooted in their own contexts, unaware of different educational/research systems, different academic conventions and requirements (see Alexander et al., 2018; Hyland, 2006). Engagement with different academic literacies (see Zamel & Spack, 1998), and different approaches to practitioners conducting research in their own contexts enhances knowledge-building through recognising the "importance of research and scholarship to developing professional learning and teaching practice" (BALEAP, 2014, p.23). Such engagement develops understandings of "ambiguity and multiple perspectives in academic enquiry" (ibid., p.23).

*Multiple perspectives in academic enquiry* are found in the form of practitioner research under discussion: Exploratory Practice. But EP's contribution to EAP specifically (as opposed to language teaching more generally) has been poorly acknowledged. This may be because until now the various EP publications with an EAP focus have not been brought together for analysis of themes across different EAP settings. It is therefore necessary to review EP literature focussing specifically on EAP contexts. The following review is aligned with the TEAP competencies, paying particular attention to Section E: *Professional*

*knowledge and values for professional development, research and scholarship.* Here, EAP practitioners are expected to develop deep awareness of:

- a. The importance of continuing professional development
  - b. The EAP subject-discipline literature and its impact on practice
  - c. The importance of research and scholarship to developing professional learning and teaching practice
  - d. The role of ambiguity and multiple perspectives in academic enquiry
  - e. The importance of critical reflection on one's own practice
  - f. Current issues in teaching and researching EAP
  - g. Professional terminology
- (BALEAP, 2014, p.23)

Although written with a different purpose, and with different phrasing, the compatibility of TEAP and Exploratory Practice frameworks is clear. The EP framework of principles was elucidated by practitioners (of teaching, of research, of scholarship) in the mid-1990s, with Allwright positing them as follows:

- Principle 1: Put 'Quality of life' first.
  - Principle 2: Work primarily to understand language classroom life.
  - Principle 3: Involve everybody.
  - Principle 4: Work to bring people together.
  - Principle 5: Work also for mutual development.
  - Principle 6: Integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice.
  - Principle 7: Make the work a continuous enterprise.
- (summarised from Allwright, 2003, pp.128-130)

The EP principles have undergone further refinement in two book-length treatments, one focusing on learners (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), the other including teachers, teacher educators, psychologists and learners (Hanks, 2017a) as researchers. The latter reframes the principles for practitioner research as an interconnected whole:



**Figure 1: The exploratory practice principles as an interconnected whole (Hanks, 2017a, p.227)**

EP principles such as ‘*integrate inquiry and pedagogy*’ and ‘*make it a continuous enterprise*’ correspond with TEAP values recognising “the importance of continuing professional development [and] of critical reflection on own practice” (BALEAP, 2008, p.5). Moreover, principles such as ‘*work to understand language classroom life*’; ‘*work also for mutual development*’, map onto the TEAP descriptor of “engaging individually and collaboratively in continuing professional development, research and scholarship” (BALEAP, 2014, p.23). Meanwhile, the emphasis on learners (students) as key developing practitioners (Allwright & Hanks, 2009) working alongside teachers who are developing their own practice (Hanks, 2017a), connects to TEAP principles of teachers, while focusing on student needs, engaging with research/scholarship. Distinct from TEAP CF, though, the EP framework of principles is less about strictly adhering to competencies/procedures, and more about encouraging attitudes of curiosity and investigation – an Inquiry as Stance as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) put it, or puzzling, puzzlement, being puzzled, as Hanks (2017a, 2019a, 2019b, 2021, 2022) elucidates.

I suggested earlier that research has been surrounded by a nimbus of mystery. Perhaps this is due to common preconceptions of the meaning of research. As Borg (2009) argues, traditional notions of hierarchical, third-party researchers leading large-scale studies dominate definitions of research. Consequently busy practitioners may avoid engaging with it, as they feel professional academics may denigrate what they do. In contrast, Exploratory Practice is attractive for teachers and learners alike. Table 1 in the Appendix summarises EP studies specifically in EAP contexts. Arguably, then, EP affords opportunities for EAP practitioners to engage in research and scholarship *because* it dispels this nimbus.

The research questions guiding this paper are:

1. What examples *are* there of EAP practitioners developing their research/scholarship using the Exploratory Practice framework?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, does the Exploratory Practice framework relate to the TEAP competencies framework?
3. How might Exploratory Practice support professional development?

In answering these questions, the contributions of Exploratory Practice to EAP research, pedagogy and scholarship are delineated.

### 3. Review of Exploratory Practice in EAP contexts

The EP principles underpin a body of work spanning thirty years across five continents. Early on, Allwright (1993) suggested practical ways to integrate research and pedagogy. However, it is worth noting he later rejected the idea of ‘steps’ or ‘models’ for others to follow (see Allwright, 2003). Another early proponent, Hanks (1999) established the importance of *puzzling* as part of teacher/learner development. The epistemological, philosophical, ethical and methodological implications of Exploratory Practice have been extensively discussed (e.g. Hanks 2019a, 2019b, 2022) in a variety of language teaching contexts. Here, though, the focus is exclusively on EAP, with particular emphasis on the ways in which EP has contributed to the development of EAP practitioners’ research and scholarship activities, as Table 1 in the Appendix shows. Criteria for selection of publications for review were:

- focus on practitioners conducting scholarship/research in an EAP context using EP;
- include a range of HE contexts from around the world (not just universities in the UK);
- provide (implicit and explicit) examples of how EP was linked to professional development in EAP.

I excluded items or articles from newsletters, blogs, or other outlets which were not subject to peer-review (a common criticism of EP is that it is ‘not academic’; to address this, I focused on international, peer-reviewed academic publications). This process resulted in more than 40 publications for discussion. Consequently, for readers with little knowledge of EP in EAP, or harbouring misconceptions about EP, this review provides a useful road into the literature, and offers links to the TEAP competencies to aid informed scholarship.

One of the aims of Exploratory Practice is to awaken practitioners’ interest in critically reflecting on aspects of their practice, a key principle of the BALEAP competencies, while also aiding students preparing for their future. It is, therefore, well-situated to contribute conceptually, methodologically and pedagogically to the academic practices of knowing disciplinary differences, and understanding student needs and student learning, whilst also considering programme development and professional development as per the TEAP competency framework (BALEAP, 2014, pp.10-11). A number of studies that follow speak to these descriptors, though the various authors’ intentions were not originally to exemplify the TEAP competencies. The following review of EP literature draws attention to its contributions to EAP theory, and EAP practitioners’ continuing professional development.



### *Adjustments to teaching*

EAP practitioners/researchers/writers engaging in EP have charted the ways in which they adjusted their teaching after investigating their own, or their students', puzzles. For example, Perpignan's (2003) study illustrated EAP teacher/student collaboration, as she examined engagement with dialogic approaches to teaching academic writing in a university in Israel. In addition to questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as research tools, she integrated pedagogical activities into her investigation. These included students in reading, assessing, and analysing feedback on original essays written by other students (in a different class) and inviting individuals to express their preferences for feedback approaches. Perpignan concluded that "co-operation among the participants [...] testifies to the spirit of positive complicity that ensues from involving all parties in the research." (2003, p.273) and added that this helped her own development as a teacher/researcher. Similarly, in the United Arab Emirates, Gunn (2005) invited her students to reflect critically alongside their teacher (Gunn) on responses to feedback on academic writing, with mutually beneficial results. Later, Gunn (2010) invited her MATESOL students to puzzle about their apparent resistance to reflection. From the students she learned that appearances might be deceptive, and also that she might need to adjust her teaching to provide more explication of the reasons for reflection.

In Taiwan, Chu (2007) examined the struggles involved when students are encouraged to share decision-making with their teacher on an EAP programme. She argued that

What students are really trained to do in EP is to *think out their own learning*.  
(Chu, 2007, p.233, emphases added)

Chu noted her own developing understandings of their difficulties, and consequent adjustments to her teaching practice, as they expressed their learning experiences. Similarly, Banister (2019, 2020) has described how he collaborated with UG students in EAP classes to investigate attitudes to peer feedback. As with Chu, Gunn and Perpignan, he found that students initially resisted the invitation to provide feedback on peers' work, but he maintains they benefited from the opportunities to critically reflect on writing processes. Moreover, he adapted his teaching practice to be more transparent about decisions made. In sum, learners as well as teachers engaged in puzzling productively about pedagogy in these studies.

Teachers have also written about contributions of peer/teacher feedback to developing academic writing. In China, Zheng (2012) critically examined teacher approaches and student

responses to feedback. Meanwhile in the USA, Best et al. (2015) described their own developing understandings of different ways of teaching academic writing. In the UK, Mazgutova and Hanks (2021) used EP as a methodological lens to analyse learner perceptions of feedback on academic writing on a short pre-sessional. All used the EP principles of working for understanding and working together, integrating research and pedagogy, which enhanced teacher and learner development alike, and map onto TEAP competencies of critically reflecting on one's own practice.

Spearheading the notion of keeping both learners' and teachers' perceptions and activities in play, Hanks discussed the implementation of EP on in-sessional programmes (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, pp.188-190), and pre-sessionals for UGs and PGTs (Hanks, 2012, 2017a, 2017b, 2021). In two sister-publications, she charted, through an EP lens, the development of learners and teachers on an 11-week UG pre-sessional, from first, learners' perspectives (Hanks, 2015a), and then teachers' perspectives (Hanks, 2015b). The former charted learners' excitement at being asked to puzzle about their learning and consequent development. The latter highlighted the teachers' move from what they characterised as stale repetitions of standard EAP teaching, to highly-motivated engagement with research and scholarship as they formulated puzzles, and explored their own EAP practice. One teacher, 'Bella', commented that through EP she had gained a deeper understanding of difficulties her learners faced as they entered the academic world, and she had adjusted her teaching as a result.

### ***Student voices in curriculum design and materials***

By encouraging teachers to puzzle about their practice, EP studies (conducted and written by EAP teachers) have contributed to scholarly discussions in EAP about EAP curriculum development in Japan (Smith, 2009; Tajino & Smith, 2005), Turkey (Biçer, 2018; Doğdu & Arca, 2018), and the UK (Bond, 2017a, 2017b). Exemplifying the importance of research and scholarship to developing professional learning and teaching practice, Smith (2009) recounted the processes of involving students in discussions about their new curriculum, and encouraging staff to incorporate student ideas into materials, syllabi and assessments, as part of the learning/teaching he led at his institution. Sadly, though, Bond, Doğdu and Arca, do not mention Smith's groundbreaking work. This lack of cross-referencing across EP is problematic and needs attention, particularly in the EAP field, where writers are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of relevant publications.

Teachers have compared traditional and innovative approaches to researching assessment in EAP in Northern Cyprus (Öncül & Webb, 2018), and investigated the positive possibilities of student-generated materials used for teaching and assessment in Japan (Pinner, 2016). By collaborating with students to understand the impacts of assessment procedures, Pinner claims his teaching practice was enhanced, and Öncül and Webb gained better understandings of the quality assurance processes in their institution and beyond. EP scholars/teachers have analysed the issues involved in developing EAP speaking skills in HE settings in Japan (Kato & Dalsky, 2019; Nakamura, 2006; Pinner, 2016), and Turkey (Mumford, 2018). Through their investigations, they were able to listen to students' accounts of their experiences, and embed their consequent understandings of student struggles into their course design. In this way, they combined the EP principles of relevance, working for understanding, and the TEAP competencies of critical reflection, and developing professional learning and teaching practice through research and scholarship.

### ***Motivation***

Motivation (of teachers and of students) has been a rich area of investigation in EAP settings in China (Li, 2006), Japan (Pinner, 2016), Spain (Machin, 2020) and the UK (Consoli, 2021). Consoli, for example, elicited puzzles from his EAP students, and worked with them to explore these using the EP concept of 'Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities' (PEPAs). Using normal EAP activities, but with a focus on learner motivation, he actively investigated student attitudes to learning. Like Li, Machin and Pinner, he incorporated theories from the field of motivation to provide external sources of reflection on his own and his students' EAP practice through EP. Consoli concluded that he gained nuanced understanding of his students' motivation, and that EP aided him, as a heavily workloaded teacher, to engage in researching his EAP context, thus contributing to his professional development (another of the TEAP competences).

Exemplifying the TEAP competence of critical reflection on practice, Stewart, in Stewart et al. (2014), charted her students' and her own developing understandings as an EAP teacher in Japan. Using the 'zemi' class as a springboard for students to identify, explore puzzles, and present findings via poster presentations, Stewart charted increased motivation and critical thinking over several years. She provided an extended example of how Japanese university

students of EAP examined not only their own learning processes, but also constructively critiqued the EP principle of “put ‘quality of life’ first” (Allwright, 2003, p.128), thus building their (and her) capacity for critical analysis.

### ***Student agency***

Dar’s (2015) case study of a Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity (PEPA) where pre-sessional students working together with their teacher, examined reasons why they struggled with motivation for self-study is noteworthy. Dar provides a clear analysis of how students and teacher could work together to examine their EAP practice, with beneficial results all round. She learned of the conflicting demands her students faced: study, family, life, work, and adjusted her teaching expectations as a result. She also reflected on her own professional development as an EAP teacher, concluding that through EP she was able to engage in research investigations which were appropriate to her situation, and that this sustained her interest in researching practice over many years.

Likewise, Hanks (2017a, 2017b) focused on the EP principle of *integrating* research and EAP pedagogy in a form of *phronesis*. The process of engaging with learners, eliciting their puzzles, as well as sharing teachers’ puzzles, galvanised the teachers’ interest in critically reflecting on their EAP practice. She concluded that EP principles “speak to agendas of inclusive practice and research-based teaching [providing] a conduit into the academic community for fledgling researchers” (Hanks, 2017b, p.47). Such co-production involves multimodal approaches such as poster-making (see Hanks, 2021), as learners and teachers engage in researching their own contexts and collaborative meaning-making. Although some in EAP may resist the notion of learners as co-researchers, they should be aware of movements across HE, in which there is “greater emphasis on actively engaging students with research suitably adapted to recognise the variation and complexity of constructing knowledge in different disciplines” (Healey, 2005). EP thus prepares students for the future demands of their academic careers, as Hanks (2017a, 2019a, 2021, 2022) has pointed out. Similarly, Kato and Hanks (2021) discussed the challenges of working with demoralised students in a so-called ‘remedial’ EAP programme in a Japanese university. Kato and Hanks found that learner-initiated puzzles in EP strengthened internal support, as investigating their own puzzles revitalised the students’ interest, and this heightened the motivation of the teacher.

EAP/EP practitioners have also explored the processes of teaching reading in academic preparation programmes in Australia (Rowland, 2011), China (Zhang, 2004), Northern Cyprus (Karanfil, 2018) and Turkey (Ergünay, 2018). In each case, by integrating normal EAP pedagogic practices to enable students to investigate their puzzles, they gained insights into student needs and student learning, as well as developing their own teaching. Relevant to this growing evidence of EP in EAP, is the learner-centred publication of Dawson et al. (2017). Here, Dawson (the teacher) and her students co-wrote a chapter, discussing their puzzles about academic writing; they reported gaining mutual understandings of student/teacher struggles as well as institutional requirements. Later, Dawson (2020) engaged in a deep-dive analysis of the EP principles of ‘quality of life’ and ‘understanding’, relating these to the Aristotelian notions of ‘eudaimonia’ and ‘gnoseology’, as a result of her work with EAP learners in the UK.

### ***Institutional/internal support***

On a more critical note, Hanks (2017a, 2017b, 2019a) has also problematised EP, noting the struggles that both teachers and students face (e.g. lack of time, lack of support) when trying to explore their puzzles in a UK university. She concluded that although time and support are welcome, it is the inner motivation deriving from identification of puzzles *relevant to the individuals* that makes the difference to engagement. She argues for curiosity and puzzling as a form of ‘slow thinking’ (Kahneman, 2012), seeing this as a productive way to conduct research/scholarship, and she resists the impetus to rush to hasty conclusions (see Hanks, 2017a, 2019a, 2021). Over the years, the teachers with whom she worked have incorporated EP into the curriculum and praxis in their institutions, and continue to puzzle about EAP practice with staff and students, with or without institutional support, but with inner motivation. This need for institutional support can also be seen in Etherington et al. (2020) who used EP as a framework for their work with EAP teachers in Saudi Arabia and the UK, looking at ways to promote ‘quality of life’ or wellbeing. Teachers collected and discussed ‘sticky objects’ as prompts for discussing positive emotions. Immediately apparent was the need for internal support (being recognised and acknowledged as serious scholars/researchers), as well as the benefits from institutions providing support.

### ***Teacher development and the wider context***

Like Dar (2015), though in different UK institutions, Banister (2019) and Goral (2019) collaborated with their students to identify areas of puzzlement, and worked together to probe these areas to mutual benefit. Their narratives demonstrate that their EAP practice gained from this engagement with research and theory. Goral notes that using normal pedagogic activities as PEPAs to investigate puzzles while also learning/teaching, “was beneficial for both the learners and the teacher” (2019, p 181). Banister (2021) also examined the affordances of engaging EAP learners in EP, which, he argues, provided benefits for teachers in understanding their students’ needs. Their work was prompted by a project focusing on university teachers of different languages (including EAP) engaging in research, with EP as the focal point (see Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019).

More explicitly as a teacher educator, Trotman (2018) provided a case study charting his experiences, introducing EP to teachers as part of CPD and initial training courses in his HE institution in Turkey. Prompted by a teacher-research project introducing EP (see Dikilitas & Hanks, 2018), he critically reviewed the EP framework, and then showed how his teachers-in-training utilised PEPAs in their EAP practice to explore their puzzles. Again, this critical reflection exemplifies the TEAP competencies outlined above. Furthermore, Hanks and Dikilitas (2018) discussed their processes of mentoring EAP teachers in Turkey and Northern Cyprus, sharing puzzles, conducting investigations, and disseminating findings via conferences and publications. In Australia, Benson worked with teachers investigating their puzzles about EAP teaching, and writing a joint article recounting their explorations and evidencing their development (Benson et al., 2018). Also in Australia, Rowland (2011) worked with teachers preparing for an MATESOL and teacher development programmes, encouraging them to read and critique articles as CPD and entry into academia simultaneously. Gunn (2009) provided an edited volume of chapters by teachers in the UAE, some of whom were teaching in HE settings. They investigated questions such as students’ attitudes to academic writing, editing/proof-reading and plagiarism, student needs and expectations, and student responses to on-line materials. These writers exemplify the integration of pedagogy and research through scholarly investigations, as outlined by the TEAP competencies.

The development of ‘university pedagogy’ is ripe for EP explorations. In Finland, Vaattovaara (2017) discussed EP as part of a university pedagogy module, and charted the

enthusiastic responses of EAP teachers to engaging in researching their practice. Her argument connects to the EP principle of ‘quality of life’ and the need to ensure that the research is relevant to the practitioners themselves (see Hanks, 2017a, 2019a, 2019c, 2022, for further analysis). Moving across continents, Dalsky and Garant (2016) used EP as scaffolding for their intercultural learning project involving EAP students in Japan and Finland examining expectations about collaboration. Webb and Sarina (2018) used EP as a springboard into international collaboration (between EAP students in Australia and Northern Cyprus) with UG students fostering democratic competencies. These practitioners used EP as a way of developing understandings of EAP pedagogy as they wrote up their studies and adapted their teaching appropriately.

### ***Summary***

Many of the authors mentioned above were experienced EAP teachers who were taking their first, tentative steps into the world of research and scholarship. Exploratory Practice provided the impetus (via puzzles elicited from students or teachers), as well as feeding into methodology, and providing knowledge for others to learn from, adapting, critically evaluating and adjusting pedagogy as appropriate. EAP practitioners reflected critically on their own practice, current issues in teaching and researching EAP were discussed, and the importance of research and scholarship to developing professional learning and teaching practice came to the fore. In other words, EP feeds directly into the TEAP CF values, knowledge, activities for CPD. However, many EAP writers seem unaware of the plethora of EP publications discussed here. This undermines their claims to originality, and indeed, scholarship, as they make mistaken assertions about what has/hasn’t been done. It is vital for EAP scholars to demonstrate their awareness of what work others have done with Exploratory Practice in different EAP contexts around the world, and thus establish their claims to scholarly work.

#### **4. Developing scholars: different journeys through scholarship and research**

In Section 1, I asked what examples there were of EAP practitioners developing their research/scholarship using EP. Having identified a large body of work in Section 3, I now

turn to the question of how EP might support professional development. I provide a set of vignettes of EAP practitioners engaging with EP. Criteria for the vignettes were that they

- provide examples of EAP practitioners using EP for CPD;
- demonstrate ways in which EAP practitioners have used EP to aid their understandings of EAP pedagogy, theory or methodology;
- demonstrate (implicitly and explicitly) the ways in which EP and TEAP frameworks are linked.

The vignettes mention newsletters, blogs and other outlets, as these often form a part of the portfolio of CPD work that teachers accumulate over time.

There are, inevitably, challenges for practitioners wishing to engage in research. For example, Borg (2009) indicates the apparently small numbers of practitioners around the world who claimed engagement in research. Many of his respondents were EAP professionals, and many of them cited lack of time, lack of funding, as major hindrances to research engagement. Borg concludes that when research is conceptualised as large-scale, intensive projects requiring time and money, teachers are dissuaded from attempting it. In contrast, many forms of practitioner research (including EP) proffer a more manageable, more accessible approach. EAP practitioners may move from initial curious forays, gradually developing confidence in conducting, disseminating and publishing research, and then realise that what they do is just as valuable and relevant as more traditional third-party research practices.

Each of the following vignettes represents a different way of approaching the TEAP competency of “professional development, research, and scholarship” (BALEAP, 2014, p.23). The purpose of the vignettes is to trace the teacher development journeys of these EAP practitioners. Each person has taken a different path, each faced different hurdles, and yet all pursued similar goals: the investigation of EAP practice, using the EP framework, understanding multiple perspectives in academic enquiry and the enhancement of their teaching. I introduce them *not* as templates to be copied, but rather as examples of the multiple ways in which individuals have incorporated research and scholarship into their own work, in the hope that this will inspire others to do the same.

**Vignette 1:** Chris Banister encountered EP through contact with Assia Slimani-Rolls. He joined a local CPD group which was exploring the EP framework and was encouraged to develop his own puzzles. Naturally, he focused on researching pedagogic practice in his



own (EAP) setting. He was puzzled by the struggles he experienced in gaining meaningful feedback in student evaluations of his modules. Consequently, he began two years of investigations to actively investigate student experiences and perspectives. He shared his puzzle with the students and invited them to contribute to class discussions on the purpose and function of evaluations (see Banister, 2019, 2021 for details). As a result of his investigations, he became interested in sharing his experiences with colleagues inside and outside the group, and rich conversations ensued. Initially, he was not given time to conduct his investigations, but over the years his institution began to recognise the importance of supporting EAP practitioners, thanks mainly to Slimani-Rolls' initiatives (see Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019). Banister's first local presentations at CPD workshops led to greater confidence, and to presentations at international conferences. He built up a portfolio of work, presenting on themes such as obtaining meaningful student evaluations, collaborative opportunities for practitioner research and using EP to support novice researchers in EAP. He became the moderator for IATEFL ReSIG online discussions, and convened on-line discussions with scholars and researchers from around the world thus learning more about ambiguity and multiple perspectives in academic enquiry. In publications, Banister comments on the ways in which his EP work aided his professional development: not only does he say that EP has "illuminated my practice" (Banister, 2019: 145) but he also notes that his EP work led to "recognition [i.e.] my Senior Lectureship as well as the Fellowship of the HEA" (ibid.). Crucially, he notes that he was able, through his research, to reconnect with his learners, and respond to their needs.

This is just one example of how "research and scholarship [lead] to developing professional learning and teaching practice" (BALEAP, 2014: 23) through teachers puzzling together with learners, exploring praxis, as Exploratory Practice recommends. A second vignette shows a similar pathway, of a teacher moving from the periphery in HE to a more central role. Here, the role of mentors was crucial as a broad portfolio of work emerged.

**Vignette 2:** Bee Bond encountered EP through contact with Judith Hanks. Bond became interested in researching pedagogic practice in her own (EAP) setting, and began puzzling about her practice. She found that others were interested in similar questions. With a colleague, she led a Teacher Development workshop for colleagues locally. She used a series of mentors to develop her confidence until she was able to shine independently, and has commented elsewhere on the benefits of having

supportive colleagues who aided her development. She presented her work nationally on using EP to re-engage student interest (*BALEAP Conference, 2015; Exploratory Practice Seminar Day, 2015*), where she met EP/EAP practitioners from around the world. Her development continued as she joined a Symposium of EP practitioner-researchers and presented at the British Educational Research Association (*BERA Annual Conference, 2016*) alongside Costantino, Hanks, Slimani-Rolls. These presenters were then invited to represent BERA with their EP Symposium, at the American Educational Research Association (*AERA Annual Conference, 2017*). In 2015 she began publishing, contributing an opinion piece to an EAP Blog (<https://teachingeap.wordpress.com/2015/05/01/exploratory-practice-and-the-eap-practitioner/>) and later she wrote conference proceedings for BALEAP and AERA. She continued to use the EP framework, this time as inspiration for curriculum development in her own institution and wrote this work up for a local online journal in 2017 ( <https://languagescholar.leeds.ac.uk/co-constructing-the-curriculum-through-exploratory-practice/> ). She also contributed short commentaries in Hanks (2017a) in which she helpfully outlined her own approach to EP in EAP. Importantly, her previous exposure to EP principles in 2010 fed into the vision of the competencies and values as she worked with a team to update and expand the TEAP CF (BALEAP, 2014). She has since moved on to publish other highly-respected work, and to contribute to the development of theory and practice in EAP through her roles and activities in BALEAP.

Bond is unusual in that she was later able to secure funding for time away from teaching in order to conduct her research. However, in her initial engagement with EP she had little or no reduction in teaching time. She was able to conduct her EP studies (puzzling, investigating both with her learners and colleagues, and as an individual) as an integrated part of her EAP work, and this seems to have ignited her passion for later (funded) research. Bond argues persuasively that:

EP is (both simply and complexly) an attitude and approach to teaching and learning which embeds the principles of co-construction and co-operation that are increasingly highlighted as a goal of higher education practices (Bond, 2017b, pp.10-11).

Like Banister, she has successfully used her EP work as evidence of scholarship in applications for promotion and Senior Fellow of the HEA. This professional recognition is important; but/and equally important is the way in which she has developed the theory and practice of EAP by critically examining teacher and student behaviours and practices, and disseminating her findings. She has engaged actively with the TEAP competences, as many others do, simply by doing her job well (as EAP teacher, researcher, scholar), and by activating her curiosity to inquire deeply, as the EP principles advocate. She is now in a powerful position inside the academy, with a respected voice, and the chance to advocate for EP as a 'way in' for other practitioners.

These stories of scholarly teaching/research excellence may, however, seem daunting to a novice. A third vignette shows a rather different pathway. This person needed to find her own route, with minimal mentoring and little institutional support originally. Her story speaks to those who find themselves isolated in their desire for scholarship.

**Vignette 3:** Yasmin Dar encountered EP through contact with Simon Gieve. She enacts the EP principles, as she critically reflects on EAP practice. Notably, she enthused her students, who later volunteered to share a presentation with her at the *IATEFL ReSIG Seminar* (2012) on 'Using class time to help teachers and learners develop as practitioners of teaching and learning'. They were pleased (if nervous) to share the platform and discuss their puzzles and explorations alongside their teacher, and they commented (see Allwright et al., 2013) that this aided them in their preparation for the world of academia, where presentations are the norm. Dar has presented her work at *BALEAP Conference* (2013) in the UK, and international conferences, and she published accounts of her experiences in newsletters and book chapters. In 2015 she shared her work with EAP teachers and teacher educators in Turkey; a guest speaker in a series of CPD workshops introducing EP. She inspired them to attempt EP in their own contexts, in their own ways, and this resulted in a number of presentations and publications by them (see Dikilitas & Hanks, 2018). She continues to inspire other practitioners nationally and internationally to engage with Exploratory Practice as they investigate their own classrooms. Dar, then, reflected on her own EAP practice and encouraged her students to do the same. Unlike the others in these vignettes, Dar worked in EP for several years without a mentor. She has been persistent in pursuing her puzzles using the EP framework by herself, with minimal

support (i.e. no time reduction in teaching; no funding for her EP work). Dar embodies the value of research and scholarship to developing professional learning and teaching practice, as outlined in the TEAP competency framework. She has inspired others, in other parts of the world, to engage in curious investigations of their EAP practice, using the EP principles as a guide.

A fourth vignette emphasises the need for EAP teachers (and learners) to develop in their own ways and in their own time. Development is rarely linear: long periods of quiet may be followed by bursts of activity, followed by deep reflection again.

**Vignette 4:** Jess Poole encountered EP through contact with Judith Hanks. She started by incorporating puzzling with her students in her own EAP setting of a pre-Undergraduate pre-sessional programme. Fascinated by their personally relevant puzzles, she incorporated EP into her classes and over the years, investigating their puzzles became established as a positive way for them to engage in EAP. Following Hanks (2015a, 2015b, 2017b), her students listened to a talk presenting principles of EP, and were invited to contribute their own puzzles. In this way, they were exposed to the challenges of note-taking in a ‘live lecture’ setting, and this served as a springboard for their own investigations. Poole has extended and developed EP beyond Hanks’s initial tentative forays in her workplace. For example, Poole focused on creative, visual ethnography, online activities, graphic novels and comics as forms of practice-led research/scholarship. She has mentored teachers supporting students to investigate their puzzles by using PEPAs. Consequently cohorts of students and teachers have become proficient in scholarly practice and research techniques (e.g. identifying and critiquing relevant academic articles, conducting small-scale data collection and analysis, presenting findings via poster presentations, in preparation for academic life). Although she has given presentations (both ‘standard’ and ‘poster’ types) at conferences locally, nationally and internationally, and has published (e.g. Poole & Schneider, 2021), over the past decade, she has preferred to focus more on student development through EP. She deliberately chose long periods for reflection (she provides insights into this in Hanks, 2017a) rather than hasty publications. She is continuing to use the EP approach of puzzling with students to explore the practice of reading and producing comics, and what this might tell us about the experience of learning and communicating in another a language. Through her profound reflections,

and gentle encouragement of others, Poole embodies the value of research and scholarship to developing professional learning and teaching practice.

These vignettes indicate that scholarly research for teachers has to start somewhere. Frequently it begins in teacher development sessions. For example, as head of Teacher Development in my workplace, I invited colleagues to talk about what puzzled them about EAP. Their puzzles ranged from the conceptual to the practical, e.g.: “*Why do students often find it difficult to make connections between work done in two different classes (e.g. IELTS prep and academic writing)?*”; “*Why am I often not sure whether students have understood what they have read/heard?*”; “*Why do I feel unconfident in correcting students’ compositions?*”; “*Why, when I think I’ve got a great lesson, is it pants [rubbish] and vice versa?*”. This was the spark for teacher discussions around EAP, distinguishing between exam preparation and preparation for study at the university, EAP pedagogy, and teaching enhancement. It led to some (but not all) colleagues beginning their own scholarly/research investigations in fruitful ways, re-igniting their interest in/through praxis. For EAP teachers often working in precarity, feeling empowered enough (through EP) to puzzle about these issues can, and does, make a difference in quality of life, quality of teaching and learning, and ultimately professional development.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

In this Special Issue of *JEAP*, celebrating 20 years of the journal and 50 years of BALEAP, I also want to celebrate how BALEAP PIMs, ResTES, and Conference are instrumental in providing spaces for EAP practitioners to engage in critical discussions and to share their work. The role of BALEAP in aiding the dissemination of practitioners’ explorations of their practice is crucial, providing safe spaces essential for dissemination of initial research, discussion of ideas, and offering inspiration for future scholars to critically reflect on their own practices. As can be seen, the TEAP competency of “undertaking research and scholarship to develop own professional practice and to inform the practice of colleagues” (BALEAP, 2014: 23) is central, but often no funding or time is allocated for this. In such circumstances, EP enables research/scholarship because of its emphasis on the integration of research and pedagogy. EP, then, becomes an applicable and sustainable way for EAP practitioners to develop. EP encourages teachers to reflect critically, share awareness of

current issues in teaching, and gain understandings of the importance of research and scholarship to develop professionally, as the TEAP framework recommends.

In response to the questions posed in Section 1, I have surveyed the literature, providing examples of how EAP practitioners have developed their research/scholarship using the EP framework. It is clear that there are many publications in international, peer-reviewed academic journals demonstrating EAP teachers' active engagement with research and scholarship through EP. I have shown how EP supports practitioners' professional development, with reference to current issues (e.g. motivation, curriculum design) in teaching and researching EAP, and I have traced the extent to which the EP and TEAP competencies frameworks relate to one-another, with particular emphasis on research and scholarship in professional practice. Arguably, scholarship without research remains at the level of anecdote, while research without scholarship is no research at all. Shulman maintains that scholars need to "discover, to connect, to apply and to teach" (2000, p.49), and commentators on EP need to do the same.

Research, scholarship, pedagogy are deeply meshed. As we frequently tell our students: the key to good academic practice lies in full, thorough, accurate referencing. To discuss Exploratory Practice without reading and referencing, say, Allwright and Hanks (2009); Hanks (2017a), is as bad as discussing Communities of Practice without acknowledging Lave and Wenger (1991); Wenger (1998). The lack of adequate references by writers/researchers/scholars across EAP to the many publications noted in this article is puzzling. This is an area for future research, and one where BALEAP and *JEAP* can make helpful contributions by signposting the scholarly outputs already published.

By reviewing extant literature of practitioners' voices reflecting on their experiences of research and scholarship, I have tracked the potential of the EP framework to reignite practitioners' interest in exploring EAP theory and pedagogy. This article indicates the processes involved as teachers and learners realise the ways in which they can use outcomes from participation in EP activity to enhance their continuing professional development. Each person begins with small steps, often relying on the mentorship of others, as they practise presentations, or ask for feedback for publications. This is entirely normal: we do not spring into confident researchers/scholars giving international presentations, writing books and articles, without years of support. Colleagues then support others with kindness and wisdom,

whilst also acknowledging the support they have received, in a positive life-cycle of multi-directional mentoring (Hanks et al., In Press). Thus the EP principle of ‘mutual development’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks 2017a, 2019a) is key to aiding the TEAP competence of undertaking research and scholarship to develop own professional practice and to inform the practice of others disseminating results of own scholarship and research to enhance the practice of and have an impact on the wider sector (BALEAP, 2014, p.23).

Of crucial importance now is the need for researchers to reference the body of EP work adequately, fully and accurately, so as to demonstrate their own scholarship. This article may aid that endeavour.

As EAP practitioners move into the academy, they need to engage with research/scholarship, and concurrently to have their contributions recognised. Exploratory Practice provides opportunities for EAP practitioners to explore their pedagogy, investigate and build theory, and gain deeper understandings of student needs. In doing so, practitioners are exposed to multiple perspectives in academia, and enter debates about theory and practice across disciplines. By investigating issues that are relevant to their practice, practitioners develop greater understandings of the complexities of the field, and by disseminating the findings of EP activity, other practitioners may learn about the struggles they have faced. In this way, EP aids teacher development, as well as learner development, and researcher/scholar development, across the field.

In sum, it is possible to evolve from viewing research as rarified activity, practised only by a few, to seeing (EP-EAP) practice as research, potentially/potently practised by teachers, teacher educators and students alike. This invitation demystifies the nimbus of research, making it clear that, through their own agency, practitioners can problematise, puzzle, investigate and disseminate in a scholarly manner. EP reconceptualises research/scholarship activities as ventures where practitioners contribute as equally-valued theorists, explorers and meaning-makers in EAP. I conclude that by igniting such curiosity, EP enables teachers to develop their own understandings of the importance of undertaking research and scholarship to enhance their EAP practice.

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