Article

Shifting perceptions of inclusive practitioner research: Epistemological affordances of exploratory practice

Judith Hanks iD
University of Leeds, UK

Abstract
Over the past two decades, 'inclusivity' has become a key issue in research in applied linguistics and language education. However, the inclusion of teachers, teacher educators, and learners as researchers with key insights into their contexts has not yet been fully examined. This thought-piece explores developments in inclusive practitioner research, specifically focusing on exploratory practice (EP). The article probes the notion of inclusivity, asking why inclusivity matters and what does it mean for practitioner researchers. It sheds new light on inclusivity in exploratory practice, amplifying and deepening understandings, and shifting perceptions of what it means to be inclusive, as it examines the contributions practitioners make to debates about/ around social justice.

I Introduction

Inclusive practitioner research can be troubling, risky, and provocative. It implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, crosses boundaries and transgresses norms about who does what. The notion brings together different theoretical and epistemological approaches in applied linguistics and language education, and although there are many positive examples of social inclusion, there yet remain many elements of exclusion in research and pedagogy. Consequently, as Ushioda (2016) suggests, academics need to pivot to make

Corresponding author:
Judith Hanks, Associate Professor of Language Education, School of Education, University of Leeds, Hillary Place, Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK
Email: j.i.hanks@leeds.ac.uk

space for, and acknowledge, practitioners and their work. Against the backdrop of movements such as Black Lives Matter, and decentring English Language Teaching (ELT) (Banegas et al., 2021), the field has begun to foreground the experiences of those who have often been overlooked as valuable co-researchers with significant contributions to make. Inclusivity matters, and is particularly relevant in co-produced, participatory work. One form of practitioner research known as exploratory practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2017a) places inclusivity at the heart of its framework, thus offering insights into the socio-economic, socio-political issues affecting practitioners. Crucially, these insights emanate from the perspectives of learners and teachers themselves. In broadening the notion of inclusivity beyond simply inviting teachers and learners to actively participate as researchers, key questions such as 'What does inclusivity mean?' and 'Why does inclusivity matter?' need addressing. In doing so, further questions are raised: 'What are the affordances of inclusivity? For whom?' This conceptual article discusses such issues, focusing particularly on practitioners engaging in exploratory practice (EP).

EP has flourished alongside other forms of practitioner research such as reflective practice and action research, engendering cross-fertilization of ideas, methods and approaches. With its advocacy of inclusive practitioner research, positioning both teachers and learners as key developing practitioners (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), EP merits closer attention. Consequently, I first outline the background of EP, briefly establishing the main principles of the framework. I discuss the notion of inclusivity, broadening the definitions from including teachers-as-researchers (see Burns, 2010; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), to learners-as-researchers. Highlighting accounts of practitioner researchers from non-traditional backgrounds, I trace work done by teachers, teacher educators and learners in language education contexts around the world, paying particular attention to inclusivity. That is, I deliberately include accounts which are outside the usual canon of research in English language teaching by English speakers; I consider examples of Brazilian, Japanese, and Turkish teachers of English, an Italian teacher of Italian, and of Brazilian, Indian, and Thai learners of English. Their puzzles evidence growing curiosity about the social contexts in which they live and the everyday struggles they experience. As these examples show, issues of inclusive social justice are highly relevant to practitioners, and their critical explorations provide nuggets of wisdom for research and pedagogy alike. I conclude that in creating space for practitioners to exercise agency as researchers themselves, EP foregrounds inclusivity, thus decentring ELT and moving towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (https://sdgs.un.org/goals) of achieving quality education and a more equal society.

II Background

For more than two decades, EP has argued for the inclusion of learners as co-researchers alongside teachers and teacher educators (see Allwright, 2003). The EP framework explicitly includes learners and teachers puzzling together, prioritizing mutual development, understanding, and quality of life, integrating research and pedagogy. Of particular note, are the three middle principles of '(1) involve everybody, (2) work to bring people together, (3) work also for mutual development' (adapted from Allwright, 2003, p. 129)

of the EP framework. Relevant here is the notion of 'inclusive practitioner research' (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 5). When Allwright and Hanks first proposed the idea, alongside colleagues from the Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group, they were very much focused on a glaring absence of learners as active agents in research. There were, of course, extensive accounts of teachers engaging in action research (Burns, 1999, 2005), reflective practice (Farrell, 2007), and narrative inquiry (Johnson & Golombek, 2002), but even in the 2003 special issue of *Language Teaching Research* (dedicated to EP studies) there was scant evidence of/from learners engaging in such explorations. Allwright and Hanks were convinced that learners have many insights to offer, and wanted to draw attention to this. At that time, their argument was relatively simple: include all practitioners as potential researchers, i.e. include learners as well as teachers, in the EP invitation to participate in practitioner research. Their book foregrounded examples of learners setting puzzles and investigating (for analysis of examples, see Section IV), and this has encouraged others; there is now a robust body of work showing practitioners around the world engaging in praxis (see, for example, Banister, 2020, 2021; Consoli, 2022; Dalsky & Garant, 2016; Dawson et al., 2017; Hanks, 2009, 2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2019a, 2022a, 2022b; Kato & Hanks, 2021; Miller, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013; Pinner, 2016; Tajino et al., 2016; Zheng, 2012). But within this evidence there are 'Easter eggs' (to use a term from Film Studies where intertextual references are visible to those 'in the know'), in which inclusivity takes on more modern meanings. This article aims to open those 'Easter eggs' and analyse the affordances for inclusivity therein.

III Exploring inclusivity

The concept of 'inclusivity' deserves scrutiny. It is central to the aims of applied linguistics and language education: (1) to understand how people learn, and (2) to understand elements of pedagogy that make a positive difference. Yet despite recent calls for decentralization in educational research and ELT, many assumptions around teacher and learner roles and activities remain. I posit that when talking about 'inclusivity' we need to go beyond traditional notions of third-party researchers coming into classrooms, conducting their research, then withdrawing to write up and publish. As a first step, inclusivity means opening up the research endeavour to include learners, teachers, teacher educators, programme leaders/directors (etc.) as practitioners with valuable viewpoints and the agency to conduct research in ways which are most suited to them.

This can come as a shock to mainstream researchers. The classroom has often been a reflection of cultural norms and societal hierarchies which position teachers as controllers, 'delivering' teaching (as if it were a package) having been handed results from professional researchers to implement. Yet the puzzles posed by EP practitioners (see Costantino, 2019; Hanks, 2009, 2015a, 2015b, 2017b, 2021; Lyra et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2008, 2015; Moraes Bezerra & Miller, 2015) challenge preconceived ideas in education which position learners and/or teachers as passive recipients of information from professional academic researchers. The evidence from action research, exploratory practice, and reflective practice, shows that many practitioners enjoy researching their classrooms (see, amongst others, Burns, 2010; Dikilitaş & Hanks, 2018; Hanks, 2017a; Mann

& Walsh, 2017; Vaattovaara, 2017), if the agenda is relevant to their work. These accounts afford crucial, nuanced understanding of issues central to applied linguistics and language education such as motivation, language learning anxiety, and social justice.

Inclusivity means encompassing and celebrating diversity, including, amongst others, women, people of colour, and people with disabilities as proactive agents taking control of research in their areas (note that due to space constraints, this list is merely a set of prompts and is not exhaustive). As a second step for inclusivity, then, the call resonates from Disability Studies: 'Nothing about us, without us'. Co-production and co-creation are increasingly prevalent in the fields of applied linguistics and language education, and EP's notion of co-production (see Hanks, 2021) includes the first-person experiences of marginalized people. Roles are meshed, identities shift, and shift again, activities are exchanged: what used to belong to researchers now belongs (potentially) to all. Many practitioners (of research, of learning, of teaching) have multifaceted identities, which incorporate a range of roles and perspectives (for discussion, see Hanks, 2019b, 2022a, 2022b). Arguably all practitioners come with important questions, rooted in context, which are relevant for themselves, their co-workers, and for the field. Consequently, I posit a third step for inclusivity: prioritize the experiences of those who have often been overlooked – teachers and learners themselves, with different heritages, coming from different backgrounds, in different contexts, with different, resonant, stories to tell.

IV Affordances of inclusive practitioner research

Hanks (2017a) portrays the EP principles as an organic and developing framework, where curiosity is key. EP invites teachers, learners, and others, to establish research agendas which are directly relevant to the participants themselves. Here, we might take up the proposal to see teachers-as-learners too (see Hanks, 2015b), further elaborated as 'dialogic relationships' in Miller et al. (2020, p. 459). To do this, we need to enable learners and teachers to set their own research questions. In EP these questions are known as 'puzzles', rather than problems, as Hanks (2009, 2017a, 2019a, 2019c) elucidates, drawing parallels with Kahneman's (2012) call for 'slow thinking'; they can be positive or negative prompts. EP thus challenges epistemological assumptions that research can/ should focus only on student or teacher performance. In the examples below, instances are given of ways in which learners, teachers, and teacher educators, have begun their personal, political, transformations. The contributions from practitioners have long been in the public domain, but I now re-examine them to shed light on this shifting perception of inclusive practitioner research. Viewed through an inclusivity lens, these examples highlight the need for representation and respect in applied linguistics and/or language education research.

1 Curiosity: Teachers as intercultural researchers

Inclusivity can mean crossing cultures to develop greater intercultural understandings. Hiratsuka (2016) examined the complicated processes involved in team-teaching in state schools in Japan. Here, teachers from two different (and contrasting) educational cultures are brought together to teach the same class. Typically, a Japanese teacher, with

considerable experience of the Japanese school and examination system, is paired with a younger foreign assistant (American, Australian, British), who brings not only 'native-speaker' knowledge of the language, but also a very different understanding of pedagogy. Sharing a class may bring conflict as the two epistemologies collide, with each believing that their own system/experience is best. Hiratsuka highlights such complexities, and, through his EP work, shows that team-teachers on both sides of the divide need time to puzzle about their various cultural assumptions and approaches if they are to achieve the mutual understanding necessary to harmoniously merge their two (or more) sets of epistemologies about what needs to be done in the language classroom. For example, one of his participants ('Aitani', an experienced Japanese teacher of English in Japan) encapsulates a familiar dilemma when she writes: 'My mind tells me that understanding of a foreign language doesn't necessarily mean translating it into one's mother tongue. But my unconscious behaviours easily betray my mind, and often make me end up with acts of translation' ('Aitani', in Hiratsuka, 2016, p. 116). This contrasts with 'Matt', an Australian assistant language teacher with one year's teaching experience, who seemed eager to try communicative approaches. His efforts were aided by students knowing that he lacked proficiency in the Japanese language, thus an 'English only' approach was promoted. The two teaching styles sometimes clashed. However, Hiratsuka suggests that by puzzling together, these colleagues 'could champion collaboration and develop new understanding about teaching' (Hiratsuka, 2016, p. 115). Although Hiratsuka's study does not claim to resolve all the difficulties and culture clashes encountered by many 'home' and 'foreign' teachers in similar team-teaching contexts (who could?), it highlights the need for teachers to reflect, probing their own behaviours, beliefs, cognitions in order to enrich their pedagogic understandings. Tajino and Smith (2016) call this 'team learning'. Crossing cultures can result in thorny problems, but EP affords opportunities for respectful mutual comprehension of alternative viewpoints.

2 Curiosity: Teachers exploring puzzles with learners

Hiratsuka is not alone in advocating the importance of negotiation to achieve harmony via EP. Studies have documented teachers and teacher educators conducting EP investigations into aspects of their pedagogy that are relevant to them and their learners, since they set their own research questions (puzzles). For example, Dikilitaş and Hanks (2018) worked with university teachers, curriculum developers and teacher trainers in Turkey and Northern Cyprus, eliciting their puzzles and thence encouraging them to investigate their praxis. Practitioners asked questions not only about learners' interest in and ability to read texts outside class (Karanfil, 2018); about testing (Oncul & Webb, 2018); about curriculum (re-)design (Biçer, 2018), and integrated skills classes (Doğdu, & Arca, 2018), but also opened up discussions of democracy across continents such as Northern Cyprus and Australia (Webb & Sarina, 2018). Including learners in their investigations led to some surprising findings – for example, the realisation that learners hold a 'rich diversity of views from which one can learn much' (Webb & Sarina, 2018, p. 179), or Karanfil's discovery that learners do in fact read widely, but often not the set texts. These practitioners presented their work in conferences and in chapters which are not mediated through academic researchers, do not disguise teacher-researchers' identities with pseudonyms,

but rather provide platforms for acknowledging their work. Similarly, teachers working in universities in the UK teaching English for academic purposes (EAP) and modern foreign languages (Italian, French, Spanish) supported one another in exploring their praxis, and were included as case studies in Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2019). Slimani-Rolls and Kiely position themselves more conventionally as researchers first and practitioners of teaching second, nevertheless, their work has inspired teachers to continue puzzling/researching independently (see, for example, Banister, 2020, 2021; Costantino, 2019). Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2019) conclude the teachers in their project were 'articulating the challenge of the classroom as *one of inclusion*, not just in terms of active participation in the pedagogic activities, but also in the task of understanding' (p. 201; emphasis added).

EP is a form of professional development, as Costantino (2019), a teacher of Italian, notes. As she delved into her puzzle about giving feedback in her classes, she, like Aitani above, noted differences in her beliefs and behaviour regarding teaching Italian in the UK. By puzzling and investigating, she gained a deeper understanding of how educational action and educational theory interacted in her own practice. She states 'This would never have happened if I had not reflected upon, investigated and experienced the epistemological, the ontological, and the ethical dimensions of my practice, both practically and theoretically' (Costantino, 2019, p. 84). This was not a third-party researcher reporting on a teacher's development, but was rather her commentary on her own personal/professional growth. Costantino adds '[EP] has been pivotal in reframing my pedagogical everyday practice but also in shedding light on the difficulty of challenging classroom routine and performativity' (Costantino, 2019, p. 84). Including her teacher-self as a reflective person learning from her learners enhanced her professional and personal understandings.

In the work of EP practitioners, inclusivity encourages mutual development. For example, in Brazil, Andrade (in Hanks, 2017a, pp. 150–152) reports that she was worried about bad behaviour in her secondary school classroom. Pupils fought, played games, shouted and threw the textbook on the floor. This led to her inferring that they hated learning English and perhaps hated her. However, reframing her concern as an EP puzzle, Andrade asked her students why they behaved in this way. They told of poverty, deprivation, noise, at home, where norms of behaviour were different to those expected in school. These students said they enjoyed learning English, and explained: 'It's just our way', thus calming some of her anxiety about being a good teacher and maintaining discipline. Had she not included them in her puzzled investigations, Andrade would not have gained these insights into their lives outside school. Including the learners was central to developing holistically. While Andrade comprehended the reasons for their behaviour, the students began to appreciate different approaches are required at school. They, together, found ways to respond more appropriately in their teaching/learning environment.

In each of these cases, the teachers reported gaining understandings of the struggles of their students. Consequently, an atmosphere for learning that accommodated the needs of the students was enabled, whilst also aiding teacher comprehension of issues such as learners' willingness to communicate, their anxiety about speaking or writing, or their responses to feedback. But what of the learners themselves?

3 Curiosity: Learner-initiated explorations

Shifting perceptions of inclusivity when learners are included alongside teachers as co-researchers means inviting them to puzzle about, explore, and present their work from their own perspectives. In other words, EP is not mediated by a third-party researcher, rather it foregrounds practitioners' own investigations of their own learning lives. These notions of inclusivity in the form of 'learner-initiated puzzles', were advanced by Hanks (2012, 2015a), and developed by Banister (2021) and Kato and Hanks (2021), amongst others. Learners have agency, often more than they are given credit for, and this means they are well-placed to actively investigate pedagogic practices. For instance, Hanks has encouraged students and teachers on pre-sessional programmes at a British university to puzzle and explore their language learning/teaching lives. Problems that seemed to beg for a solution were re-framed as puzzles and opened doors to cultural-political-social understandings. In one case, Hanks (2012) reports that she and another teacher invited international students (from, amongst others, China, India, Iran, Japan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Thailand) to puzzle about their learning. One Thai student (pseudonym 'Oak') talked about his group's puzzle: 'Why can't I express my feelings exactly in English?' This apparently innocuous question revealed hidden depths. As he explained, he often wanted to engage in complex conversations in English, but felt hampered. He elucidated: 'sometimes I would like to say a joke [. . .], but somebody from UK or Hong Kong, maybe they didn't understand' ('Oak', in Hanks, 2012, p. 131). This was frustrating, but as he investigated with his group-mates, and later presented to his classmates, he illuminated his multi-layered, multi-lingual life as a university student in the UK. Ensuring that he could present his perspective meant that he (re-)gained a sense of himself as a humorous, witty person with culture and knowledge to share.

Other students' puzzles illuminated social, ethical and personal/professional issues. A student from India, 'Tina', asked: 'Why is proficiency in English seen as a status symbol?' Now studying in an international class in England, she wanted to problematize earlier experiences. She explained: 'we felt humiliated in our country if we are not very fluent in English' ('Tina' in Hanks, 2017a, p. 281) and found that others from other countries had felt similarly uncomfortable. They noted that command of the English language seemed to confer status on the user, particularly in post-colonial contexts, and status could be withheld/withdrawn if the speaker made mistakes. Through the process of exploring their puzzles with others from different countries, the scars of these humiliations seemed to fade. There was a sense of camaraderie stemming from past adversity, which conveyed them into a more positive present, ready to face the challenges of an academic career. The students cited ideologies and exclusions that they had suffered in the past; EP led to a more critical analysis of how English can be used as an excluding weapon by different communities, and, as a result of their joint critique, it empowered the students to have confidence for the future.

4 Curiosity: Learners as researchers

EP is distinctive in including learners as curious researchers of their praxis. In the Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group, learners are actively included as co-researchers

alongside teachers. The Group holds an annual EP 'Event' at which approximately 200 learners (aged 11–19 years) voluntarily present their puzzles and explorations independently, alongside approximately 100 teachers, novice teachers and teacher educators. All come together to present posters, hold symposia, and share ideas, much like any other academic conference. Participants choose how to represent themselves, and pseudonyms are offered, if required. The majority prefer to be acknowledged with their own names, just like any other professional researcher. All are practitioners (of learning/teaching/researching) on a development trajectory, which may be personal or professional or both.

Allwright and Hanks (2009) provided a platform for learners' voices from the 10th Anniversary EP Event in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Young learners in state schools posed their puzzles which included not only questions about language learning/teaching and the curriculum, but also encompassed learner motivation and ethical/social issues such as corruption (cheating) and teenage pregnancy. Notably, learners were invited to set their own agendas/puzzles, and to present if they wished. No incentives were offered other than the joy of sharing their research. Participants were invited to publish their work via their letters, accounts, and reports in a book, and their pleasure at being accorded this respect can be found in chapters 11–15 of Allwright and Hanks (2009). This approach precedes Pinter and Kuchah's (2021) efforts to include young learners by more than a decade. Unfortunately, Pinter and Kuchah minimize EP in their otherwise excellent book, mentioning it only in a single sentence, wrongly implying that the young learners had no choice in participation. In fact, Allwright and Hanks argued strongly for the learners to have control over what they did; whether to speak, write or not. As the following examples demonstrate, the participants chose what, and how much, they wanted to contribute.

Allwright and Hanks deliberately started their Chapter 11 with a Brazilian learner's (Mariana) account, since they wished to foreground learners' experiences, learners' voices and perspectives. Mariana was not obliged to write, but she chose to send her letter for inclusion in the book, and, like many others, she expressed pride in her contribution. Mariana's introduction, written when she was 15 years old, encapsulates the notion of inclusivity that this article aims to address:

> The teacher started to talk about exploratory practice and asked us if we wanted to participate in the EP event. A few people got interested in that and I was part of this group [. . .] The first time I went to the EP sessions we debated our questions. It was very interesting because I liked to show my opinions. The sensation of being among several teachers is great! We could say what we think about our questions and they heard us without criticising us; they could understand us and explore our opinions, respecting them above all. (Mariana's story, in Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 166)

Mariana explains that she enjoyed sharing her views, and notes that her opinions were honoured. Her letter suggests that being listened to with respect was a rare occurrence for a learner, and it was through participating in EP that she felt included. Instead of researchers exploiting learners for their own research purposes, answering the researcher's questions, here Mariana was in charge.

This inversion of epistemological assumptions about who does what in researching/ teaching/learning is also seen in a narrative from an 8th grade student, Carlos. Carlos wrote a letter in Portuguese and asked his teacher, Walewska Braga, to translate for publication. He describes how he and his classmates decided to present at the annual EP Event, held at the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC), Rio de Janeiro. Carlos' puzzle 'Why do we cheat?' excited his classmates. They interviewed teachers and other students in the school, gaining greater understandings of why cheating is common practice in tests at school. Carlos remarks:

> We also noticed that a lot of people misbehave outside the school [. . .] people parking their cars on the sidewalks, people throwing their papers and cans through the windows, on the streets, the elderly being disrespected [. . .] When my group presented the poster at PUC, many teachers mentioned that their students also cheat. The teachers congratulated us and said our poster made the curiosity of knowing why their students cheat emerge. (Carlos, in Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 210)

These young researchers saw that rules and regulations in society were frequently broken, hinting that cheating in school is linked to broader social problems. Being included as researchers meant that the teachers were learning from the learners (and researchers could learn too, if they only paid attention) in open dialogue about attitudes to rules, transgressions, and cheating.

Another group-member's comment, which was added to Carlos' account as a postscript confirms the ethical approach taken:

> P.S. Carlos doesn't like speaking in public. The presenters of the poster were Daniela and Patricia. (Daniela, in Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 212)

This indicates that these students were free to present or not, as they wished. At the EP Event Carlos did not present orally, but his group-mates did. Carlos and Daniela then provided their combined narratives in the book for a rich example of inclusivity in action.

Daniela wrote another narrative, explaining she had conducted many explorations and presented her research at EP events. She chose to write about her puzzle, and its accompanying poster, which she felt was important: *Meu bem . . . calma lá! Porque as adolescents engravidam, se têm tanta informação?* (translated by their teacher as 'Baby, hold on a second! Why do so many teenagers get pregnant in spite of having so much information?'). Daniela explained how/why she and her group decided on this puzzle: a young girl in their class had become pregnant and was having to miss school. Her group analysed the gendered responses of the boys (claiming that girls wanted to get pregnant) and the girls (complaining that there is a lack of communication between parents and children). Daniela's group went beyond their classroom to interview other teenagers who had become pregnant. One group member even went round her local neighbourhood to conduct a questionnaire on the subject. They then collated their results and presented a poster at the EP Event. Their puzzle, reflecting on teenage pregnancy and attitudes surrounding it, illuminates social issues surrounding female experiences in education. It was empowering, as Daniela comments:

> Doing the work, presenting it to a lot of people, gave me the opportunity of seeing myself as a young girl capable of learning and teaching. I loved the opportunity of giving my opinion about such an important matter. (Daniela, in Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 215)

From Daniela's remarks, we can see her personal and professional development, as she forms and strengthens her identity as a learner, a teacher, and researcher. Kramsch (2009) reminds us to see students holistically, and these stories add weight to the argument that students and teachers are complex beings with emotions and feelings, thoughts and beliefs and histories as well as dreams to be included. EP can help with this approach. Inclusivity, then, means including learners at the researchers' table, respecting the socio-political insights they bring.

5 Troubling, risky, provocative research: Learners and teachers seek a more equal society

More recently, the 20th Anniversary EP Event in Brazil (2019) included learners, students and teachers from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds, with different genders, orientations, heritages and abilities. Teachers and novice teachers also shared their puzzles – some asked why they continued to teach despite an atmosphere of violence and distrust in the city. Others asked why teachers were not valued in society and why teachers suffered. Alongside them, students puzzled about issues that matter to them: bullying, racism, hatred. Each conveyed their different experiences of life. Their puzzles naturally encompassed language learning and teaching issues such as motivation, anxiety, willingness to communicate, but also reflected current socio-economic and political concerns. For example, learners presented their work via posters investigating (multilingually) questions such as:

- Why do we go to school? (*Por que vamos à escola?*)
- Why do people hate people? (*Por que as pessoas odeiam pessoas?*)
- *Por que o bullying está sendo cada vez mais praticado?* (Why is bullying happening more often?)
- *Por que o Racismo?* (Why Racism?)

(Hanks et al., in preparation; n.b. languages in original order presented by the students)

These young learners came from a range of backgrounds: some from areas of the city where deprivation, poverty and crime are rife, others from reasonably comfortable zones. Investigating these questions as powerful agents in their own right gave voice to their concerns. They spotlighted issues which affected their learning and their quality of life, but of which teachers might remain unaware, while professional researchers might never consider such questions from the students' point of view. Inclusivity, then, means not inviting briefly to take part in research, but establishing Freirean principles of curiosity and critical inquiry in educational settings (Freire, 1972).

Not everyone can travel to these settings to see for themselves, and even a network such as the Fully Inclusive Practitioner Research Network (FIPR) (https://www.fullyinclusivepr.

com) tends to focus more on dissemination and connection between teachers and teacher educators around the world. However, in the e-book published by the Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group (2021) available both in Portuguese (https://tinyurl.com/ czk54amx) and in English (https://tinyurl.com/4fc853mx), learners, teachers and teacher educators document and analyse their own work as they puzzle about and investigate their pedagogic worlds. They collaborated to make this accessible more widely online. Their 'common striving towards awareness of reality and self' (Freire, 1972, p. 79) dialoguing with the socio-political context is conveyed in the following puzzles:

- Why do I have to study English when I don't even know Portuguese?
- Why don't my teachers understand me?
- Why aren't students interested in the subject?
- Why do we have to accept such aggressive behaviour?

(Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group, 2021, p. 9)

As they indicate, puzzles also afford opportunities for positive questioning (on positive puzzling, see also Hanks, 2017a, 2019a). Despite injustice, there is hope:

- Why do people like challenges?
- Why are our English classes so cool?
- Why do all students do their homework?
- Why have I been so attracted to learning with my students?

(Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group, 2021, p. 9)

Vibrant examples of the posters created by students are available in the e-book, and it is noteworthy that many of these young researchers collaborated not only in the production of the posters but also in the production of this multimodal, multi-lingual e-book. I end this section with a telling example from a group of 6th grade students who complained about the orange uniforms they had to wear for school which, at the time, echoed the orange overalls of the city's street cleaners. Their teacher perceived this as 'a good opportunity to work on possible prejudices toward different professions' (Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group, 2021, p. 16) and encouraged them to investigate. The authors asserted that:

> *Entender que as pessoas são únicas e têm suas maneiras idiossincráticas de agir e pensar é um exercício de cidadania. Aceitar o papel político da escola, onde cada aula é um ato de libertação, é enfrentar o enorme desafio de trabalhar dentro desta visão de cotidiano escolar.*

> 'Learning that people are unique, and that they have their own individual ways to act and to think is an exercise of citizenship. To accept the political role of the school, where each class is an act of liberation means confronting the enormous challenge of working within this vision of everyday school life.' (Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group, 2021, p. 13)

V Discussion

In the above examples, learners and teachers are investigating linguistic/pedagogic questions as independent agents: quality of life, communication and ethics have come to the fore. Impact and relevance are directly linked to the fact that it is the practitioners themselves who set the agenda. Inclusivity lives at the heart of the exploratory practice framework alongside 'working for understanding' and 'quality of life'. Consequently I now move inclusivity to the centre of the framework. These accounts from practitioners offer profound insights into the lives of schoolchildren, students, and teachers, and the pressures they face. What seems common to all the above experiences is the sense of agency and enjoyment that came from teachers and learners/students setting their own questions and researching collaboratively. By actively including teacher, teacher educator, and learner contributions, practitioners' deep knowledge can be brought to consciousness, critiqued, analysed and reviewed, with potentially radical results for research and pedagogy alike. Inclusivity, then, also means providing choices about who sets the research questions, who decides what to do; how agency is exercised, how the work is disseminated and by whom.

This is a pivotal moment for the field. Inclusivity means teachers and learners can be affected by, and can affect, the work that is being done. A professional academic researcher may have questions about student demotivation, but their way of approaching and investigating the topic may be very different to that of students and teachers. If the practitioners investigate, then a whole new world unfolds, and, sometimes, motivation increases because of this sense of agenda-setting; being heard with respect. The findings then inform what teachers do and can enable teachers, teacher educators, and programme leaders, to be more holistic in their work, while learners develop a sense of agency. The inclusion of various identities (teacher, researcher, learner) aids personal and professional development (see Hanks, 2019b, 2022b; Tajino & Smith, 2016; Miller et al., 2008). EP affords opportunities for everyone to take part in (1) setting the research agenda, (2) identifying research questions relevant to practitioners themselves, (3) conducting investigations, and (4) collating and disseminating findings. By transgressing norms about who does what in research and pedagogy, EP invites us to cross boundaries and think differently about our quotidian work. It can be positively transformative, as a form of co-produced, integrated, and sustainable research and pedagogy; an example of what Kramsch (2021, p. 45) calls 'small exercises of symbolic power'. Many teachers and students live in a reality in which exclusion from the benefits and privileges of society are a daily source of resentment. The battles that are reported are, perhaps, a rightful protest at not having been included by society. EP includes these marginalized groups by valuing their opinions and respecting their experiences.

Kuchah (2018, p. 313) suggests that 'there is a need to move beyond simplistic dichotomizations of social justice and instrumentalism/utilitarianism and to acknowledge greater complexity in the medium of instruction discussions particularly in countries with a dual colonial and linguistic heritage.' As the examples above demonstrate, EP embraces that complexity, taking it beyond the narrow confines of English as a medium of instruction or ELT discussions, to encompass broader social and political themes such as bullying, cheating, racism, and gender injustices. EP provides opportunities to

collaborate with others, including everyone/anyone who wishes to be included (for example, Hanks, 2009, 2012, 2017a; Miller, 2010, 2012). It is a way of responding to Johnson and Golombek's (2011, p. 3) call for critically observing 'the social practices and situated contexts' of practitioners. Arguing that knowledge of learners needs to be foregrounded in teacher education, Canh (2020) maintains, this will 'enable language teachers to cope successfully with the complexity and tension of teaching linguistically, culturally and emotionally diverse learners in their own local linguistic landscape' (p. 78). Echoing Freire (1972), he suggests that 'one of the most important sources of teachers' knowledge about teaching comes from the learners with whom they are working.' The EP principle of practitioners working together to set their own agendas for research is emancipatory and collaborative: inclusivity writ large.

In this hopeful picture, some limitations should be mentioned. The 2003 special issue of *Language Teaching Research* spearheaded a surge of interest in practitioners researching their practice(s) in a variety of ways. Since then, practitioners have engaged in collaborative attempts to comprehend the complexities of language learning/teaching life, and a body of work has now been (co-)produced, documenting such work, particularly by those from the global majority (for further discussion, see Hanks, 2017a, 2019a, 2019b, 2022a, 2022b; Miller et al., 2020; https://www.fullyinclusivepr.com). As I teased out the affordances of inclusive practitioner research in the form of EP, I foregrounded work by colleagues from beyond the Anglophone world, notably Brazil, Japan and Turkey, in this article. However, in the search, examples of EP from the Indian sub-continent were rare, and EP in countries in Africa were invisible. A puzzle arises: 'Why are examples of EP seldom reported in these contexts?' This is intriguing because the EP framework champions the principle of 'minimise the burden by integrating the work for understanding [i.e. research] into normal pedagogic practice' (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 260). In other words, as examples from Brazil, China, Indonesia, Turkey, and Viet Nam show, EP requires minimal intervention, with minimal expense or costs. EP might be attractive in such settings, but does not appear to be active everywhere. Further questions arise: Is EP actually being conducted in African, Indian, and Sri Lankan (or similar) contexts but the work is not disseminated? Or are traditional hierarchies so entrenched that the notion of practitioners (learners and teachers) conducting research is not yet acceptable? Or are other factors at play?

Moreover, few publications have directly drawn attention to inclusivity in practitioner research (honourable exceptions are Hanks, 2009, 2012; West & Crookes, 2017). Examples written by, for example, people with disabilities, or LGBTQ+ practitioners (etc.), are not foregrounded. Yet many of the accounts from teachers and learners conducting EP provide fruitful avenues for diversity and inclusivity to be explored. By including teachers and learners (etc.) as agentive practitioner researchers, deeper insights in to everyone's experiences and struggles may be gained, simply by inviting, surfacing, exploring and then attending to their puzzles.

A challenge for applied linguistics and language education is to make space for learners/teachers to puzzle about their practice and disseminate their work. As the examples above have indicated, learners, like teachers, do evince enthusiasm if they are given the space and respect to explore their experiences. Inclusive practitioner research, whether exploratory practice, action research, or reflective practice, is a route into that space,

challenging the hegemony of professional academics, and (re-)valuing the contributions of learners and teachers. Encouraging practitioners to engage in problematizing, puzzling, and exploring exemplifies the notion of bringing together ethical, social, pedagogical, and theoretical dimensions. Inclusive practitioner research, particularly in the form of EP, sets up epistemological challenges for academic cultures of research (and pedagogy), by questioning who does what, with whom, and how.

Despite these challenges, the notion of inclusive practitioner research reaches across social divides to include all voices, all experiences, if practitioners choose to engage, and if they are heard. It is inclusive in the sense of including learners as co-researchers alongside teachers and teacher educators who are demonstrating the 'self-inquiry dimension' (Johnson & Golombek, 2020) at the same time as curiously scrutinizing the world. The notion of inclusivity encompasses the principles of involving everybody and working to bring people together. So how can those in the mainstream make their research more inclusive? EP pushes at the boundaries of that mainstream envelope, including all those who are interested, and actively inviting those from often-marginalized groups to take part. This article reinforces that invitation. Inclusivity means that the work, ideas and insights of colleagues (learners and teachers) in education needs to be acknowledged and encouraged.

VI Conclusions

Inclusive practitioner research can be a glorious, subversive, propulsive force in the allied fields of applied linguistics and language education. EP affords opportunities for everyone to be included in exchanges around and dissemination of research into cultural, educational experiences. Such research addresses issues concerning not only language learning, but also humanity, social justice, and, in Arendt's (1958/1998) terms, the human condition. Although traditionally research has 'belonged' to researchers, while teaching/ learning 'belonged' to teachers and learners, in the twenty-first century, these rigidly defined roles do not hold. Many of us are 'transing' (translating, translocating, transitioning, translanguaging and transgressing) across/between/among established relations for teachers, learners, and researchers. The principles, amongst others, that Black Lives Matter, that we should #citewomen, and that we should research with people with disabilities, with people from diverse backgrounds, and with LGBTQ+ people (and not research 'on' these groups) are important qualities for truly impactful research and pedagogy. Puzzling affords insights going beyond the local, to contribute to wider discussions in the field. In considering the exploratory practice principles of involving everyone working together for mutual development, I have drawn attention to the affordances of inclusivity as an ethical, curious, political, socially-aware stance, leading to quality education and a more equal society. Inclusivity matters because teachers are leaving the profession, frustrated and burnt-out; it matters because the vast literature on (de-)motivation in our field suggests learners are disinterested and dispirited. By inviting learners and teachers to be curious about their worlds, and to exercise agency in exploring their puzzles and disseminating their findings, the field stands to gain greater insights into issues which are directly relevant to practitioners. Concurrently, practitioners gain if they are re-energized and re-motivated to engage joyfully with their learning and teaching.

Funding

ORCID iD

Judith Hanks ⓘD https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6750-7568

References

Allwright, D. (2003). Exploratory practice: Rethinking practitioner research in language teaching. *Language Teaching Research*, *7*, 113–141.

Allwright, D., & Hanks, J. (2009). *The developing language learner: An introduction to exploratory practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1958.)

Banegas, D.L., Bullock, D., Kiely, R. et al. (2021). Decentring ELT: Teacher associations as agents of change. *ELT Journal*, *76*, 69–76.

Banister, C. (2020). Exploring peer feedback processes and peer feedback meta-dialogues with learners of academic and business English. *Language Teaching Research*, *27*, 746–764.

Banister, C. (2021). Harnessing learner research agendas to continuously explore EAP learners' needs. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *51*, 101108

Biçer, K. (2018). Exploratory practice as a way of fostering learner autonomy. In K. Dikilitaş, & J. Hanks (Eds.), *Developing language teachers with exploratory practice: Innovations and explorations in language education* (pp. 141–156). Palgrave Macmillan.

Burns, A. (1999). *Collaborative action research for English language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.

Burns, A. (2005). Action research: An evolving paradigm? *Language Teaching*, *38*, 57–74.

Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners*. Routledge.

Canh, L.V. (2020). Remapping the teacher knowledge-base of language teacher education: A Vietnamese perspective. *Language Teaching Research*, *24*, 71–81.

Consoli, S. (2022). Practitioner research in a UK pre-sessional: The synergy between exploratory practice and student motivation. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *57*, 101108.

Costantino, A. (2019). Space and time for understanding(s): The recursive cycle of language education and classroom enquiry. In A. Kostoulas (Ed.), *Challenging boundaries in language education* (pp. 71–86). Springer.

Dalsky, D., & Garant, M. (2016). A 5,000-mile virtual collaboration of team teaching and team learning. In A. Tajino, T. Stewart, & D. Dalsky (Eds.), *Team teaching and team learning in the language classroom* (pp. 164–178). Routledge.

Dawson, S.J., Ihara, P., & Zhang, K. (2017). EAP learners exploring their own language learning lives through exploratory practice. In T. Stewart (Ed.), *Voices from the TESOL classroom: Participant inquiries in higher education classes* (pp. 7–13). TESOL Press.

Dikilitaş, K., & Hanks, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Developing language teachers with exploratory practice: Innovations and explorations in language education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Doğdu, B., & Arca, D. (2018). Why do students consider integrated skills lessons as a grammar and vocabulary lesson? In K. Dikilitaş, & J. Hanks (Eds.), *Developing language teachers with exploratory practice: Innovations and explorations in language education* (pp. 181–203). Palgrave Macmillan.

Farrell, T.S.C. (2007). *Reflective practice for language teachers: From research to practice*. Continuum Press.

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin.

Fully Inclusive Practitioner Research Website. (n.d.). *FIPR*. Available at: https://www.fullyinclusivepr.com (accessed June 2024).

Hanks, J. (2009). Inclusivity and collegiality in exploratory practice. In T. Yoshida, H. Imai, Y. Nakata, et al. (Eds.), *Researching language teaching and learning: An integration of practice and theory* (pp. 35–55). Peter Lang.

Hanks, J. (2012). Inclusivity and trust in exploratory practice: A case study of principles in practice. In E. Tarone, & D. Soneson (Eds.), *Expanding our horizons: Language teacher education in the 21st century* (pp. 117–138). CARLA.

Hanks, J. (2015a). 'Education is not just teaching': Learner thoughts on exploratory practice. *ELT Journal*, *69*, 117–128.

Hanks, J. (2015b). Language teachers making sense of exploratory practice. *Language Teaching Research*, *19*, 612–633.

Hanks, J. (2017a). *Exploratory practice in language teaching: Puzzling about principles and practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hanks, J. (2017b). Integrating research and pedagogy: An exploratory practice approach. *System*, *68*, 38–49.

Hanks, J. (2019a). From research-as-practice to exploratory practice-as-research in language teaching and beyond. *Language Teaching*, *52*, 143–187.

Hanks, J. (2019b). Identity and trust: Issues raised when practitioners engage in researching practice. *The European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL*, *8*, 3–22.

Hanks, J. (2019c). Involving everyone in enhancing quality of life in language education: Explorations and insights from praxis. *JACET International Convention Selected Papers*, *6*, 3–28.

Hanks, J. (2021). Co-production and multimodality: Learners as co-researchers exploring practice. *Educational Action Research*, *29*, 462–482.

Hanks, J. (2022a). De-mystifying the nimbus of research: Re-igniting practitioners' interest in exploring EAP. *Journal of EAP*, *60*, 101176.

Hanks, J. (2022b). Integrating research into language teaching and learning: Learners and teachers as co-researchers exploring praxis. *Language Teaching*, *55*, 217–232.

Hanks, J., Miller, I.K., Cunha, M.I.A., et al. (in preparation). 'What is in our brains?' Practitioners collaboratively exploring practice in language education.

Hiratsuka, T. (2016). Actualizing exploratory practice (EP) principles with team teachers in Japan. *System*, *57*, 109–119.

Johnson, K.E., Golombek, P.R. (Eds.). (2002). *Teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development*. Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, K.E., & Golombek, P.R. (2020). Informing and transforming language teacher education pedagogy. *Language Teaching Research*, *24*, 116–127.

Kahneman, D. (2012). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Penguin Random House.

Karanfil, T. (2018). Investigating and understanding 'free reading' experiences through exploratory practice. In K. Dikilitaş, & J. Hanks (Eds.), *Developing language teachers with exploratory practice: Innovations and explorations in language education* (pp. 61–82). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kato, Y., & Hanks, J. (2021). Learner-initiated exploratory practice: Revisiting curiosity. *ELT Journal*, *76*, 421–431.

Kramsch, C. (2009). *The multilingual subject*. Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (2021). *Language as symbolic power*. Cambridge University Press.

Kuchah, K. (2018). English-medium instruction in an English–French bilingual setting: Issues of quality and equity in Cameroon. *Comparative Education*, *52*, 311–327.

Lyra, I., Braga, S.F., & Braga, W.G. (2003). What puzzles teachers in Rio de Janeiro, and what keeps them going? *Language Teaching Research*, *7*, 143–162.

Mann, S., & Walsh, S. (2017). *Reflective practice in English language teaching: Research-based principles and practices*. Routledge.

Miller, I.K. (2009). 'Puzzle-driven' language teacher development: The contribution of exploratory practice. In T. Yoshida, H. Imai, Y. Nakata, et al (Eds.), *Researching language teaching and learning: An integration of practice and theory* (pp. 77–93). Peter Lang.

Miller, I.K. (2010). Construindo parcerias universidade–escola: Caminhos éticos e questões crítico-reflexivas [Building university–school partnerships: Ethical paths and critical-reflexive questions]. In T. Giminez, & M.C.G. Góes (Eds.), *Formação de professores de línguas na América Latina e transformação social* (pp. 109–129). Pontes Editores.

Miller, I.K. (2012). A prática exploratória na educação continuada de professores de línguas: Inserções acadêmicas e teorizações híbridas [Exploratory practice in the continuing education of language teachers: Academic insertions and hybrid theorizations]. In K. Silva, F.G. Daniel, S.M. Kaneko-Marques, & A.C.B. Salomão (Eds.), *A formação de professores de línguas: novos olhares* (pp. 317–339). Pontes Editores.

Miller, I.K. (2013). Formação inicial e continuada de professores de línguas: Da eficiência à reflexão crítica e ética [Initial and continuing training of language teachers: From efficiency to critical and ethical reflection]. In L.P. Moita Lopes (Ed.), *Linguística aplicada na modernidade recente: Festschrift para Antonieta Celani* (pp. 99–121). Parábola Editorial.

Miller, I.K., Barreto, B.C., Kuschnir, A., et al. (2008). Prática exploratória: Questões e desafios [Exploratory practice: Issues and challenges]. In G. Gil, & M.H. Vieira-Abrahão (Eds.), *Educação de professores de línguas: Os desafios do formador* (pp. 145–165). Pontes Editores.

Miller, I.K., Côrtes, T.C.R., Oliveira, A.F.A., & Braga, W. (2015). Exploratory practice in initial teacher education: Working collaboratively for understandings. In D. Bullock & R. Smith (Eds.), *Teachers research!* (pp. 65–71). IATEFL.

Miller, I.K., Cunha, M.I.A., & Allwright, D. (2020). Teachers as practitioners of learning: The lens of exploratory practice. *Educational Action Research*, *29*, 447–461.

Moraes Bezerra, I.C.R., & Miller, I.K. (2015). Exploratory practice and new literacy studies: Building epistemological connections. *Pensares em Revista*, *6*, 90–128.

Oncul, G., & Webb, R. (2018). Intertwining Exploratory practice with 'Standard' research practices in foreign language education. In K. Dikilitas & J. Hanks (Eds.), *Developing language teachers with Exploratory practice: Innovations and explorations in language education* (pp. 119–140). Palgrave Macmillan.

Pinner, R. (2016). Trouble in paradise: Self-assessment and the Tao. *Language Teaching Research*, *20*, 181–195.

Pinter, A., & Kuchah, K. (2021). *Ethical and methodological issues in researching young language learners in school contexts*. Multilingual Matters.

Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group. (2020). *Por que trabalhar para entender a vida em sala de aula?* [Why work to understand life in the classroom?]. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/czk54amx (accessed June 2024).

Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice Group. (2021). *Why seek to understand life in the classroom? Experiences of the Exploratory Practice Group*. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/4fc853mx (accessed June 2024).

Slimani-Rolls, A., & Kiely, R. (2019). *Exploratory practice for continuing professional development: An innovative approach for language teachers*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Tajino, A., & Smith, C. (2016). Beyond team teaching: An introduction to team learning in language education. In A. Tajino, T. Stewart, & D. Dalsky (Eds.), *Team teaching and team learning in the language classroom* (pp. 11–27). Routledge.

Tajino, A., Stewart, T., & Dalsky, D. (2016). *Team teaching and team learning in the language classroom: Collaboration for innovation in ELT*. Routledge.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. (n.d.). *The 17 goals*. Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/goals (accessed June 2024).

Ushioda, E. (2016). Language learning motivation through a small lens: A research agenda. *Language Teaching, 49*(4), 564–577. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444816000173

Vaattovaara, J. (2017). Evidencing the passion of language teachers' research engagement: The case of a university pedagogy ALMS course module. *Language Learning in Higher Education*, *7*, 461–473.

Webb, R., & Sarina, T. (2018). The role of Exploratory Practice and international collaboration in the university classroom: A guide to fostering students' democratic competences. In K. Dikilitas & J. Hanks (Eds.), *Developing language teachers with exploratory practice: Innovations and explorations in language education* (pp. 157–180). Palgrave Macmillan.

West, G.B., & Crookes, G. (2017). Critical practitioner research in language education under difficult circumstances. In S.A. Mirhosseini (Ed.), *Reflections on qualitative research in language and literacy education* (pp. 139–155). Springer.

Zeichner, K.M., & Noffke, S.E. (2001). Practitioner research. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 298–330). American Educational Research Association.

Zheng, C. (2012). Understanding the learning process of peer feedback activity: An ethnographic study of exploratory practice. *Language Teaching Research*, *16*, 109–126.