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Conclusion: Developing in/through Exploratory Practice

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Editing this book has provided us with the invaluable opportunity to monitor the whole process of engaging in practitioner research carried out in the Exploratory Practice (EP) framework. Often, practitioners are provided with a one-stop workshop or a series of workshops and left alone during the implementation stage, without identifying how the learning process continued or whether it even did. EP, on the other hand, emphasises sustainability and deep understanding. By inviting practitioners to write up their experiences of the EP process, we have come to see how they developed their understanding of the original puzzles and reported on the development in their beliefs and assumptions. Our mentoring experience has led

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to mutual development as well as a greater breadth and depth of understanding for all those involved in the work leading up to this volume.

In Chap. 2, Hanks and Dikilitaş provided three narratives of how they introduced Exploratory Practice to teachers, teacher educators and curriculum developers in a series of Professional Development workshops in different geographical regions. They concluded that teachers develop their understandings at their own pace and in different ways, which is in marked contrast to what is often expected in more traditionally structured training programmes. Encouraging the participants to puzzle about their language teaching (or teacher training, or curriculum development) experiences, and to engage in researching their own contexts, seemed to enhance quality of life in a variety of ways. In Chap. 3, Trotman described how, by mentoring a group of novice teacher researchers in his university, he had the opportunity to retrospectively compare action research to EP, which led him to developing a stronger understanding of what EP is. He also noted that his understandings continued to develop as he engaged in mentoring EP practitioners. Karanfil in Chap. 4 found out that he was holding assumptions about his students' reading habits. This led him to generate varied further questions. He also reported that these new questions required another engagement in EP in the future. Ergünay in Chap. 5 also mentioned his awareness of the needs of his learners regarding reading and the process of deciding to plan more extensive reading activities. Mumford in Chap. 6 described the process of engaging in EP. He not only developed further puzzles in his mind, but also reported that he could use the findings as classroom materials. This is one of the key principles of EP in that the process benefited learners as they developed confidence in making presentations. His experience was a good example of how EP could allow teachers and students to co-develop their understanding in mutually beneficial ways. In Chap. 7, Öncül and Webb probed their initial ideas about how frequent testing is perceived by students and instructors. They described this process of discovery (that frequent testing can in fact be something positive) as an excellent opportunity. This illustrated Öncül and Webb actualizing a real learning experience for themselves as practitioners.

Another learning experience was reflected by Biçer in Chap. 8. Biçer examined institutional underrepresentation of learners in the school and

developed an EP-based research plan through which student inclusion and representation could be enhanced at the academic and administrative levels. Similarly, in Chap. 9, Webb and Sarina looked into how they would be able to create opportunities to activate, guide and strengthen learners' democratic participation and competences in the classroom in two different contexts. They discussed how they managed to transcend cultural differences, which helped them to create a more dynamic and engaging learning space.

In addition to providing an opportunity to challenge assumptions, EP is a powerful tool for raising awareness in the scope of puzzles. Doğdu and Arca in Chap. 10 described how realization of what lies behind their puzzles helped them learn about the curriculum they were managing and developing. They mentioned that they could consider the emerging issues in the further planning of their curriculum, a real process of addressing in-house needs at macro as well as micro level within the university. Such local adaptations could make the programme and the teaching more relevant, thereby leading to more and better learning on the part of learners.

On the basis of these insights gained from the practitioners' accounts, we draw the following conclusions, related to the EP principles outlined in Allwright (2003), Allwright and Hanks (2009) and Hanks (2017):

1. EP evokes further questions and keeps practitioners thinking (*Trotman Chap. 3; Karanfil, Chap. 4*) in a positive state of 'being puzzled'
2. EP investigations themselves spark further puzzles (*Mumford, Chap. 6; Webb and Sarina, Chap. 9*) as research and pedagogy are integrated
3. EP helps with re-questioning of existing assumptions (*Karanfil, Chap. 4; Öncül and Webb, Chap. 7*) as understanding is put before problem-solving
4. EP helps practitioners make pedagogical decisions and plan further practices (*Ergünay Chap. 5; Doğdu and Arca, Chap. 10*)
5. EP allows for opportunities for teachers, teacher educators and students to co-develop (*Hanks and Dikilitaş, Chap. 2; Mumford, Chap. 6; Biçer, Chap. 8*) in a healthy cycle of mutual development
6. EP enables a sustainable exchange of ideas among teachers, colleagues and students (*Karanfil, Chap. 4; Ergünay Chap. 5; Webb and Sarina*

Chap. 9) through the processes of working together and including everyone.

EP is an exploratory process of learning and development, practitioners develop puzzles on the basis of their experiences and ask WHY questions. As exemplified above, assumptions could be could be rigorously and systematically examined, and critically analysed using data and artefacts gathered from the classroom, and so initiate another chapter in the lives of the practitioners.

It should not be thought, however, that the framework of EP principles is static. Instead, Hanks (2017) argues that this is a living structure, which can grow and adapt. We contend that the twin notions of curiosity and puzzling should also be incorporated as essential aspects of EP work. The principles, then, can be reconfigured as a web of interconnected ideas, as shown in Fig. 11.1.
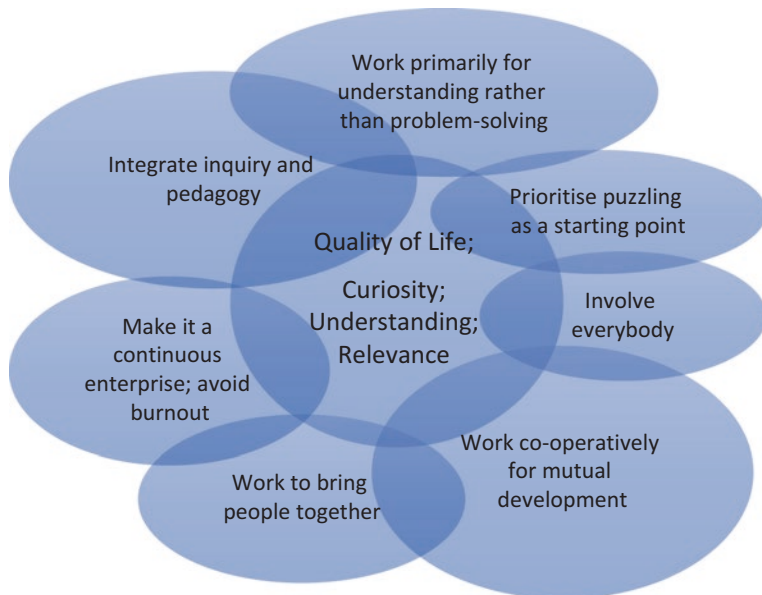

Fig. 11.1 The Exploratory Practice principles as an interconnected whole (adapted from Hanks, 2017, p. 227)

EP, like any other form of practitioner research, provides opportunities for individually relevant modes of development initiated and sustained by teachers (see Dikilitaş, 2015a, 2015b; Wyatt, Burns, & Hanks, 2016; Wu, 2006). The developmental path occurs differently in that practitioners can proceed according to their own capacities and inclinations, as argued extensively elsewhere (for example, Breen, 2006; Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970). Depending on their interests, histories and relevance to their specific teaching contexts, they will engage at different levels, different rates and different times, as is appropriate for their working lives.

EP development is person-specific and deeply linked to context. Free from top-down, rigidly structured training programmes, it provides space for practitioners to explore what interests them. By not imposing previously set goals and objectives but by encouraging the freedom to set their own agendas and discover for themselves, we believe that the teachers, teacher educators and curriculum developers who have contributed to this volume were able to exercise their agency in conducting research in their own settings. We observed how they unpacked their puzzles in ways that were most meaningful to them, their colleagues and their learners.

At the same time, we have developed our understandings of EP in the sense of the struggles or challenges that EP practitioners faced. We cannot really know what students think or feel until after we ask them and interpret what they have reported, and the same is true of teachers, teacher trainers, teacher educators and others.

Puzzles can be better explored and understood by the individuals who thought of them (rather than by outsiders) because they often emerge through long-held individual experiences and mental conflicts regarding classroom contexts. So, exploration is a result of the practitioner's ability to connect the dispersed pieces in the context to understand the whole picture regarding the various sources of evidence. Such a process requires the cognitive engagement of the puzzle holders in relating the evidence to their own perspectives. As Holliday (2002) argues, writing becomes an integral part of the analytic research process. This book exemplifies the efforts of teachers to generate context-specific knowledge, which informs their language teaching in ways that could not have been described or prescribed before. We present these chapters not as recipes to be replicated but rather to inspire others to begin their own explorations.

We believe that this book will add to the growing body of evidence of practitioners' researching their own practices and insights. We hope it will inspire other teachers, teacher educators and curriculum developers wishing to research their own classrooms, institutions and educational cultures in/through EP, as well as help develop practitioners' confidence to write up and publish their work, whether formally (in a book like this one) or more informally (using the creative possibilities of digital media). Above all, we believe that such publications might provide professional development sources for others who might like to work with a similar purpose, while also moving the field forward by considering the EP principled framework itself.

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