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Enacting Exploratory Practice Principles: Mentoring Language Teaching Professionals

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Introduction

Exploratory Practice (EP) is an original form of practitioner research in language education. It aims to integrate research, learning and teaching, and promotes the idea of teachers and learners puzzling about their language learning/teaching experience (Allwright, 2003, 2015). To do this it uses 'normal' pedagogic practices as investigative tools (Dar, 2015; Hanks, 2016; Miller, Cortes, de Oliveira, & Braga, 2015). To date, though, little has been done to investigate EP in language teacher education. In this chapter I outline how I mentored five language teachers who used such tools to investigate what puzzled them about their classrooms.

I provide here an account of my first venture into adding EP to the two other forms of practitioner research offered at Izmir Katip Çelebi University (IKCU) as a means of professional development (Trotman, 2015a, 2015b).

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I outline issues involved with mentoring five teachers carrying out EP. In particular, I investigate the extent to which the seven core principles were suitably implemented in their EP studies. The chapter also contains interviews with the teachers which probe their actions and beliefs. First, though, it is necessary to outline the seven EP principles used in this study:

The 'what' issues

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

The 'who' issues

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

The 'how' issues

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

(Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 260, original emphases)

I also link the outcome of the EP studies to Allwright's (2001) conceptual overview and analysis of the three major processes of teacher development: Reflective Practice, Action Research (AR) and EP. A further intention was to carry out this study with regard for general ethical issues in EP (Allwright, 2005; Hanks, 2015a) and microethical issues outlined by Kubanyiova (2015). This chapter explains my realisation of the benefits of EP to practitioners—both teachers and learners. It then looks at the context in which the study took place. After that I describe the outcome of a presentation I gave to all English Language Teaching (ELT) colleagues at IKCU on EP, following which I mentored five teachers on their EP studies involving students in their own classes for approximately one academic year. Each study is explained as a single EP case study (Stake, 2003). The chapter ends with my reflections on each case, in particular on the degree to which core principles of EP were implemented.

Background

My recent ELT background had largely concerned teacher education, principally mentoring teacher-researchers. I had completed a doctoral study (Trotman, 2010) into the beneficial features of oral feedback on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing, which was largely based on Burns' (2005) model of AR and involved reading work by Borg (2003), Dörnyei (2007) and Richards (2003). I had also worked for three years at IKCU with teachers on AR studies (Dikilitaş, Smith, & Trotman, 2015; Trotman, 2015a) and more recently on the uniqueness and commonality involved in case study research (Trotman, 2016).

An Epiphany

My involvement began as I joined a series of EP workshops which took place in Izmir over one summer. These were split into two parts: interactive input (in June), followed by sessions in September evaluating how far we had come in terms of setting up personal EP work and encouraging colleagues in our various institutions to set up theirs.

At the outset, although I was familiar with the term 'Exploratory Practice', my initial thoughts were that it was simply a variation on, and possibly less regarded version of AR. I was not optimistic about getting much out of the workshops apart from having the chance to catch up with fellow teacher educators from other universities who I tended to see only at conferences. A more detailed (if rather quirky) account of how I felt about EP mid-way through the course can be found in Hanks (2017). This outlines how I was not at the time exactly 'on-board' with the idea of EP, and especially the constant refinement of participants' puzzles during sessions. Just when it seemed those in the group had summarised what puzzled them about their classroom work, the presenters were at pains to make the puzzles more specific. On reflection, I think my sense of frustration was brought about by the fact that I would not actually be investigating my own classrooms, but working with teachers who I was planning to introduce to EP. Since I felt there was no need at this stage to have an actual 'puzzle' in my mind, it was seemingly impossible to refine

it. It was only later when I began mentoring five teachers that I realised the necessity for this.

The nature of the sessions on EP, which firstly involved presenter-input followed by small group-work discussion, eventually led me to reflect on my earlier doctoral studies (Trotman, 2010) involving AR. I began to compare and contrast my experience on this with the seven core principles (Allwright & Hanks, 2009) on which EP is based. Such reflection produced trigger points, each of which eventually became cumulative in effect. This formed a realisation in my mind that EP had greater potential for research purposes than I had earlier felt was the case.

The initial and most striking realisation concerned three of the core principles. In contrast to the principles of EP concerning *minimising the burden* and *developing collegiality* (Allwright, 2003; Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2015a), in my doctoral study I had imposed upon colleagues who had sometimes only reluctantly agreed to help generate and gather data for me in their own and students' lunch-breaks. I also reflected on how, during my PhD viva, the external examiner had pointed out how I seemed to have simply 'used' the students without requesting the use of their names, thus empowering them by acknowledging their presence in the thesis, or indeed sharing with them any knowledge acquired. In short, a third EP principle, this time of *mutual development* (Allwright, 2005; Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2015b) was noticeably lacking.

On further reflection, such issues were probably the main causes of teacher-participant attrition throughout my five-year part-time doctoral study. For other researchers intending to use students less as subjects and more as co-researchers, Hanks provides an interesting account of the experiences of learners in an EAP context engaging with EP for the first time. She writes there of how "Learners welcomed the responsibilities of setting the agenda (via their puzzles) and driving the EP work forward" (2015a, p. 127). This was in contrast to my experience on the doctoral programme. This time, then, I was concerned about how far teachers and I would be able to adhere to the seven core principles of EP outlined above. The eventual puzzle that I had formed in my own mind by the end of the course, one which had led to my frustration when asked in sessions

to work on this puzzlement (at that time I felt it required no further fine-tuning), was as follows:

> *In which ways and to what extent would first-time teacher researchers be able to help implement the seven core principles of EP in their chosen studies, and how would they deal with research-related issues arising?*

The Context for Engaging in Research

The present study took place in a state university in Turkey, a context in which job-security is almost guaranteed. There is no obligation to conduct research of any kind. Teachers' attendance at staff meetings is, however, a must, and although such meetings are usually held for administrative purposes rather than professional development, in a departure from the norm, one was devoted fully to a presentation on EP given by myself. Prior to the actual presentation the thirty participants took part in a ten-minute discussion led by me, at the start of which I asked them to work alone or with a partner to discuss what they felt were the likely benefits of engaging in teacher-research. The discussion elicited the following reasons why teachers might like to carry out their own projects:

- they might discover things that could improve their own, and thus students', classroom performance
- as research is—at least for some people—intrinsically interesting, they could absorb themselves in analysing data in their free time, as a result of which they might achieve realisations about their work
- they could present their studies at a local or national conference and invite colleagues to listen, following which they could publish their work in a local or national journal
- they would strengthen their CV by providing evidence of research-related publications when applying for an Assistant-Professorship positions or any other academic post.

The final point, and one that I hoped would be the most encouraging, was that they were working within what I believed was a supportive

professional environment. There was no top-down pressure from the administration to conduct research, thus with suitable mentoring teachers could explore issues within their own classroom context exactly how and when they wished. These features largely reflect the kinds of action that school leaders can take to promote an environment that is conducive to teacher-research, plus the practical measures that facilitators can take to make teacher-research a more productive experience for teachers. Key features Borg lists for producing a conducive environment include the following:

- actively promoting teacher research and giving it a high profile within the school
- creating opportunities for teachers to share their research findings with other teachers
- rewarding teachers' commitment to research.
  (summarised from Borg, 2015, p. 109)

Key practical measures listed by Borg for facilitators to take include:

- facilitating, as far as possible, teachers' access to resources, such as electronic journals and books on how to do research
- supporting teachers in creating a structure for their teacher research projects—for example, by helping them create a timetable with immediate milestones
- working towards a final concrete output—for example, a short written report and/or presentations at a staff meeting or similar event.
  (ibid.)

Presenting Exploratory Practice and Action Research

Thirty language teachers attended my presentation which looked at the similarities, differences and possible overlaps between AR and EP, plus a more detailed overview of the seven core principles of EP. Also explained at the session was the concept of a 'PEPA'—a 'Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activity' (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 29)—the use of

which would enable necessary data to be collected during lesson time. It was important to explain that activities not normally used in classroom teaching and which may disturb the normal course of events cannot be regarded as a PEPA. I therefore provided examples of PEPAs from our daily teaching lives, such as surveys, questionnaires, writing diaries, interviews, and transcripts of recordings of oral pair and group work. Two examples of slides used in the session appear below.

> *What is a **PEPA**?*
>
> *'**P**otentially **E**xploitable **P**edagogical **A**ctivity'*
>
> *EP involves using a classroom task (**one that you would normally use with your students**) as a research tool in order to collect the necessary data. Examples: Surveys. Questionnaires. Writing diaries. Interviews. Pair and group work. Others? Maybe you can tell me some….*

My final slide in the presentation illustrated the following, which represented my current thoughts on AR and EP.

> *"If it seeks to understand a puzzle by minimising the burden to all involved by carrying out the research in classroom time with carefully planned PEPAs, and involves all concerned in mutual development, then that's exploratory practice. However, if it seeks to address a problem and provide solutions in order to improve matters, while at the same time intervening in (and possibly interrupting classroom events) then that's probably action research. It is quite possible, however, for action research and exploratory practice to contain elements of each other."* (Trotman, in Hanks, 2017, pp. 253–254)

The remainder of the presentation involved teachers discussing together and completing the following guided sentences:

- *"One thing that puzzles me about my classroom teaching is…"*
- *"I think I can collect data to investigate this puzzle in my own classroom by using the following PEPA(s)…"*

Providing the Initial Impetus

Following the presentation, five colleagues came to me to express their interest in the possibility of carrying out an EP study with me as their mentor. Individual weekly time-slots were arranged for each of the teachers, during which they made more specific their respective areas of intended research involving EP. Time was limited to half an hour at lunch-time on Fridays, so each person had five minutes to provide an update on their work, while others fed back to them. Colleagues who were not currently researching but had previously carried out research with me at IKCU, and whose work also appears in Dikilitaş et al. (2015), were also invited to attend and feed back. My overall aim was—in line with Borg's (2015) practical measures listed earlier—to further develop a culture of research within the preparatory school.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning the EP studies, I gave a follow-up presentation to the group of five teachers based on Kubanyiova (2015). This summarised her work on the *macroethical* and *microethical* principles of situated research, based on terms originally used by Guillemin and Gillam (2004). 'Macroethics' concerns such matters as gaining informed consent of participants and guaranteeing, where necessary, anonymity and confidentiality. In line with a further macroethical feature Kubanyiova (2015) outlines, it was also agreed that any benefits gained in terms of knowledge acquired from the EP studies would be fairly distributed to the ELT community both at our institution and beyond (Ortega, 2012). The latter point is, of course, once again in line with the EP principle of involving everybody as practitioners developing their own understanding (Allwright, 2005). Kubanyiova separates 'microethical' considerations into *the ethics of care* and *virtue ethics*. In the former, the researcher is expected to show sensitivity to subjects involved in the study, i.e. not bullying them into participation. In the latter, the researcher is expected to show reflexivity when s/he discerns discomfort on the part of subjects. Later in this chapter, I explain how

both considerations applied when one of the five participants unexpectedly withdrew from the EP research group.

Refining Puzzles

With the onset of the new semester, which for all five researchers meant a heavy classroom load, personal EP studies began to take place in four areas that, while perhaps already well-researched within the ELT profession, are of clear concern for novice teachers: student motivation; error-correction; teacher talking time; issuing classroom instructions.

Data Collection Via PEPAs

Soon after this a key issue arose concerning the data collection stage. How could 'rich' data be generated for teachers by beginner-level learners unless they—the learners—were allowed to respond in their L1? As a group we thus decided that where possible, to avoid unnecessary L1 use, it would be more beneficial to carry out surveys during class time which were to be completely in English. However, following normal language classroom principles and practices, where necessary, explanations would be given in Turkish. It should be pointed out that the use of normal classroom activities such as surveys (i.e. PEPAs) during class time enables a large amount of data to be collected relatively easily.

Researcher Interviews

While data analysis and writing up research was on-going, at this point I also carried out individual interviews with the researchers. I had various reasons for doing so. Firstly, I believed it would provide useful first-hand experience for them of the structure of a research-related interview. This would prove beneficial should they themselves wish to interview students in order to probe answers previously elicited from surveys they used as their PEPAs. In particular, by requesting permission at the start of the recording, I was keen to model the principle concerning the ethics of

getting informed consent (Kubanyiova, 2015, p. 177). Secondly, due to time constraints throughout the teaching week which tended to limit contact, I wished to probe the researchers' opinions and attitudes towards research in general, and more specifically their own studies. With participants' permission, interviews were recorded. They were semi-structured and adapted from questions in Borg (2013, chapter five), all of which I had used in Trotman (2015b). There they were used to probe perceptions of an earlier group of teacher-researchers with more experience of classroom teaching. Each of the five researchers in the present study were asked the following:

- *What is your current perception of research?*
- *What type of research are you carrying out; EP or AR?*
- *Why did you decide to engage in this type of teacher-research?*
- *How do you feel about being a teacher-researcher?*
- *Which puzzle are you investigating and why?*
- *If you are facing any issues or difficulties, how are you dealing with them?*
- *What do you feel will be the benefits of your EP/AR studies?*

In the interview accounts below, the dots indicate a pause between the end of an answer to one question and the beginning of the next answer.

Case Studies

EP Case Study One: Poppy

In her third year of teaching, Poppy was experiencing difficulty with a beginner-level class which she felt was low on motivation. Her puzzle was:

Why is it that I think my class have a low level of motivation in English lessons with me?
How can I explore and understand this and how, if necessary, can I improve matters?

For her first PEPA she carried out an initial survey that measured on a Likert scale how motivated this class were. The score was considerably lower than for her other classes. Wishing to probe responses, she next carried out a follow-up survey which asked students to complete sentences in their L1 about what motivated them and what tended to demotivate them in her lessons. Based on her findings, she incorporated within her normal classroom routine relevant activities such as the use of film clips, which students had requested. She later interviewed selected students and was able to detect how many of them appeared to be visual learners. Following this realisation, and due to the introduction of more visual material in the lesson, Poppy noted in our interview how their levels of motivation had improved.

Poppy: *Research is a way to understand my students and my teaching… in order to empathise with them I asked questions…at first my study was exploratory practice as I was trying to understand…but when I started to do attitudinal surveys it became action research as I began to search for solutions…I decided to carry out research as I felt inadequate as a teacher…earlier I felt like a novice but this has changed…and now I feel like I'm doing something good for my teaching…my topic is motivation…my class were not motivated and I thought the problem was me….concerning issues…writing my research in a second language is not easy for me…especially novice teachers will benefit from my research…they'll change their views of their students and understand the difficulties they face student responses to my second survey have awakened an awareness of myself as a teacher..*

In her words we can detect how carrying out EP affected Poppy's motivation. She moved from an early feeling of low-esteem into a degree of enlightenment.

Follow-up: It is interesting to note how, although the original focus in her study was EP, this later developed into AR. This is a possible and reasonable, if not always necessary or inevitable process. Poppy's study, in fact, reflects aspects of Allwright's (2001) conceptualisation of three major macro processes for understanding. She had moved from contemplation for understanding onto action for understanding and eventually action for change.

Poppy later successfully completed the CELTA (Certificate in Language Teaching to Adults) and subsequently decided she no longer wished to

continue with her study. In line with Kubanyiova's (2015) ethics of care (and all responsible research), we both agreed that the door would remain open should she wish to return. And in fact, on my contacting her six months later, Poppy agreed to allow me to use her data in this chapter.

I now turn to the second Case Study.

EP Case Study Two: Amanda and Karen

Amanda and Karen, who were both in their first year of teaching, initially decided to collaborate on an EP study. Their puzzle ran thus: *During speaking activities, when and in which ways do our students prefer to be corrected?* This involved explorations of student preferences for oral error-correction among both of their beginner-level classes, which each contained approximately twenty-five students. For a PEPA they each administered the same survey concerning *when* students preferred to be corrected.

For Karen, her quantitative data analysis revealed how, in contrast to what she had learned from her teaching course about the benefits of providing feedback on students' utterances, most of the class preferred instant rather than delayed correction. After discussing the results with her students, Karen invited me to participate in their classroom time in a class debate in English on the pedagogical principles involved in such a matter.

Here is Karen's account of this debate:

Karen: *After the written data that l collected from my students l wanted to learn their ideas verbally. Thus l asked them to explain their opinions related to their answers in the data forms. […] The reason why l asked my students their ideas is the surprising results that l got after the survey. Most of my students supported their ideas by saying "we learn better when our mistakes are corrected instantly" and also they wanted to be corrected all the time. We, my supervisor and l, tried to explain that it is not possible to correct each mistake all the time because of the time limit of each class and also the disturbing nature of being corrected all the time. At the end of the discussion they agreed that their teachers may ignore minor mistakes like everyday words or phrases that we use in the class, but still the idea of being corrected (instantly) should not be ignored totally*.

Interview with Karen: *Research means dealing with an issue to improve my skills as a teacher because after effort something new comes out… ours is data based research… we're collecting data and according to the results we're going to shape our research, I'm doing it to improve my skills as a teacher… and understand students and find out the gaps, problems in teaching. It's a really good experience for me, especially when I compare myself with friends at other universities who don't have the opportunity… error correction is our topic, even when our students have an answer they hesitate because they're afraid of making a mistake…data collection is an issue…our students are reluctant to speak so I cannot correct them and collect data…so as a PEPA I got them to create dialogues from movie star quotes…our research will help us to see how our students prefer to be corrected…*

It is clear in the following comments that Karen was startled by the outcome of her data analysis. By sharing her findings with her students, Karen both consciously and explicitly acted according to the EP principle of developing collegiality.

Follow-up: Karen later commented: *Ninety per-cent wanted to be corrected instantly…I shared my findings with them…because I was surprised… I wasn't expecting to see these results… they wanted correction in each case… grammar…vocabulary… they think this is the role of the teacher… but I disagreed with them… this is something that should not be generalised…they want correction but although I do it… I'm not convinced they all benefit… just the ones who want it…my students kept asking me… how is your research going?*

It is noticeable in this regard that her sharing data and opinions led to the class feeling, as with Hanks (2017), that they were at least partially responsible for setting the agenda. Although they refer to '*your*', meaning Karen's own research, they displayed more than polite interest in knowing what she was finding out.

Since Amanda's data analysis indicated how her own group preferred delayed correction, she and Karen decided to continue separate, individual, parallel EP studies.

Amanda: *Teaching requires improvement and research is a good opportunity to assist with this… everybody working in a university should carry out research….I'm happy as a researcher because I want to be a successful teacher*

and as a beginner I'm doing my best…our subject is error correction… we have to correct their errors but without discouraging them.…time is an issue but also planning and organising the steps…plus reading about research… students may benefit from our study… it's important to know and prioritise their opinions… and it'll maybe help me find a better job..

Follow-up: After she had completed her analysis, Amanda told me that she had not consciously shared any findings with her class, which perhaps breaches the EP principle of developing collegiality. She did point out, however: *I've learned that the teacher should ask students their preferences…I didn't share them…but I formed my lessons in accordance with their answers*. In this way, indirectly and perhaps only implicitly, Amanda had in fact observed the EP principle of developing collegiality. At the same time she had developed her own understanding of what puzzled her.

That both Amanda and Karen were led to question their own assumptions regarding error-correction fits well into EP concerning principle two, which concerns working to understand before thinking about solutions. At the same time, the work of each once again reflects aspects of Allwright (2001) in terms of firstly contemplation for understanding and then action for understanding. However, unlike Poppy, they felt it was sufficient to stop at this point and not become involved in action for change.

I now turn to Case Study three.

EP Case Study Three: Harrison

In his third year of language teaching, Harrison's puzzles were "*Why do I dominate the classroom discourse?*" and "*How can I reduce unnecessary teacher talking time and encourage more productive student talking time?*" He had become aware of such issues following his viewing of a lesson which had been video-recorded by an observing teacher-trainer. Harrison felt uncomfortable after noting in the video how he tended to dominate the classroom interaction. To an extent, Harrison had thus experienced Critical Learning Episodes (CLE) during the lesson (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2014, p. 27).

Harrison initially collected data by administering a survey among his class which requested attitudinal information on student preferences in his lessons concerning talking time. From the analysis he realised that pair and group work would at least enable the possibility for an increase in student talking time. Harrison later asked his class to work in pairs, each recording their dialogue on mobile phones and listening to themselves later in the lesson and at home. He followed this up by working with each pair on their dialogue, pointing out how they could extend and improve language produced therein.

Harrison: *At first the notion of research was foreign to me…but now I think it's like a mirror in which I can see myself…I can see how I've changed… my study is exploratory practice…which is searching…reading the results of surveys and data…action research also has data but EP's about recording the information you get during teaching …honestly…I want a good cv…but after learning about research I want to continue…I really see that I'm improving myself…it's nice to explain your experiences…and share with colleagues… my topic is speaking less…and getting students to speak more…I used to ask students a question one by one and talk all the time…I was tired and bored… time is an issue…I have lots of things in my mind…I want to write…but it's late at night…a benefit is I can show different things about my style to my colleagues*.

Follow-up: Harrison had collected thirty-five short recordings of his students engaged in pair-work during classroom time. Prior to his analysis, he felt that the problem with a shortage of output by the students was due to the dominant teacher, such as he felt himself to be. From anonymous written feedback by his students, his eventual findings were that seventy-five per cent of the time the students admitted their own shyness was the reason. One remark he recalled was: *I don't want to speak as I feel all my friends are better than me*.

Like Karen, Harrison had observed the EP principle of developing collegiality by sharing his findings about this with his class, which once again led to discussion on how they could develop their oral skills. The EP study carried out by Harrison, like Poppy's, concerned all three macro processes outlined by Allwright (2001). He had initially engaged in contemplation then action for understanding and finally action for change.

I end with Case Study four.

EP Case Study Four: Tracey

Tracey had recently completed the CELTA and was in her first year of teaching. Her initial puzzle concerned how to issue classroom instructions so that her students would be able to engage in tasks. After further refinement, the actual puzzle ran thus: *How can I ensure my pre-task instructions are given to my students clearly enough for them to understand and then participate in the set tasks?* For a PEPA, Tracey firstly prepared an eleven item survey.

Tracey: *My research is exploratory practice… I realised a kind of problem in my classes and I wanted to understand the reason for it but I'm not looking for the solution. I want to understand my students better…while teaching I can also learn something new so my students' feedback is very important for me and maybe I can realise the points I'd not noticed before…my topic was giving instructions before the task.. I realised some students didn't understand some points and for some tasks I noticed this immediately…but after a few weeks of this…for more confusing tasks…during the tasks they couldn't do the things they were supposed to do…while monitoring I noticed they were doing nothing…they were asking each other what to do…one research issue for me is that because of their language level students have difficulty expressing themselves…but for it to be EP it has to be in English…my students will benefit from my research because now I know they need more instruction checking questions*.

Following the analysis of data from the initial survey and after sharing the results with her class, Tracey designed a follow-up survey which probed students' perceptions.

Follow-up: Tracey later commented on her experience as follows:

My EP research highlights unnoticed problems about my instructions… survey outcomes showed how 16 students needed to ask for instructions to their classmates…after that I preferred to go deep into the reasons behind these problematic instructions…as a result I found out that several students had problems with complicated, fast and not loud enough instructions before the tasks…so these results reminded me that giving instructions to lower-level classes has a critical importance that can even cause the whole activity to fail in the end…grading my language level to students' level is

the key point at giving efficient instructions.to manage it, I should make sure if the class atmosphere is suitable to be heard easily…after that, using short sentences step by step (preferably with sequencing adverbs), speaking more slowly than I generally do, and paying more attention to my voice became priorities for more effective instructions as Jim Scrivener lists in the chapter "Giving Instructions" (Scrivener, 2012, pp. 128–131).

It is clear from the work carried out by Tracey that, in line with Amanda and Karen, she engaged in the first two of the three processes outlined in Allwright (2001). She firstly contemplated in order to reflect on her puzzle concerning issuing instructions, then she engaged in action for understanding students' problems.

Writing Up Research

Concerning the above accounts, Kubanyiova's (2015) microethical principles of the 'ethics of care' were taken into further consideration. Those interviewed were shown my summarised accounts of their responses, and invited to comment. From the interviews, however, I noted that researchers were having difficulty in writing up their studies. With this in mind, during an extended period in which they were analysing their data, I wrote a set of guidelines for novice research writers. My intention was to get researchers writing about their work as soon as possible. Later reading of their work indicated how they had in fact made use of the guidance, especially relating to the use of lead-in sentences and focussing on the research topic.

Discussion and Reflection

Although at the preliminary workshops my initial thoughts concerning the value of EP in ELT were less than positive, they soon altered when I reflected on how EP appeared a more humanistic means of carrying out practitioner research than was the case with my AR doctoral study (Trotman, 2010). For the future, my own understandings continue to

develop. For example, in contrast to what they term "transmissive and input-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD)", working with lecturers in Higher Education, Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2014, p. 427) adopted "transformational and practice-based CPD". To do so they used a combination of EP and CLE. As units of analysis they each identified in recorded classroom discourse, the episodes enabled teachers to develop a "microscopic understanding" (Walsh, 2011, p. 18) of how interaction worked in their lessons and lectures. On reflection, as this appears to be an extension of the CPD we seek to implement at IKCU, I should have encouraged the five teachers in the current study to record their lessons in order to identify from transcripts actual instances relating to their respective EP puzzles. Future research beckons.

In this chapter we have read how five novice researchers with relatively little experience in the classroom began their EP studies with me, which lasted approximately one academic year. Each of them was able to make discoveries about their puzzles that helped them to question their assumptions about what goes on within the dynamic complexity of the language classroom (Tudor, 2001, 2003; van Lier, 2013). The work carried out by each of them reflects Tudor's (2001, p. 9) comment:

> …in order to understand precisely what takes place in our classrooms, we have to look at these classrooms as entities in their own right and explore the meaning they have for those involved in them in their own terms.

From the five cases above and interviews with each, I identified the following points: Poppy's and Harrison's studies each began as EP but later developed into AR. Contemplation via reflective practice led to initial understanding, which led to further action for understanding via EP. The next step for them involved action for change, i.e. AR, and thus their studies reflected all three major processes of teacher development outlined in Allwright (2001). In contrast, EP studies by Karen, Amanda and Tracey reflected the first two of Allwright's (2001) three processes. In this respect they may be regarded solely as EP. This is not meant as a criticism. On the contrary, it seems likely that in the future they may each wish to engage in further action for change.

What I Learnt as a Mentor of EP Practitioners

Reflecting on this study I realised how, with suitable guidance, encouragement and support, novice researchers could, in a relatively easy manner, manage their EP projects over the course of one academic year. In order for this to happen, however, I had to wear several different 'hats': those of mentor and supervisor, critical friend and supportive colleague. At times the research group faced challenges, especially with regard to writing up their studies. In response to this I prepared a template for them to use as they wished. I also realised how, when it was not easy for us to meet individually or as a group, even quick chats in the corridor on the way to lessons proved insightful.

Final Comment

As a result of the above studies my final comment runs thus: far from being a less regarded form of practitioner research, EP is a viable and humanistic means of researching one's own classroom context. Since EP seeks primarily to understand the complexities involved rather than act on them, there is no immediate requirement to seek solutions where there may in fact be none. Understanding may be enough.

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