Sage Research Methods: Data and Research Literacy

Adopting the Exploratory Practice Principles to Better Understand Peer Feedback: Puzzling, Co-Researching and Sharing Practitioner Research

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Pub. Date: 2025

Product: Sage Research Methods: Data and Research Literacy

DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781036216719

Methods: Practitioner research, Case study research, Collaborative research

Keywords: feedback, learners, puzzles, teaching, language, classrooms, journals, Life in Classrooms, inquiry, students

Disciplines: Education

Access Date: August 18, 2025

Publisher: SAGE Publications Ltd

City: London

Online ISBN: 9781036216719

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Abstract

This research methods Case Study is based on an Exploratory Practice (EP) inquiry that I conducted into peer feedback processes, collaborating with my undergraduate English-language learners as co-researchers. I introduce EP, focusing on its core principles and processes while offering an insider account of how these played out when applied in a real-world classroom setting. I first sketch out the peer feedback study, providing background context and my rationale, explaining how this was grounded in my curiosity and professional practice as well as the educational and applied linguistics research literature. I then describe some of the key practical and ethical challenges encountered, from introducing and explaining EP to learners in class to ensuring integration of research into practice and publishing EP understandings in academic journals. Next, I reflect on EP as a method in action, what went well—enhancing understanding of peer feedback and integrating research while retaining a language focus—and what did not go quite as planned—uncertainty about the boundaries of EP, gaining learners' consent to act as co-researchers, and navigating the frameworks and processes of conventional academic research. Finally, based on lessons learned from this Case Study, I suggest five key considerations for readers thinking of adopting EP: (a) harnessing the freedom the principles offer; (b) gaining buy-in from learners to act as co-researchers; (c) introducing EP language to learners; (d) providing guidance for designing activities that integrate teaching, learning, and research; and (e) completing EP ethics applications and publishing EP in academic journals.



Learning Outcomes

After reading this Case Study, students should be able to

- identify and describe the guiding principles and core processes of EP;
- anticipate, discuss, and reflect on some of the key practical and ethical challenges specific to EP;
- apply and enact the EP principles to conduct curiosity-led inquiry in classroom or practice-based settings; and
- reflect on an account of inclusive and collaborative practitioner research as it played out in a real-world educational setting.

Overview and Context

Background

This research methods Case Study reflects on my experiences as a teacher-researcher using Exploratory Practice (EP) to investigate how my students, undergraduate English-language learners at a U.K. university, judged the quality of classmates' work (see Banister, 2023). It offers readers interested in using EP—whether working in language teaching or beyond—the inside track on how EP research played out in real classroom settings, highlighting the challenges encountered before suggesting five key considerations for adopting EP.

When this study commenced, I had taught English for academic purposes (EAP) for 5 years, a period during which I also completed a master's degree in applied linguistics, a postgraduate course in higher education, and, last but not least, started using the principles of EP.

At the time, efforts to enhance feedback quality in U.K. universities were well underway, with the notion of *student feedback literacy*—developed into a full framework by David Carless and David Boud (2018)—covered extensively in my postgraduate course in higher education. Defined as "the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies" (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 1316), student feedback literacy envisioned learners developing their *proactive recipience*—requesting that feedback targets specified aspects of their work—and *evaluative judgment* skills—the ability to judge the quality of work—as well as a key role for *peer feedback*—what Shulin Yu and Guangwei Hu (2017, p. 178) define as how "learners work together and comment on one another's work or performance and provide feedback on strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for improvement."

Rationale

Peer feedback processes had intrigued me for some time. On the one hand, my university was keen for lecturers to facilitate effective peer feedback processes, and as a teacher keen to promote learner autonomy, I was curious about the potential for students to become proactively recipient and develop their evaluative judgment skills. On the other hand, my previous attempts to facilitate effective peer feedback processes had prompted learner engagement, which often seemed lukewarm and merely an act of "going through the motions" (Banister, 2023, p. 747). This all puzzled me. Why the disjuncture between institutional priorities and

research findings and our lived classroom experience? Interrogating these assumptions and apparent contradictions provided the rationale for the study.

My Peer Feedback Study

My EP inquiry focused on peer feedback processes around a formative oral presentation task. I co-researched this with my academic and business English learners using familiar, but adapted, classroom activities to enhance our understanding of peer feedback in our local setting. The study revealed learners' broadly favorable beliefs about the potential of peer feedback but also resistance from a minority, who opposed such processes in principle. Nevertheless, learners as co-researchers offered constructive and sometimes insightful reflections, for instance, highlighting tensions around proactive recipience. *Language Teaching Research* journal published my account, online in 2020, and in its final version in 2023. It has since been cited several times.



Section Summary

- *This methods case reflects on my use of EP to co-research peer feedback processes with academic and business English undergraduates at a U.K. university.*
- *The study revealed learners' broadly favorable beliefs about the potential of peer feedback despite resistance from a minority.*
- Language Teaching Research *journal published my account, and researchers have cited it several times.*

Practitioner Research Design

Exploratory Practice: Principles

My focus now turns to the EP methodology used in this case. Judith Hanks (2017, p. 227) defines EP as cu-

riosity-led practitioner research (PR) founded on seven interconnected principles, as follows:

1. Prioritize *quality of life*, understanding, and relevance.
2. *Work* primarily *for understanding*.
3. Involve everyone.
4. Cooperate for mutual development.
5. Bring people together.
6. Integrate research and pedagogy.
7. Make it a continuous enterprise.

For a comprehensive discussion of these principles, including their emergence from the work of Dick Allwright and grounding in Freirean education, see Hanks (2017).

Central to EP is what Simon Gieve and Ines Miller (2008, p. 23) termed *quality of life* (QoL), "what teachers and learners understand, and/or try to understand, about their joint [classroom] experience." Rather than focusing on action or change, as encouraged by action research and other PR models, EP's priority is to better understand classroom life through its work for understanding. EP inquiry strives to enhance QoL through the exploration of a counterintuitive or otherwise intriguing aspect of classroom practice selected by practitioners themselves. Practitioners, working in diverse national and educational settings, have harnessed EP's principles, often sharing the deepened understanding with their broader communities (Hanks, 2017) and, as Assia Slimani-Rolls (my original EP mentor) and Richard Kiely (2019) noted, enjoying long-lasting advantages in terms of teacher learning and professional development. EP proposes collaborative, participatory, and inclusive educational practitioner research achieved by engaging with its seven principles and the key processes of puzzling, co-researching, and adapting familiar classroom activities to give them an exploratory dimension. In the rest of this section I discuss these processes and a further one—sharing the understandings that can emerge through EP inquiry.

Puzzling and Co-researching

Puzzles and the act of puzzling lie at the heart of EP. Puzzles are questions about aspects of classroom life that have sparked practitioners' curiosity and that guide the work for understanding. These puzzles are often reformulated as "Why?" questions to lend reflexive power. For example, my EAP colleague John Houghton

(2019, p. 157) puzzled, “Why do I feel I need to improve my skills for teaching speaking?” More recently, a learner puzzled, “Why should I learn professional writing concepts to improve my financial reports?” Puzzling sets EP apart from action-oriented PR frameworks such as action research and, indeed, many other research methodologies that foreground problem solving and a solutions-based outlook (Hanks, 2017). As the preceding examples illustrate, both teachers and learners can set puzzles, what Yoshitaka Kato and Judith Hanks (2021) categorize as *teacher-initiated* and *learner-initiated* puzzles. Both are enactments of the collaborative co-research approach that EP advocates, positioning learners as developing practitioners of their own learning, with the potential to offer valuable insights about classroom life. (Hanks, 2017). The discussion in this case, for brevity’s sake, limits itself to the puzzling and co-research of my teacher-initiated puzzle about peer feedback (for accounts of a teacher-researcher scaffolding learner-initiated puzzling, see Banister, 2018, 2021).

Creating Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities

Once an exploratory practitioner has identified their puzzle, they choose a familiar teaching and learning activity from their repertoire or syllabus and consider how to adapt it by creating an exploratory dimension designed to illuminate their puzzle—all while retaining the activity’s original language-learning aims. These bidimensional activities, what Hanks (2017) refers to as potentially exploitable pedagogic activities (PEPAs), are how EP integrates research into practice. As Ines Miller, Isabel Cunha, and Dick Allwright have written (2021), it is through such activities that EP empowers learners and positions them as practitioners with insights worth sharing while simultaneously positioning teachers as learners who can develop their own understandings of classroom life both *from* and *with* their students.

It is worth stressing that puzzling, co-researching, and creating PEPAs are not linear processes; in fact, my experience revealed them to be inherently overlapping and iterative.

Sharing Enhanced Understanding

After exploring their puzzle via PEPAs, exploratory practitioners may engage in a third process—sharing their enhanced understandings of the puzzled-over aspect of classroom practice with others beyond the immediate setting. Although not obligatory, this can enrich the existing literature with practitioner perspectives and

understandings and, important for EP as an emerging methodology, can model and make visible EP's practice-as-research, work-for-understanding ethos.

Setting for the Peer Feedback Study

This was not my first encounter with EP, and since adopting it several years earlier my commitment to its principles and ethos had deepened. These previous experiences helped me to formulate my new puzzle: "Why does peer feedback receive a lukewarm response from my learners?" (Banister, 2023, p. 753). I decided to explore the puzzle with groups of both EAP and business English learners. Both groups would be relatively large, allowing me to access a breadth of learner views about peer feedback, adapting familiar classroom activities and creating PEPAs around an oral presentation task for which peer feedback processes were already in place. The oral presentation component involved different learners each week delivering formative presentations (on discipline-specific topics for the EAP learners and business topics for the business English learners) in preparation for an end-of-term summative talk. I discussed my plans with colleagues, who agreed that learners taking on the roles of presenters and audience members were ideally positioned to provide peer feedback and, in addition, that the endeavor had the potential to bring people together to foster cooperation and work for mutual development, as per EP's principles.

Section Summary

- *EP is curiosity-led inquiry enacted via its key principles and centered around working for understanding and improving QoL.*
- *Core EP processes include puzzling, co-researching, and creating PEPAs to integrate research into practice.*
- *Sharing understandings of EP inquiry is also important.*

Practitioner Research Practicalities

Having decided to use EP to explore a peer feedback puzzle with my learners, my thoughts turned to the

practicalities and ethics of bringing EP into the classroom.

Introducing EP and Buy-in

From previous experience, I recognized that my aim was not merely to introduce EP but to encourage learners to buy into puzzling and co-researching. If I wanted co-researchers, I would need to persuade them of EP's potential. In addition to this practical consideration, there also was an ethical dimension: I needed to lead and initiate the inquiry process without overburdening myself or my learners, in line with EP's principle of continuity.

Language of EP

A further consideration was the language of EP: Which key terms from EP's lexicon should I use with learners while co-researching with them? How much would be too much? How accessible would puzzles or PEPAs prove to be? Although the word *practice* might seem familiar, I suspected that this would be limited to the sense of "practice makes perfect." Similarly, although I might expect my business English learners to understand QoL as an economic term, EP uses this term differently, to refer to teachers' and learners' lived classroom experiences. I wondered whether receptive understanding of EP language would suffice or whether active use should be encouraged. Previous EP work cautioned me against underestimating learners, and added to this, my teaching instincts, for want of a better phrase, suggested that using at least some of EP's unique lexicon would facilitate more effective puzzling and co-research. After all, in my classroom practice I regularly taught grammar and vocabulary terminology, believing that it acted as a helpful shorthand to discuss language use. Moreover, the educational research literature on feedback literacy recommended the teaching of enabling language (for uptake of feedback), so I reasoned that teaching some EP language to facilitate EP inquiry represented a consistent approach.

Integrating Practice as Research: PEPA Design

Beyond introducing EP and some EP language lay a further challenge—how to truly integrate inquiry and pedagogy, a key EP principle. I remembered from my apprenticeship in EP how often my colleagues and I initially thought that we were achieving this when, in fact, we were "teaching and researching rather than

researching via teaching" (Houghton, 2019, p. 157). Creating PEPAs requires "considerable creativity and rewiring" (Slimani-Rolls and Kiely, 2019, p. 189), but, in fact, contemplating this stage only prompted further questions:

1. Would one PEPA be enough?
2. Would it shed light on my puzzle?
3. How would I capture learners' contributions as co-researchers?

Institutional Ethics and Informed Consent

A final challenge was the completion of institutional ethics procedures, including research approval forms. Having conducted EP before, I was aware that my institution would require information about my aims, methodology, dissemination plans, participants, safety, consent, confidentiality/anonymity, and data protection. Gathering and entering this information, submitting the form, and receiving approval would be crucial to start the process in a timely manner. Also, if I wished to share learners' ideas as co-researchers of the puzzle sharing our understandings, I knew that I would need to obtain their informed consent in writing, another practical and ethical challenge. Heightening the challenge further, consent would need to be gained early in the term, with rapport and trust still at an emerging stage.



Section Summary

- *Introducing EP in class, gaining buy-in from learners, and deciding which EP language to use constituted ethical and practical challenges.*
- *Integrating research into practice so that it became practice as research presented a further challenge. The exact shape that PEPA design would take was another practical consideration.*
- *Institutional ethics procedures represented a further challenge.*

EP's Principles in Action

Reflecting on EP in action, I now discuss what went well and what did not go to plan, structuring my thoughts around puzzling and co-researching, creating PEPAs, and sharing EP inquiry.

Freedom Offered by EP Sowed Some Doubts

An unanticipated early challenge emerged as I prepared to co-research peer feedback with learners. I had decided to revise peer feedback processes but wondered whether change at this stage aligned with an EP approach. Would this be problem solving rather than EP-style work for understanding? These doubts, once sown, lingered a while, but further reflection helped me realize that I had already spent several months reflecting on peer feedback, reading literature, and discussing it with critical friends; I had, in fact, already taken the time to "stop, look around and think" (Hanks, 2017, p. 171). Although co-research *with* my *learners* was only just starting, my puzzling had begun much earlier. Reasoning that QoL should be my central concern and that having confidence in classroom materials and processes was paramount, I resolved to implement my planned changes. I did, though, remind myself to keep an open mind as this new phase of puzzling, with learners as co-researchers, got underway. In fact, as the term progressed, this was reflected in the fact that I refined my puzzle to "Why might my learners not view peer feedback as worthwhile?" (Banister, 2023, p. 748), the final word of the reformulated puzzle highlighting the perceived lack of value students attached to peer feedback, which, I began to see, was what truly puzzled me.

Limited EP Language Entered Classroom Discourse

In the first week I used interactive approaches with reading texts to introduce EP. Learners, in two groups, read different texts about EP and then shared information to answer questions. These texts introduced core EP language, but when actively discussing EP, I limited my teacher talk to "puzzles" and "puzzling," "working for understanding," and "integration," consolidating understanding of these by repeating them strategically and encouraging their active use. This approach worked well, with learners using these terms in class to facilitate co-research and with this limited EP talk gradually entering classroom discourse. To manage complexity, I paraphrased QoL as "a better teaching and learning experience for us all" and referred to "activities where we practice language while puzzling" rather than PEPAs.

Some Co-researchers Hesitated to Become Involved

Although I succeeded in introducing EP and some of its lexicon, when it came to gaining learner buy-in, there were also unexpectedly direct questions: “Do I have to sign this?” one student asked when presented with the consent form. Walking what felt like a fine line, I explained that I believed it would be beneficial, but ultimately, it was the student’s decision. Two more learners hesitated, asking to think about it. I agreed, but inside I couldn’t help feeling slightly discouraged, having hoped to get everyone on board immediately. If students were unpersuaded, perhaps I hadn’t explained EP and the puzzle well enough? As it transpired, in the following class, these learners dug the forms out of their bags, somewhat crumpled but nonetheless now signed, confirming that they were ready to participate.

How PEPAs Integrated Co-research into Existing Classroom Practices

In response to the challenges of creating PEPAs, I reviewed existing activities for the formative oral presentations. I reflected on the educational and applied linguistics literature on peer feedback, on discussions with critical friends, and considered my skillset as a teacher-researcher. Subsequently, I designed three PEPAs.

The first consisted of two activities, one for presenters and one for audience members. I adapted a template slide deck for presenters, hoping to promote proactive recipience by requiring presenters to state which three assessment criteria (from delivery, use of grammar, use of vocabulary, pronunciation, relevance, and analysis) they would like peer feedback to target. Meanwhile, for audience members composing peer feedback, I added further detail to an existing worksheet: a summary of the criteria, a table for note making around presenters’ three requested criteria, and a list of enabling language for peer feedback (“You did a good job with . . . ,” “Next time consider how to . . . ,” etc.).

Reimagining this task as a PEPA worked well, providing repeated opportunities to observe peer feedback, proactive recipience, and evaluative judgment in action and providing learners with a lived experience of peer feedback processes from both giver and receiver perspectives, which they could later reflect on. Learners cooperated to pool and discuss peer feedback, as per EP’s mutual-development principle. Moreover, the PEPA

retained a clear language focus by encouraging audience members to listen actively to provide peer feedback and when using the enabling language to compose peer feedback, thus aligning with EP's integration of practice and research.

A second PEPA was inspired by Carless and Boud's (2018) notion of feedback *meta-dialogues*—unpacking aspects of feedback through direct discussion with learners. This seemed quite similar to Luke Rowland's (2011) take on PEPAs—asking learners to read extracts from research findings and then discuss them in relation to their own experiences, an example which had helped me to fully grasp the concept of PEPAs as a novice EP researcher. I wanted to discuss peer feedback directly with my learners as co-researchers, so, to shed light on my puzzle, I created four short meta-dialogues:

1. Feedback giving and receiving: Who benefits and why?
2. Academic journal peer review processes (feedback as a norm)
3. Workplace feedback (feedback beyond university)
4. My puzzle

Some we discussed orally in class, after which I captured my co-researchers' ideas in my reflective journal. Learners completed others as written homework, with the results captured on our virtual learning environment.

The meta-dialogues surfaced learners' insights as co-researchers. For example, one business student suggested that they would have more credibility when giving feedback on business content rather than language aspects of presentations, effectively asking, "Who is better placed to decide what peer feedback should target, the presenters or the audience member?" I agreed, and learning from my learners as EP envisions, I revised the process to allow peer feedback composers to choose one area they would like to target (the presenters chose the other two)—an example of EP's mutual-development principle in action. Providing delayed language feedback after discussions retained a language focus and ensured integration.

For the third PEPA, I designed a survey about peer feedback for learners. I wanted them to reflect on and express their attitudes toward and beliefs about peer feedback at the end of term, and to do so anonymously. The survey comprised 10 statements about feedback and peer feedback to which learners responded by indicating their agreement/disagreement using a five-point Likert scale. Prompts encouraged additional comments to capture qualitative and quantitative data. Having learned basic survey design skills in my master's course, this was not something I viewed as overly burdening. Asking students to access the survey in class from a link allowed learners to provide responses anonymously and allowed me the opportunity to encourage

them to add qualitative comments, enriching the data.

Academic Research Conventions Jarred with EP

Completing the university ethics form proved frustrating because the questions reflected conventional academic research aims, often jarring with EP's principles. For example, the form's language objectified learners as "the researched," very far from co-researchers, plus there was no space to discuss EP's integration principle and avoidance of burnout, a clear, ethical consideration. Similarly, on completing the study, when I decided to write up my EP research for an academic journal (note: not the journal that later published it), I encountered similar issues, this time, rather ironically given the topic of the study, in peer reviewers' comments. These gatekeepers provided some helpful feedback, but their guidance, like the ethics forms, diverged from EP's ethos. They contested the first-person authorship style and required that I focus on "results," not "understanding." As a still relatively inexperienced academic writer, I lacked the confidence to defend the EP approach I had adopted.



Section Summary

- *EP's principles offer much freedom but sometimes caused doubts as to whether I was doing puzzling right.*
- *I brought limited EP language into classroom discourse to discuss key aspects in a meaningful way.*
- *Some learners hesitated to become involved, requesting time to consider participation.*
- *I designed three PEPAs, reimagining and adapting peer feedback activities around an oral presentation task, creating meta-dialogues about peer feedback, and designing a survey. The PEPAs worked well as ways of integrating co-research into existing classroom practice.*
- *EP principles jarred with academic research conventions and processes, such as ethics applications and journal peer review.*

Practical Lessons Learned

Based on what I learned from using EP as a methodology to explore peer feedback processes and aligning with EP's nonprescriptive approach, I end with some guidance—intended not as recipes, instructions, or even recommendations, but five key considerations, questions to ponder and keep uppermost in mind when embarking on your EP journey. I present these next, framed once again around puzzling and co-researching, creating PEPAs, and sharing EP understandings.

Puzzling and Co-researching

Why Do the EP Principles Offer Such Freedom?

I learned that EP's framework of principles, as opposed to prescribed steps, offers significant freedom. Enjoy this freedom and roam around for as long as feels right to you; make changes when you feel the time is right, prioritize QoL, and be ready to move back and forth with the process, staying open minded and flexible. My puzzling had progressed to a point where I wanted to make changes while still recognizing the need to continue the work for understanding. Thus, while designing a PEPA for my puzzle, I took an iterative approach to formulating the puzzle itself, refining it to "Why might my learners not view peer feedback as worthwhile?" (Banister, 2023, p. 748), the final word highlighting the perceived lack of value some learners seemed to ascribe to peer feedback. This, I had begun to see, was what truly, deeply puzzled me.

Why Should Learners Co-research a Teacher's Puzzle?

Be prepared to engage fully with your co-researchers, to explain your rationale, provide some background to your puzzle, and show why you see potential value in exploring it *together*. When administering consent forms, recognize that many people are, understandably, acutely aware of their rights and potential (mis)use of data and so may need reassurance. On reflection, I suspect that the learners who hesitated had simply never been asked anything like this before. What I took from this case was that as an exploratory practitioner, you should be ready to elaborate on EP's ethos and potential benefits and field questions in class, but even though you can certainly give learners time to consider their involvement, ultimately, you may need to accept a learner's wish not to be involved. With this in mind, keep clear records of who consented in case you later

wish to share your EP research.

How Will You Talk About Your EP with Learners as Co-researchers?

Part of introducing EP in class necessarily involves deciding what part of the EP lexicon to introduce and which of them, if any, to actively use with learners. This study bolstered my belief that teaching a minimum of the EP lexicon facilitated more meaningful, nuanced, and frank discussions with learners. In my own setting, teaching learners at upper-intermediate and advanced language levels using a limited set of the method's language seemed especially appropriate given institutional expectations that university learning, including language learning, should be research led and/or research informed. You may wish to go further and teach more EP language or be more implicit and teach less; your context as well as the language proficiency of your learners will be your best guides to avoid overburdening.

On a practical note, the current fully inclusive PR website (https://www.fullyinclusivepr.com/exploratory-practice.html) provides accessible definitions and summaries that you might use with learners to aid understanding of the core EP lexicon. To test understanding, you could create short quizzes, create communicative crosswords or meta-dialogues about EP, or adapt the multiple-choice questions provided following this Case Study. For more examples of EP and information about it, use the additional resources and consult the reference list of this methods Case Study.

Creating PEPAs

What Will Your PEPA(s) Tell You About Your Puzzle and How?

Reflecting on the PEPA design for this EP case, I identified value in designing and using multiple PEPAs that combined observation with discussion, offered opportunities to puzzle with co-researchers throughout the term, and at various points in the term provided a mix of qualitative and quantitative data (with emphasis on the former) via oral discussions or writing, in open classroom discussion, and anonymously. This variety imparted both breadth and a measure of additional rigor to the EP study.

EP is research as proposed by classroom practitioners to illuminate the lived classroom experience. Because it is rooted in the classroom relationships of practitioners, EP also draws on the rapport, trust, and goodwill that builds between practitioners so that nuanced, meaningful, and constructively critical co-research of a puzzle is possible. This case showed me that having an option for co-researchers to share views anonymously may have allowed some more critical voices be heard. Some had already emerged openly in class discussions, but others had not. Although polling software has become very classroom friendly, surveys are only one way to gain anonymous responses, and they do require skill to design and interpret. Alternatives—in many ways more attractive—include the discussion boards, wikis, and quiz features now built into online learning environments, for which anonymity settings can be easily enabled.

Sharing EP Understandings

Why Might You Need to Explain, Justify, and Defend Your Use of EP's Principles?

EP's principles and core concepts differ from more conventional academic research methodologies. Just as you need to explain EP to learners, you may need to justify your use of EP's principles and lexicon to ethics approval committees or journal reviewers. But because these conventions are notoriously resistant to change, you may, nevertheless, need to work within them. In this Case Study, I reflected on my decision to write about my EP for an academic journal, but when sharing your EP, remember that writing for journals is only one option. You can present oral reports of EP at conferences, online events, or show-and-tell sessions. Posters are a more visual option. If you do go down the journal writing route, research the journal thoroughly—its aims, scope, and editorial board on the website will tell you a lot—and bear in mind that journal titles may not be reliable indicators of whether PR such as EP is actually welcome. However, these days, major journals often publish guidance for peer reviewers, which can help you anticipate which EP language you might need to clarify and defend for publication purposes. I found that once I explained, justified, and defended my use of EP's principles and my preference for some of its terminology, reviewers and editors responded favorably. Although EP has been gaining traction now for several decades, it remains an exciting and innovative approach that is new to many.

Section Summary

- *EP's relatively nonprescriptive approach offers freedom to explore and to go back and forth with the process.*
- *For learners to participate as co-researchers, you need to explain the rationale for EP and gain their consent.*
- *Teaching some EP language may facilitate in-class discussions of puzzles.*
- *PEPAs offer a broad exploratory potential: quantitative or qualitative, written or oral, anonymous or through open, face-to-face discussion. Be prepared to explain your use of EP when writing for publication.*

Conclusion

This methods Case Study focused on practical and ethical challenges encountered when using EP's principles as a methodology. These ranged from introducing and explaining EP to anticipating the issues of buy-in and EP language to the challenges of designing activities that integrate research into practice and also shed light on a puzzle. I also discussed explaining and justifying EP for ethics application processes and writing up EP for journal publication.

Despite these challenges, I would strongly urge you to try EP for yourself. EP has channeled my curiosity, refreshed my teaching, strengthened my connections with my learners—and has been a lot of fun! In this case, it fulfilled its potential by bridging the practice–research gap and positively impacting my QoL and that of my learners. By adopting the principles of EP and engaging in its core processes to explore peer feedback, I deepened my understanding (as, I believe, did many of my learners) of this vital aspect of pedagogy. More important still, since this case, I have sustained my use of EP to explore new aspects of my practice, meaning that I am still reaping the broader benefits of the EP principles as a methodology, and I would foresee that this will continue to be the case for the future of my professional practice and for the learners I collaborate with as future co-researchers.

Discussion Questions

1. What potential do you see for a PR approach such as EP for inquiry, both in language education and in education more broadly?
2. What challenges might you encounter when adopting EP to explore a puzzle in a teaching and learning setting with which you are familiar?
3. Can you envision (your) learners as co-researchers?
4. Think of a teaching and learning activity with which you are familiar. How might it be adapted as a PEPA?
5. What more could academic journals do to encourage practitioner researchers to submit accounts of their inquiry?

Multiple Choice Quiz Questions

1. What is the primary aim of EP?

- **a.** To enhance teachers' and learners' understanding of their chosen aspect of classroom life
- **b.** To help teachers and learners make changes to classroom processes
- **c.** To help teachers and learners solve classroom problems

2. Which concept lies at the heart of EP inquiry?

- **a.** Meta-dialogue

- **b.** Quality of life
- **c.** Evaluative judgment

3. Which of the following statements about puzzles, EP's equivalent of a research question, is false?

- **a.** Both teachers and learners can set and explore puzzles.
- **b.** A puzzle cannot be reformulated after the start of inquiry.
- **c.** Puzzles are designed primarily to express curiosity about classroom life.

4. In EP, what is the role of a PEPA?

- **a.** To provide peer feedback
- **b.** To improve language knowledge and skills
- **c.** To integrate research into pedagogy

Further Reading

Fully Inclusive Practitioner Research. (n.d.). *Exploratory practice.*https://www.fullyinclusivepr.com/exploratory-practice.html

This website provides an accessible overview of EP's core principles, key aims, and processes.

Hank, J. (2017). *Exploratory practice in language teaching: Puzzling about principles and practice.* Springer + Basic. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/978-1-137-45344-0

This is Judith Hank's comprehensive account of EP—its philosophical origins and its focus on developing understandings for practice and its conception of learners as practitioners of learning and potential as co-researchers. The book also contains a rich resources section with examples of EP work and interviews with pioneers of the method.

IATELF Research SIG. (2024, December). *ReSIG News.*https://resig.weebly.com/resig-news.html

This news webpage of the Research Special Interest Group of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language provides details on a number of events and publications, with EP often included.

Slimani-Rolls, A., & Kiely, R. (2019). *Exploratory practice for continuing professional development: An innovative approach for language teachers.* Springer + Basic. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-69763-5

The authors highlight the benefits of EP for teacher professional development.

YouTube. (n.d.). *Learner-initiated exploratory practice: Revisiting curiosity* [Video]. https://youtu.be/goDCm-CB362o?feature=shared

If you would like to extend your knowledge into learner-initiated puzzles, this video introduces and previews Yoshitaka Kato and Judith Hanks' article in *English Language Teaching Journal* that discusses both types of EP puzzles (see "References" for the full article link).

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