MAKING THE CASE FOR EXPLORATORY PRACTICE FOR TESOL IN THE JAPANESE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Kevin Garvey & Matthew Miner
Kanda University of International Studies

ABSTRACT

The following paper presents an analysis of two studies of Exploratory Practice (EP) in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and argues for the implementation of EP in the context of English language learning at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) and in the broader Japanese university context. We establish the definition of EP, an application of critical theory to Action Research (AR), and explore examples of AR applied through EP in the field of TESOL in recent history, keeping in mind the demands and limitations intrinsic to the teacher-researcher nexus. We then discuss potential benefits of student involvement in research as practiced in EP. Published EP within the field of TESOL is limited; nevertheless, we end with suggestions for implementing EP into TESOL course design and methodology.

DEFINING EXPLORATORY PRACTICE

Exploratory Practice (EP) was born out of practitioner research, which, in the language-teaching profession, is research conducted by the teachers themselves in an effort to better understand their own practice (Allwright, 2005). Dick Allwright (2003, 2005), one of the founders of EP, felt disillusionment with traditional academic research models and the ways they impacted teachers, students, and the classroom, considering them to be "parasitic" rather than supportive, prescriptive rather than integrated, and burdensome rather than self-contained within an acceptable teacher workload. There was also the concern that when doing research, teachers were prioritizing academic practices and dialogue between academics over classroom pedagogy and involvement of students in the process (Allwright, 2005).

At the same time, a certain practitioner research movement called Action Research (AR) was gaining popularity as a counterpoint to conventional research models. AR "involves a self-reflective, systematic and critical approach to enquiry by participants who are at the same time members of the research community" (Burns, 2003, p. 29)—in this case, teachers who seek to critically and reflectively analyze their own classroom "in order to bring about critically informed changes in practice" (Burns, 2003, p. 35).

However, Allwright felt that despite its broad intentions, AR still maintained the rigorous academic demands of developing research skills and conducting research in a "technicist framework" of isolating problems and finding solutions (Allwright, 2005, p. 355). While Allwright felt that such an approach was feasible for teachers with additional time and resources such as

those in teacher training courses with academic advisors, Allwright sought to integrate the inquisitive process of AR into standard classroom practice rather than overburden practitioners with new training and techniques. These factors inspired Allwright to propose a research approach he called "Exploratory Practice," which prioritizes a mutual understanding of "quality of life" in the language classroom over "instructional efficiency" or enhanced teaching through "the latest pedagogical ideas" (Allwright, 2003, p. 119).

In practice, EP involves teachers and students conducting research together to develop an understanding of classroom quality of life issues based on the participants' own goals (whether or not that understanding inspires change). The process should contribute to language teaching and learning as well as professional development for all participants in a way "that does not lead to 'burn-out', but that is indefinitely sustainable" (Allwright, 2003, p. 127). To ensure the sustainability of EP, it is conducted using "normal pedagogic practices as investigative tools," such as group discussions and poster presentations, as contrasted with "devised questionnaires" or other "sophisticated classroom research tools," including those introduced from third-party researchers conducting or controlling classroom research (Allwright, 2003, p. 118). In other words, EP research processes are part of the course curriculum and include student-conducted language learning activities rather than extra or adapted sets of research practices applied from outside of the classroom. "EP, then, offers an exciting proposition: one which aims to integrate learning, teaching, and research. It promotes empowerment and in doing so, it challenges existing assumptions of performativity" (Hanks, 2015, p. 24). That is to say, by empowering teachers and students to research their own language teaching and learning puzzles as part of standard coursework, EP is a useful process for understanding life in the classroom; in turn, that understanding may provide for better long-term goals for course development compared to short-term measurements of how well or how poor teachers are instructing and/or how well or how poor students are performing tasks.

FRAMING EP IN CONTEMPORARY TESOL IN THE JAPANESE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT (BACKGROUND)

The affordances of EP and its fundamental principles could offer the chance for KUIS practitioners to better understand the quality of life in the English Language Institute (ELI) classrooms. Brooks' (2016) presentation on the differences in expectations of university culture and academic rigor between non-Japanese English language lecturers and their Japanese students highlights one of the areas in which problems might be collaboratively discussed and identified, rather than decided solely by teacher-researchers who may be in conflict with social and cultural differences. Brooks' qualitative excerpts highlight significant differences between students' and teachers' characterization of university life, experiences of time management and work-life balance, and priorities as full-time students. Many of the topics brought up by teacher-interviewees were directly related to day-to-day life decisions (e.g. commuting, part-time work, sleep schedules, extra-curricular activities), that influenced the classroom "quality of life." Likewise, student-interviewees brought up the difficulties of balancing academically rigorous English-language courses with non-academic commitments, such as clubs, socializing, family time, and work (Brooks, 2016). Additionally, McVeigh (2002) offers an in-depth analysis of the

challenges Japanese university students face, particularly when negotiating the expectations of teachers from different cultural backgrounds. One example is the expectation of many American teachers that students readily employ first-person opinion and experience in debate or argumentative essays, an approach many Japanese students are inexperienced with. Another issue is related to *seken*, or "the official gaze" of a classroom authority (usually a teacher) directed at the students. McVeigh (2002) suggests Japanese students learn to avoid *seken* by blending in with their classmates and becoming virtually anonymous in larger classes. This strategy is challenged by small-size language courses (such as in the ELI) in which non-Japanese instructors may specifically call on individual students to answer questions. These two examples of clashing expectations related to classroom culture are often treated as impediments or impasses in conventional language instruction. Efforts towards understanding differing classroom expectations as part of an EP approach to classroom-centered research can help overcome such obstacles.

EP's process of collaborative exploration between students and teachers offers a method for bridging cultural and social expectations, though it is not without limitations. On one hand, Allwright (2005) addresses one criticism of EP as being difficult or impossible to generalize to other socio-cultural environments. Specifically, Allwright suggests that EP offers a deep look into the human interactions between teacher and student and seeks to capture the simplicity of a person's experience in the classroom; and yet a deep understanding of the human experience may be inexplicable (in this case, ESL students may struggle to express their quality of life in the classroom in the target language) or it may be inapplicable (what works in a Japanese university ESL class may not work in an American graduate ESL program), thus complicating EP's contribution to the collective discourse of language teaching and learning (Allwright, 2005). However, Allwright reframes this shortcoming as a potential advantage for the specific classroom in which it is employed: while the results of EP might be "largely incommunicable" across contexts, they may be "directly usable" to their context of origin (2005, p. 359). In other words, solutions borne of the EP process may be idiosyncratic to their context (and thus not generalizable to other classes, let alone schools or countries), but this signals that the process is responding directly to the site-specific issues and that students are being "seen in their particularity as individuals…and interacted with according to their needs" (hooks, 1994, p. 7). Allwright borrowed the term "think globally, act locally" to describe this process in EP: identifying fundamental language learning principles, contextualizing them to meet immediate needs, then re-envisioning those principles to either challenge them or inform "global" thinking (2003, p. 115). Collaboration between a teacher and their students generates "deep understanding" that cannot be replicated in another classroom environment. This understanding is *indefinitely sustainable* as teacher-student collaborators "recognize each classroom as different" and that "strategies must be constantly changed…to address each new teaching experience" (hooks, 1994, p. 10).

Framing teachers and students as cooperative "understanders" as opposed to culturally and socially separate actors, as in the case of Brooks' and McVeigh's lecturers and students, opens the door to bridging understanding and closing gaps in expectations and priorities.

In the case of the (primarily) Japanese young adult English language learners studying at ELI in KUIS, where their English proficiency lecturers (primarily) hail from various countries and cultures outside of Japan and are operating with different backgrounds, experiences, and teaching philosophies, EP affords both parties the chance to connect through a mutual investigation into language learning and teaching puzzlements. If teachers unfamiliar with the local culture wonder about student performance issues, and if students familiar with local teaching methodologies are confused by new approaches to language learning, collaborative research can begin to answer some of those questions in immediate and meaningful ways.

THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH

Both teachers and students struggle with complications in the classroom that EP can help mitigate. One ongoing issue for teachers in TESL/TEFL pedagogy and research is the balancing act that many must perform between their role as a teacher and their role as a researcher. In addition to potential administrative pressure to conduct, publish, and present research in professional settings, teacher-researchers may also feel a disconnect between their research work and their classroom practice. According to Mehrani (2014), "Reflections on the relationship between researchers and practitioners suggest that [the] research-practice divide has been an endemic feature of modern language education" (p. 21). Mehrani suggests that, despite efforts to bridge the gap such as the advent of the "teacher-researcher movement" as part of an overall critique of an imbalanced teacher-researcher relationship, there is still a divide between research and practice (2014, p. 22). One reason for this gap is the "lack of time and access to educational research" (Mehrani, 2014, p. 24). A participant study conducted by Allison and Carey (2007) supports this finding, suggesting that ESL teachers felt there was not enough time to carry out research and publishing, nor were there enough external motivators such as university support and/or mandates for ESL instructors to publish. To add to this, teachers may detect a gap between findings in professional articles and the issues their students face as learners of a second language, what Mehrani classifies as the "complexity and impracticality of research findings" (Mehrani, 2014, p. 24). For example, Borg (2009) found in his analysis of responses from English teachers around the world that "a recurrent view was that research had little to offer them," with some respondents seeing no practical application or doubting the quality, validity, or relevance of research conducted with "small samples and limited generalizability" (p. 13). Ultimately, decades of literature suggests that many ESL teachers feel a disconnect between classroom practice and academic research, whether because they lack the time and resources or because they cannot see the application. For such teachers, EP offers mitigation for such research concerns: as a collaborative, integrated research process, EP melds with classroom practice, using the tools that teachers may already be employing rather than adding additional components (and thus additional work). In addition, EP connects research practice to classroom experience, making the research relevant and the application evident.

EP also responds to ESL student issues, one being their relationship with the second language (L2). Ownership of a learner's second language is a persistent concern: while students may display high levels of motivation within class time and perform well on formalized language

assessment (TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTs, etc.), this motivation might not extend beyond specifically defined academic goals (Berwick & Ross, 1989; Yoneyama, 2012). EP has the potential to create an environment where learners co-construct their goals alongside guiding teachers. Whether these goals replicate conventional academic goals or move beyond them, the student is shown that they are an equal stakeholder in the outcome of the classroom. This co-construction can be a vehicle for the development of intrinsic motivation. EP highlights the role of the teacher as guide and mentor; it also highlights the role of the student as stakeholder and their goals as the main focus (as opposed to the goals of the teacher). Such empowerment may grant a new relationship between learner and language.

Despite the benefits of EP for teachers and students, not all learning environments afford the opportunity for teachers to employ exploratory practices, and it is important to recognize the variety of resources and goals available to teachers in the diverse field of TESL/TEFL. However, the basic principles of EP require the willingness and autonomy of an instructor, as well as an understanding amongst students that they are real stakeholders in their education. Such conditions align comfortably at KUIS, where learner autonomy is a critical component of the ELI philosophy and pedagogy, emphasized in the Self Access Learning Center (SALC), where students develop skills necessary to recognize their own language learning needs and develop strategies to meet them (About the SALC, 2020).

One hesitation present amongst teacher-researchers in employing EP is that the classroom role of the teacher becomes diminished (Hanks, 2015, p. 13; Pinter et al., 2015, pp. 24) or that the blending of researching and teaching roles is inappropriate for the classroom (Pinter et al., 2015, p. 24-25). The next section of this article will present two case studies in which EP researchers confronted these issues and explored solutions. These case studies present convincing arguments that EP highlights how important the teacher is for structuring an environment for students to practice self-discovery rather than "erasing" the role of the teacher.

FOCUS OF THIS CASE STUDY REVIEW

In the following section, this review will focus on two case studies that explore recent interpretations of EP. In each of these case studies, a different approach to EP was taken, and the results illustrate the strengths of EP in empowering learners and teachers, as well as the variety of ways in which EP can be deployed. We hope to show that EP can be applied to a wide variety of cultural and linguistic environments, and that EP is naturally responsive to diversity in stakeholders, resources, and the learning goals of a learner population. This suggests that EP can be adapted to the culturally diverse and student-centered ELI and aid KUIS practitioners in their own professional development.

CASE STUDIES OF EXPLORATORY PRACTICE

Case Study One: Exploratory Practice in Primary Schools Across India

Case Study Summary

In 2015, a team of English teachers working at various English language programs in different schools across India implemented an EP research project wherein the teachers involved their students, who were children of varying ages, as co-researchers. The project was inspired by literature (Kellett, 2004) suggesting that there are four ways to carry out research on child participants: research on, for, with, or by children. This project opted for the third option—research with children—thus involving students as co-researchers. "This involves a perspective shift whereby adults acknowledge that they need to consult children to be able to access their views and acknowledge them as 'experts' of their own lives" (Pinter et al., 2016, p. 13). Kellet (2004) suggests that students can become partners in research with their teachers and be given responsibility for some of the decision making as well as partial ownership of the research processes. From Kellet, Pinter et al. (2016) interpret that children enjoy their roles as co-researchers and find motivation; additionally, student researchers provide new insight into classroom practices and complement teacher points of view. They also developed transferable skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and predictions, all of which are essential in later stages of education and crucial for functioning in society (Pinter et al., 2016).

Pinter et al.'s study involved over 800 students, aged 6 to 16, in over 25 various classrooms in different schools (e.g. rural, urban, and compulsory English classrooms and ESL classrooms). The participant teachers understood that the process should be flexible, based on each group's needs, and not prescribed. Additionally, a number of the teachers incorporated the research project into their "everyday teaching" in line with EP principles.

The unifying goal across classes was to uncover how the teachers and learners felt about "quality of life" issues (which, according to the author, are under-researched) in the classroom as well as the students' views on learning English (Pinter et al., 2016). "Quality of life" issues may include how and when decisions are made, how much time is allotted for separate activities, or how transparent the connection between learner tasks and goals is made, among others.

What forms the research projects took were also flexible and left to interpretation, depending on each classroom. One common approach was for teachers to elicit input from the students, asking for their feedback and giving them a say in the decisions being made for the project. For example, students were given a choice on what their holiday homework would entail, and they opted for topics that they found interesting, such as interviewing family members. Another approach was to give student co-researchers a more active role in designing and implementing materials, such as questionnaires, and then collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. In classes where students were given more active and creative roles in the co-research, students incorporated materials and activities that they found engaging and that they wanted to do. As a result, they were aware of their project, understood the processes, and appreciated the added autonomy and responsibility. For example, one class collaborated to discuss and revise specific grammar lessons in order to incorporate realia into the lessons (menus from local restaurants is one example) and thus give the grammar exercises more meaningful context. As a result, the teacher of this class observed an increase in student autonomy and effort.

Case Study Results

The results of this project focused on student and teacher feedback regarding their roles as co-researchers. The results indicate that "students tended to be deeply engaged in the work they did because it interested them; it interested them because they were part of the decision-making process about what they should do and how they should do it" (Pinter et al., 2016, p. 19). This cycle of engagement and interest represents an ideal outcome of an EP process.

The students responded positively to changes from "dull, bookish activities" to "real, meaningful tasks that they were consulted on and had a choice to engage with" (Pinter et al., 2016, p. 20). "Children enjoyed working with texts that were important in terms of their own identity and their own choices. Doing meaningful work in groups, based on their own choices, seemed to motivate them to learn English" (Pinter et al., 2016, p. 21). Other results include a change in student awareness of social issues based on their roles as interviewers, an appreciation for collaboration and participation, more active learning, and more independence and autonomy. Overall, students felt that research was a positive feature of the classroom.

Feedback from the teachers echoed that provided by the children: they noticed that their students gained confidence and often improved their ability as English learners as well as increased their motivation, engagement, participation, and independence. There was also a strong, shared desire for a continuation of EP rather than a return to conventional teaching and learning methods. Teachers also reported better relationships with their students. Finally, all of the teachers found the experience to be highly beneficial to their professional development.

Connection and Analysis

Pinter et al.'s (2016) study demonstrates that young learners can be effectively included in the EP research method as collaborators and illustrates how their views of the quality of life in the classroom are significant. The EP method considers student-collaborators as learners first without neglecting the facts of their context and background. As evidence of the effectiveness of EP in this case study, one of the project groups realized that they often had issues turning in assignments on time; as a result, the students in that class researched causes and solutions to missing deadlines and then held a poster presentation with their findings. This example demonstrates that students appreciate the responsibility of making meaningful decisions in the classroom and can successfully collaborate with teachers to produce novel solutions to shared problems. This study helps to define and differentiate EP by demonstrating the process as being a self-contained part of the classroom curriculum. There is not an effort to unilaterally identify and solve problems or uncover classroom practice at the expense of language learning, student/teacher experiences, or well-being: on the contrary, this study stresses that students "not only enjoyed what they did but learnt a great deal from it" (Pinter et al., 2016, p. 20).

Additionally, this case study suggested that children as co-researchers would develop "transferable skills." Indeed, the students learned how to work together, support each other, think critically, and make predictions. The primary purpose of the classes in this case study was the facilitation of English learning, and the students were "learning lots of English" during the research project (Pinter et al., 2016, p. 20). Finally, this project stresses that research into the

quality of life for ESL students is inadequate and that teacher-student collaboration in making decisions about pedagogic methodologies for English-learning environments is crucial.

Some concerns about EP include the disbelief that students (in this case, children) can be effective co-researchers, and that research must be a process conducted exclusively by experts who have time, training, experience, and education behind them. Indeed, in this case study, many teachers approached the process with preconceptions of research being academic and narrow (Pinter et al., 2016); some struggled with "the concept of children and co-researchers" and worried that they would opt for playing over studying (Pinter et al., 2016, p.25). However, teachers reported positive results despite their apprehensions, claiming that "children DO want to study English" and that EP and AR offer unique and immediate classroom benefits compared to traditional academic research (Pinter et al., 2016, p.25).

There was also a widespread belief that students should be adhering to a prescribed classroom experience and that children should be learning about their place in the world from figures of authority, in this case, teachers, whose authority could potentially be diminished during the open-ended process of EP or AR. In regards to Pinter et al.'s study, there was some resistance to the project from parties including head teachers, colleagues, and administrators, some of whom "questioned the value of [the project]" (Pinter et al., 2016, p. 24). The unease of allowing student stakeholders to be co-researchers demonstrates that EP requires a shift in teacher-researcher thinking and a commitment to student involvement as collaborators. Allwright (2003) states that the processes in EP "are of course subject to change with experience. And this means change by anyone who cares to try them [...] it might also prompt a rethink of underlying principles" (p. 126). This means a teacher who feels pressured by external factors to back away from EP processes can nevertheless influence classroom practice and pedagogy by changing their principles as a first but meaningful step. However, Allwright (2003) also warns, "there is always the danger, of course, that someone may mistake the practice for the principles and decide that they are 'doing' EP just because they are making use of one or more of the component processes, without regard for the principles" (p. 126). A genuine, principled shift in thinking is a potential challenge for teachers who have worked hard to earn their students' trust as an authority in a more conventional mold. EP changes but does not eliminate the basis for student trust in the teacher. As collaborators, students become aware of the teacher's expertise in designing tasks and decision-making. The basis for student trust in teacher authority involves understanding what it means to teach and organize class time effectively.

In addition to concerns raised by teachers, some parents doubted the efficacy or validity of children as co-researchers and thus as decision-makers. As children took more consequential roles in their classroom activities, parents expressed reservations about veering off course from a prescribed syllabus. However, students embraced the responsibility of explaining their roles to their parents, rationalizing what they were doing, why they were doing it, and how it benefited them. As for student perception of teacher roles, the children considered the teacher "role model, as inspiration and as a caring educator" (Pinter et al., 2016, p.21). They appreciated the efforts that teachers put in rather than seeing them in diminished or ineffective positions. The results can be extrapolated for ELI teachers, KUIS administrators, or other stakeholders who

share these concerns. The SALC demonstrates an institutional commitment to student autonomy: trusting students to engage with research when they see the personal benefit means respecting their ownership of their language learning (About the SALC, 2020). Additionally, Pinter et al.'s (2016) research suggests that students did not think less of their teachers, but rather found a new respect for them as caring role models who can provide guidance to students practicing autonomous learning.

Based on this case study, ELI teachers would do well to consider how EP will be received by students, peers, administrators, and other stakeholders. Adapting the principles of EP—of working towards an understanding of the quality of life in the classroom with student input—may serve as a step towards EP practice for educators unsure of committing to joint research with student collaborators. Ultimately, this case study demonstrates that the benefits of EP for participants are numerous and the call for more such research is explicit.

Case Study Two: Exploratory Practice in a British University EAP Course

Case Study Summary

The second case study was piloted in an "English for Academic Purposes" (EAP) class taught in the UK. The participants in the pilot were 15 students from various countries as well as two experienced EAP teachers. One teacher participated with her students as a co-researcher in a class project while the other engaged with the act of "puzzlement" over her own language teaching inquiries.

To prepare the participants for EP, the primary researcher introduced the concept during the first week of class. The introduction of EP coincided with functional English usage—taking notes and listening to lectures—thus ensuring EP involved "exploitable pedagogic activity" and was not an additional, superfluous research task (Hanks, 2015, p. 7). After the introduction of EP, students and teachers were then asked to consider puzzles they had about their own language learning and teaching experiences. "The learners did have questions that puzzled them about language learning. They seemed pleased to have been asked and expressed interest in the possibility of investigating further" (Hanks, 2015, p. 14).

When the EP session next met, students participated in a mingling activity and spoke together about their own puzzlements. They then formed small groups of three to four students who shared similar topics, such as a group investigating issues related to writing in English or another focused on learning new vocabulary. This led to a lengthy EP term project in which the student groups refined and investigated their language learning puzzles through standard research methodologies such as conducting interviews with peers and drafting questionnaires for peers, tutors, and/or teachers. By the seventh week, student groups shared poster presentations about their findings followed by written research reports.

As students participated in the aforementioned research projects, teachers concurrently analyzed their own language *teaching* puzzles (investigations into their own teaching styles): one teacher acted as co-researcher with her students and provided classroom time and resources for them to conduct their research while the other teacher discussed her puzzle with

both her class and her peers and conducted her own research. The primary researcher stressed that all of the activities related to the project were standard classroom practices: "nothing new was added" (a key tenet of EP); rather, the course topic was changed from something standard such as global issues to learning about and practicing EP in order to understand their own pedagogic practices. In other words, "existing classroom activities were used as tools for investigation, thus combining research and pedagogy in sustainable and relevant ways" (Hanks, 2015, p. 8). The result was that all researchers—teachers and students—investigated personal puzzles related to language-learning, discussed and collaborated to create investigative tools such as interview questions, surveys, and reflective writings, analyzed their findings, and presented to the class.

Case Study Results

Based on primary researcher observations, students engaged sincerely in EP because they felt empowered and saw the value of exploring their own questions related to language learning rather than predetermined or generic topics: "giving space to learners to set their own agendas raised levels of interest, because they could talk about something new, and entirely relevant" (Hanks, 2015, p. 23). Initially, the teachers who participated in EP with the students expressed reservations or began the pilot with preconceived notions about student participation (reservations similar to those expressed by teachers in Pinter et al.'s (2016) study). However, Hanks reports that "the learners in the study took the work extremely seriously, thus confounding the doubts their teachers had expressed when planning the innovation" (2015, p. 15). Furthermore, during the EP projects, teachers "reported unusually high levels of student engagement, particularly during the poster presentations," where students shared their quality work and listened intently to each other (Hanks, 2015, p. 16). Students impressed teachers by working autonomously and carefully to conduct inquiries and share the results. As a result of the classroom experience with EP, the case study's course teacher changed her opinion about her students' maturity, responsibility, and ability: she reported, "I think [EP] makes them realize what they're capable of [...] and I think it helped me view them in a much more adult kind of way" (Hanks, 2015, p. 17). This shift in thinking was not limited to one teacher: "Significantly, both teachers and learners in the study reported higher levels of motivation throughout the study" (Hanks, 2015, p. 22). Similar to the first case study, EP produced a self-reinforcing positive cycle of engagement and interest. The cycle in this case was not limited to students, but also included participating teachers who explored and became interested in their own "teaching" puzzles.

Connection and Analysis

Echoing some concerns about EP from the first case study, the researchers in Hanks' study acknowledged that such an approach may be seen as "a radical agenda of learner empowerment" and they concede that "perhaps not all teachers would feel comfortable with the ambiguity" (Hanks, 2015, p. 13). Indeed, by leveling out the power dynamic of the traditional classroom, the teacher's role may become "less clearly defined": teachers may have to significantly adjust standard practices such as lesson planning, the development of lesson outcomes, and lecturing; additionally, teachers may come to find that the power redistribution will assign them a different role, one of co-researcher and mentor rather than authority figure

(Hanks, 2015). With that in mind, both case studies demonstrate that the teachers who made these adjustments and redefined their teacher roles in spite of uncertainty were rewarded with higher student motivation and more student autonomy, qualities encouraged for students studying foreign language at KUIS. Likewise, as the gap between teacher and student mentioned by Hanks (2015), Pinter et al. (2016), and McVeigh (2002) closes due to meaningful collaboration, students may develop a respect for the teacher arising from mutual understanding rather than a forced respect from subordinate to authority figure.

Other concerns may arise from teachers who are used to meticulously planning a complete class routine or term syllabus and who may feel discomfiture with a more fluid course:

> The fear of emptiness in the lesson, where the teacher feels obliged to fill the gap is common, perhaps stemming from initial teacher training, where teachers are exhorted to plan every minute, with extra activities 'up the sleeve' ready for any who finish the task early. (Hanks, 2015, p. 14)

The desire or demand for order and routine need not preclude a teacher from adapting principles of EP: it is important to reiterate that EP is not an "all or nothing" practice, as Allwright implied when he said "there is no 'copyright' on such things" and that EP is "subject to change with experience" (2003, p. 127). A limited approach to the processes of EP may allow the teacher or institution to ensure comprehensive lesson plans while still encouraging autonomous exploration of student language learning. Indeed, Hanks's (2015) application of EP principles in the context of an intensive and rigid EAP course shows that the flexibility of EP is a strength rather than a shortcoming. Ultimately, a complete EP paradigm shift is not required: Farrell's (2015) methods for teacher self-reflection offer ways for instructors to begin to re-assess and re-imagine their role in the classroom. Indeed, a large portion of EP, varying in scope and approach, relies upon active reflection by both teachers and students as participants in constructing a classroom community.

In addition to the possible change of "role" that teachers must negotiate when they adapt to an EP approach, there is also the questionable practicality of EP, depending on the environment in which a teacher wishes to implement such an approach. Ideally EP is partially defined by its sustainability: it is meant to be an unobtrusive and integrated part of teacher and student course load rather than an added responsibility or additional project. This ideal form of EP is not always feasible or understood: one of the teachers in Hanks' study expressed concern about an additional workload related to the project:

> Trying not to add to the teacher's burden (by integrating teaching, learning, and research) is one of the principles of EP, so [one teacher's] response is significant – lack of time seemed to be a challenge for a teacher implementing EP as part of her own practice. (Hanks, 2015, p. 17)

An EP approach repositions reflection as an active part of coursework, rather than a separate domain of labor. Farrell's (2015) categories of reflection-in-action (in the classroom), reflection-

on-action (after the class) and reflection-for-action (planning for the future, outside of class time), represent one possible introductory step towards an EP approach for instructors.

The standard classroom issues found in the ELI environment still apply with an EP approach: cultural differences and complicated group dynamics add uncertainty when teachers and students form groups, collaborate, and discuss and conduct research. Hanks emphasizes that "integrating research and pedagogy is a complex activity, which involves conflict as well as harmony" (2015, p. 23). Successfully making "room" for EP in classroom practice requires a significant commitment to change and adaptability on the part of the teacher.

Despite potential issues with EP reported in Hank's study, students appreciated the chance to delve into personal and relatable inquiries rather than generic or unrelatable topics that are common in educational settings. For example, one student found motivation to study why students learn slang easily; he contrasted that with a prescribed theme like recycling, which would not have energized him and would have felt pointless and routine (Hanks, 2015). As McVeigh (2002) details, motivation for English language learning in Japan is often limited to academic goals (e.g. attaining high TOEIC scores or entering a top university through high test scores). Japanese university students often report disliking their English courses as rote and dull, and do not make connections between issues within the classroom to their lives outside class time. Students are often made to feel as though they study in order to pass tests, so that they may study again later, for another test (McVeigh, 2002). We can then draw parallels between the students in Hanks's (2015) study and those at KUIS taking courses such as Academic Literacies: Writing, who may find more engagement and benefit if their essay themes connect with their personal lives.

Teachers, likewise, expressed "a new sense of intrigued inquiry as an equal alongside the learners" (Hanks, 2015, p. 16), moving away from everyday topics and instead investigating their own learning experiences, resulting in mutual development and a reactivation of the teachers' own interests in teaching and learning. Ultimately, this case study thus shows how a well-implemented EP approach is in tune with the classroom quality of life by considering the interests and needs of both students and teachers. While a "pure" EP approach may be infeasible for many ELI instructors, it is a practice that can be applied in stages, with methods of reflective practice and AR constituting meaningful reimaginings that approach an EP methodology.

OUR SUGGESTED ACTIONS

For students taking courses in the ELI, varying degrees of an EP approach can integrate learner autonomy into the classroom, anchor and reaffirm student self-reflection, and personalize curricula. Likewise, for teachers, EP affords opportunities for flexible course development while still allowing for adherence to departmental requirements and student needs such as academic reading and writing skills development, genre awareness, and critical media literacy. In Pinter et al.'s and Hank's studies, EP demonstrates a capacity for adaptability and adjustment that has the potential to empower students and open channels of communication between teachers and learners. The benefits of this approach require a shift in mentality on the part of those involved,

something that may be a challenge for all parties, including parents and administrators who have separate goals and expectations related to the classroom experience. A nuanced approach to EP is a good way to start, partially introducing the principles of EP through student involvement in analyzing their own language learning questions. This could be a comfortable transition for students familiar with the SALC and learner autonomy as they may be practicing self-reflection as part of their self-guided learner modules. Such reflection is a good first step for teachers as well: adopting methods of reflective practice as detailed by Farrell (2015), and re-balancing the teaching-research divide through AR methodology represent practical steps instructors can take towards acclimating themselves to the integrated, open-ended EP approach. A successful adjustment to EP requires a practical understanding of specific classroom contexts and receptiveness to student input on desirable learner outcomes.

In the context of L2 learning, teachers and learners constantly negotiate barriers to understanding that originate in differing cultural, linguistic, and social structures. In this way, teachers and learners in the L2 classroom are already experienced with various teacher models, student roles, and expectations. Therefore, we argue that EP offers a valuable approach towards the language-learning environment at KUIS and in the ELI where cultural and social differences are present, and teachers and students must find common ground in their goals and expectations of the classroom experience. EP offers a theoretical framework to guide the kind of open-ended negotiation L2 teachers and learners are already conducting as well as encourage learner autonomy that the SALC promotes.

Language learners have a variety of goals; the ELI classroom should be equipped to assess and respond to these goals. EP expands the roles of teachers and learners to include "inquisitive collaborators" with common goals: assessing and improving the learning environment in an unspecified, yet-to-be-discovered way.

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