

EPCentre NEWSLETTER

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FIRST THINGS FIRST: AN APOLOGY

At long last we have found the time and the energy to settle down to the task of letting you know of developments for the Exploratory Practice Centre, and for Exploratory Practice in general, since our inaugural meeting in Lancaster last July (and please see below for our request for your help in planning what to do next!). Our apologies for the long delay.

WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING

At Lancaster

The preparation of resource packs and an EP archive:

At the EPCentre here we are trying to put ourselves in a better position to meet the needs of enquirers by preparing a number of resource packs about Exploratory Practice. So far we have sent packs for use in Canada, China, London and Turkey, but it is an idea we are still in the process of developing, with the thought that we might make packs available to meet the differing needs of newcomers and people with some experience, for example. We are also trying to establish a fully comprehensive EP archive to draw on whenever we get requests for help with the huge mass of literature that interest in Exploratory Practice has generated over the years.

The promised website:

We are putting this updated version of our very first EPCentre Newsletter on the web, in the hope that it will spur us on to develop the original idea of a more wide-ranging website coverage of Exploratory Practice. We have taken the opportunity to revise the Newsletter with the latest information on a few issues (like Inés Miller's recent success at her PhD viva!).

Contributions to Lancaster courses and research groups:

Since last July Exploratory Practice has been the subject of a number of academic sessions within the Linguistics Department and the IELE. For example, we have conducted special sessions with a group of Ukrainian teacher trainers (see 'projects' below), and with the group doing Alan Waters' MA course in Language Teaching Method. In addition, Judith Hanks, in August 2000 worked on a series of EP awareness-raising sessions with Japanese teachers of English. We have also made Exploratory Practice the subject of a series of special sessions of the Teacher Research and Teacher Development Research Group. At the same time, Judith Hanks has been contributing an EP element to an Independent Studies Unit, run by Jane Sunderland, on Researching Language Classrooms. Most recently, Dick has been in Hong Kong teaching on the MA TESOL programme there, and was able to interest the group there in Exploratory Practice so that we now have all their names to add to our mailing list.

Making research friends elsewhere.

On May 16th a small group from Lancaster (Dick Allwright; Katherine Chang; Judith Hanks; Yang, Lining; and Wu, Zongjie) visited Teresa O'Brien and some of her colleagues (Jane Andrews, Patrick Andrews, Gary Motteram, Linda Thompson, and Richard West) in Manchester, to discuss relationships between Lancaster's work on EP and Manchester's work in collaborative research. In the meantime we have issued a return invitation, for sometime in July. What we have in mind is to discuss, all under the heading, perhaps, of "Doing Research that Matters", the issue of reconciling the ultimate purposes of our research with the more mundane, and sometimes conflicting, requirements of our employing institutions. We hope that at least some of you on our general mailing list will be able to join us (see below).

Elsewhere in the world

a) in courses:

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,

- * from August to December 2000, Maria Isabel Cunha ran fortnightly EP sessions with a new group of public sector teachers, and a group of five 'multipliers';
- * Maria Isabel Cunha and Ines Miller will be offering a forty-hour module to teachers of Portuguese, French, Spanish and English from the 'municipio' of Rio de Janeiro. From August to December 2001, the new group (of forty teachers) will be working within the framework of EP to understand 'the culture of/in their classrooms';
- * some of Dick's texts are being translated into Portuguese in order for them to be available to be read by people in the above course, and to compose a forthcoming collection of Dick's texts on EP in Portuguese;
- * Ines Miller is also using Exploratory Practice with teacher trainees in the Catholic University in Rio, and Maria Isabel Cunha is using it with her learners at the Laboratory School of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro;

In Turkey,

- * Hulya Bartu has turned a whole MA course over to Exploratory Practice in Yildiz Technical University. As far as we know she is the first person to have our new portfolio of papers to use immediately as a course resource.

In Hungary,

- * Roz Ivanic has recently taught a short course on approaches to research, including EP, for a doctoral programme in Budapest.

b) in conferences:

KOREA (Taegu)

Dick Allwright's visit to Korea in September 2000, for Korea TESOL's conference in Taegu, included a plenary session at the conference in which he introduced EP as a way of developing understandings of classroom behaviour (see 'What we've been writing' section below), and a special session at the British Council in Seoul where the focus was on EP as a vehicle for learner and teacher development.

SCOTLAND (Edinburgh)

November saw Dick Allwright and Ines Miller foolhardily braving the dislocated British train system (it took six hours to get there, mostly by bus!) to attend the 8th IALS Symposium for Language Teacher Educators, where Dick gave a plenary talk entitled "Exploratory Practice: an 'appropriate methodology' for language teacher development?". The talk is now available in full draft form, as an e-mail attachment.

CUBA (Havana)

Dick was also lucky enough to get to Cuba, in December, for the conference celebrating the tenth anniversary of GELI (the national English language teacher association). His plenary there was entitled "Exploratory Practice: a decade of development", and took the form of a review of the ten years since he had given the first GELI plenary in 1991, under the title of: "Exploratory Teaching, Professional Development, and the Role of a Teachers Association." As for the Edinburgh presentation, this new talk is now available in full draft form, as an attachment. It does duplicate the Edinburgh talk to some extent, so you may not be interested in both.

FRANCE (Grenoble)

Dick went to France in early June to run workshops and give a plenary talk on the six principles behind EP, at the twenty-third annual conference of APLIUT, the association of language teachers in technical universities (IUT) in France (and the sister association of BALEAP in the UK). He had been originally invited to talk about Action Research, and had intended to offer a critique of Action Research bundled up in a presentation of EP. That happened, through the six principles, but for the first time Dick centred the talk on the just emerging idea (for him) that we should be focussing our energies on improving the quality of

'life', rather than the quality of 'work'. The talk appeared to be well received (in spite of his very 'rusty' French) and has already prompted one piece of feedback to the conference organisers that it reminded at least one person of why it was s/he was a teacher, and why s/he liked being a teacher. The idea of bringing life and work together is emerging in discussions, primarily, thanks to Wu, Zongjie's interest in such thinking, and a parallel interest in recent work in the School of Management here in Lancaster (see also section (f) under 'What we're thinking about', below).

c) in projects:

SHANGHAI

Tony Luxon reports: A consultancy team with Ron White, formerly of Reading, Steve Corcoran from Chichester and Tony Luxon from Lancaster IELE helped to design a teacher development project for serving English teachers in Shanghai. This development is through both course- and school-based work, and on the school based side, we have recommended that this development should take an Exploratory Practice approach, as it would be most appropriate for this situation and this context. In one school we visited, teachers were already doing this, they just didn't know they were doing it.

UKRAINE:

Tony Luxon also reports: At the same time, in Lancaster, a team of people from Ukraine have been designing a new Pre-service curriculum which is expected to go nationwide over the next few years. After sessions and discussions with Judith Hanks, Dick Allwright and Ines Miller, they decided to include Exploratory Practice as part of the professional orientation of the fifth year of the curriculum.

COMING SOON, PERHAPS TO A PLACE NEAR YOU

Maria Isabel Cunha and Ines Miller will be at the XVI ENPULI conference to be held in Londrina, Parana, in September 2001, where they will be eager to talk informally to anyone who would like to hear more about Exploratory Practice, and to hear from people who are already using the ideas in their work.

WHAT WE'RE THINKING ABOUT

The following issues are the ones that we keep on finding ourselves thinking, and talking, about, and of course puzzling over:

- a) how can we best understand, and then find a way through, the apparent conflict between on the one hand our interest as academic researcher/teachers in researching under-performance as an element in classroom behaviour, and on the other hand our EP-based insistence that it is the participants who should decide what shall get investigated, not outside researchers like us?
- b) how can we best understand the role of EP in the lives of teachers with little or no interactive element in their normal teaching?
- c) why do we find it so difficult to convince people that EP and Action Research really are different, in crucially important ways? (An issue for Dick at APLIUT, see above.)
- d) why do we so easily accept the idea that EP may not be appropriate to teachers of absolute beginners in a language? Are we falling into the trap of equating EP with a set of practices, rather than with a set of principles? (Another issue Dick took up in his APLIUT presentation in June).
- e) why do we worry so much about presenting EP as potentially making a contribution to classroom method? Is it related to the same issue of confusing 'practices' and 'principles'?

f) and now, in the light of Hulya Bartu's worries from her experiences in Turkey that getting a 'sense of achievement' is a problem for EP teacher groups (see the next section of this Newsletter), there is something else to worry about.

g) but the current BIG issue: how can we convince people that EP, even as a contribution to classroom method, is ultimately more about 'quality of life' than it is about 'quality of work'?

This last issue has quite recently been taken up very interestingly, as noted earlier, by Wu, Zongjie, a doctoral student at Lancaster working on teachers' knowledge in China. In his thinking Zongjie is taking us back to the earliest days of the development of EP, when we were very reluctant to reduce it to a set of practical procedures, for fear that this would also reduce it to a more or less practical 'recipe' for classroom behaviour, rather than a more or less satisfying 'philosophy' for life in general (a much more ambitious aim, perhaps, but also a much more interesting one).

Dick is now concentrating on presenting EP as a set of principles first and foremost, backed up by one 'philosophical' idea - that 'quality of life' is more important than 'quality of work'. This would perhaps have a direct parallel with the idea we have already that understanding is more important than problem-solving, and a necessary prerequisite to intelligent problem-solving. We haven't thought this through properly yet, though. Who knows what may happen to the idea?! What's happened already is here as Appendix II.

WHAT WE, AND OTHERS, HAVE BEEN WRITING

Finished papers:

1. Dick Allwright's contribution to the First International Conference on Language Teacher Education, in Minneapolis in May 1999: "Three Major Processes of Teacher Development and the Appropriate Design Criteria for Developing and Using Them", has now been published in the Conference Proceedings. The full bibliographical information is: Johnston, B. & S. Irujo (eds) 2001 **Research and Practice in Language Teacher Education: Voices from the Field**. Minneapolis, Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, pp115-133.
2. Dick's paper "Learning (and teaching) as well as you know how: why is it so very difficult?", a discussion of language classroom behaviour that suggests EP as a possible investigative tool, is now published in Wagner, J. (ed) (2001) **Pædagogik og læring i fremmed- og andetsprog**. Odense Working Papers in Language and Communication, No. 22, January, pp 1-41.
3. Dick's plenary talk for the Korean TESOL 2000 conference - "Classroom Language Learning: public behaviour, private learning" is available on request from us at Lancaster, electronically if that is convenient to you. It is expected to be published in October 2001, as part of the Conference Proceedings.
4. Dick's plenary for the Edinburgh IALS Symposium (see above): "Exploratory Practice: 'Appropriate methodology' for language teacher development?" is now available in full draft form, and we hope it will get published sooner or later.
5. His very similar, but differently slanted, plenary for GELI in Cuba (also see above): "Exploratory Practice: a decade of development" is now also available in full draft form, and we similarly hope it will soon get published, this time in Cuba.
6. Hulya Bartu, in Turkey, has published a challenging (for us) paper: "Teachers' Sense of Achievement in Exploratory Teaching" in Mair, J. (ed): **Excellence in Teaching: Promoting, Implementing and Sustaining Effective Practice**, Bilkent, Bilkent University School of English Language, pp93-102.
7. Tim Murphey, in Japan, has just published a fascinating paper that uses, from the beginning, the notion of EP. Its title, however, does not suggest an interest in EP; "Tools of

Recursion, Intermental Zones of Proximal Development, and Critical Collaborative Autonomy”, so you might have missed it. Highly recommended, and to be found in **JALT Journal**, Vol 23, No. 1, May 2001, pp130-150.

8. Kimberly Saylor, of Minnesota, is awaiting publication of her paper: “Action for Understanding: A Study in Teacher Research with Exploratory Practice”, in **Teachers’ Ways of Knowing**, due out from CUP any month now.

Also newly available:

1. Dick has also been re-thinking the one-page statement of basic principles and rewritten them in a much less cryptic style. They still fit on one page, however, in a print-size just about big enough for use as in overhead transparency form. This new statement (intended to complement rather than supersede the earlier one) is reproduced here as Appendix I. If you do want it to use in your teaching or research in any way you are very welcome to do so, of course (with no copyright implications, as long as you retain the attribution at the bottom).

2. Even more recently, while he was in Hong Kong in June he produced a combination ‘rationale’ and ‘set of principles’, where he tries to make clear the relationships between the principles, as a coherent set, not just a list. If people like it, it will essentially replace the separate rationale and principles documents, but the one-page statement of the principles in bold for an OHT may still be found useful of course. (The new document is also included here as Appendix II.)

3. Dick’s plenary at APLIUT in France was delivered entirely in French, but he’s now working on a developed version which may be bilingual French/English. It is expected to appear eventually in the Cahiers de l’APLIUT, in France.

WHAT WE’RE TRYING TO FIND TIME TO WRITE

1. We’ve been invited by a major publisher to submit a book proposal on EP. It’s very tempting, but we see a major problem knowing quite who to address it to, and how to write it so it is right for whoever it makes sense to address it to. All advice gratefully received! Dick’s visit to Hong Kong gave him time to work up some preliminary structural ideas. More later.

2. Zongjie and Dick are planning a paper together (to be written this autumn, we hope) to formally address the issue of the relationship between EP and Action Research, and to emphasise the more philosophical aspects of EP.

COMPLETED RESEARCH MAKING USE OF THE IDEAS OF EP

Dick has been privileged to examine a number of doctoral theses recently that have incorporated EP elements explicitly. For example:

Margit Szestay’s thesis for Exeter University: **Professional Development through Research.**

Judith Lamie’s thesis for the University of Birmingham: **Influences on the Process of Change: The Impact of In-service Training on the Attitudes and Practices of Japanese Teachers of English.**

STOP PRESS: DOCTORAL RESEARCH JUST COMPLETED!

We are delighted to be able to announce the success at the very recent viva of Ines Miller’s doctoral thesis: **Researching Teacher Consultancy via Exploratory Practice: A Reflexive and Socio-Interactional Approach.**

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS MAKING USE OF EP

Lancaster-based academic work

Hadara Perpignan, in Israel, has discovered and made full use of the idea that some of the principles of EP could be useful in guiding her doctoral work investigating learners' perceptions of the feedback she gives writers on an EAP course.

Morag Samson is now in Nigeria, but still working on her research project to investigate the support needs of teachers undertaking EP. She is also looking at the role the employing institution plays in supporting this type of professional development for teachers.

Ongoing research elsewhere.

Cindy Gunn, at Bath University, is completing her PhD on tracking learners' communicative development, with a strong element of using only those data collection devices that were also 'good pedagogy', and being very inventive in the process.

WHAT WE'RE DOING NEXT

Knowing how very busy everyone is all the time, we have hesitated to add anything more to people's timetables (especially our own!), but we enjoyed last July's session so much we have wanted to follow it up in some way. What we now have in mind is a special half-day session at Lancaster, for anyone who is around at the time, on "Doing Research that Matters". We had originally hoped that this could be in collaboration with Teresa O'Brien and her Manchester colleagues and students, but that has proved logistically impossible to arrange.

ABOUT NEWSLETTER AND WEBSITE.

When putting together this Newsletter we realised we were perhaps creating something that could be used as some sort of a model for what we would like to put on our webpage. Please let us know if that sounds right, or wrong, to you. Do you think a webpage should do very different things from a newsletter, or the same things very differently?

This first issue of our Newsletter probably has much less in it than should be there, because we need you to tell us what you're doing first.

Please do get in touch with us, then, and not only by answering the questions above.

Let us have your EP news, and let us know what you think should be in the next issue of the Newsletter. And let us know if you have any queries about the content of this Newsletter.

And remember we are just as happy to publicise your more general queries, if you have any, and to see if anyone else is willing to respond to them, not just us all the time!

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR EXPLORATORY PRACTICE

- 1. Try to understand first, before you try to change anything, in case you discover that change is not necessary, or perhaps not desirable (or perhaps not actually possible).**
- 2. Don't let your work for understanding get in the way of your main purpose, and try to find ways of working for understanding that actually contribute to achieving your main purpose (for example: teaching or learning).**
- 3. Make sure you're working to understand something you really care about, that is really relevant to your own interests and concerns. This won't be a problem if you're a teacher and deciding for yourself what you want to understand, but if you want your learners to help, then find something it is reasonable to expect they will care about too.**
- 4. Make sure you don't 'burn yourself out'. Instead, try to make sure that your work for understanding is so well integrated into your working life, so much a part of what you normally do anyway, that you can carry on doing it forever.**
- 5. Try to ensure that your work for understanding makes friends rather than enemies. In other words, let other people share in the fun, but don't take their cooperation for granted, and try to make sure they get as much out of it as you do.**
- 6. Try to ensure that everybody's understanding is developed, not just your own.**

Dick Allwright, Lancaster, March 2001.

APPENDIX II

The revised combined document of the rationale produced by Dick and Ines some time ago, and a re-statement of the set of principles, given more internal coherence than before.

BRINGING WORK 'TO LIFE': EXPLORATORY PRACTICE FOR THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

1. The fundamental importance to our lives of 'noticing' what happens around us, through a natural process of 'selective attention'.

1.1 As *human beings* we notice (in the common-sense meaning of that term) what goes on in the human interactions we are involved in. We then make inferences from what we notice and act accordingly upon this 'interactional information'.

1.2 As *practitioners* (teachers, learners, trainers, consultants, etc.) we similarly notice what goes on in our pedagogical and social interaction in our working contexts (classrooms, offices, etc.).

1.3 Presumably, though, we don't notice *everything* equally. We also notice different things in different ways, at different times. Depending upon our varying interests and purposes we 'foreground' some aspects, by what is usually a non-conscious process of selective attention, and we 'background' others.

2. The relationship between 'noticing' and 'understanding'.

2.1 As 'purely' social human beings, and as social and 'pedagogical' beings, this normal process of noticing what is going on around us enables us to develop understandings about our social and pedagogical lives, so that we learn to cope socially and professionally.

2.2 But this normal process of noticing does not necessarily lead directly to understandings. It may instead simply cause us to be puzzled about what we see happening around us.

2.3 It is not only problems and failures in interaction that puzzle us, however. Our puzzlement may well be about things that are going well in our interactions.

2.4 This puzzlement, in turn, may prompt us to pay special attention (to develop a more heightened sense of awareness, a second level of noticing) to whatever it is that puzzles us.

3. How we normally go about of 'noticing' and trying to 'understand' the world around us.

3.1 We normally do all our noticing (both first and second levels) in the classroom or office *at the same time* as we are teaching, learning, supervising, offering consultancy, etc. We do not normally feel a need to bring someone else in to notice things for us, and would not necessarily trust the interventions of an 'outsider' to be helpful anyway.

3.2 Neither do we normally feel a need to distance ourselves significantly from our practice in order to try to understand whatever puzzles us about it. We are in any case likely to find ourselves too busy *doing* our work to be able to take time out to study it 'objectively'.

3.3 We therefore typically approach it (whatever puzzles us) from within the situation itself, sharing our puzzlement, when it seems likely to be helpful, with the other people involved.

3.4 We hope in this way to better understand what is going on around us, our part in it all, and how our part affects the way other people in the situation can and do play their parts.

4. How our understandings may lead to our wanting to change things, and how they might instead lead more directly to an enhanced 'quality of life'.

4.1 This 'better understanding' may lead us to want to change something about our practice, and if so we can perhaps hope to be now in a somewhat better position to try to make sensible decisions about the sorts of change we want to bring about, and how best to try to do so.

4.2 Alternatively, however, and more importantly perhaps, this 'better understanding', if we can achieve it, may lead us to feel more 'on top of' something we feel we are doing well enough already - to get more satisfaction out of what we are doing and the way we are doing it. In short to improve the quality of our lives.

5. But, however natural all this may be, that does not mean we're all experts at 'noticing' and constructing 'understandings' from it.

5.1 We may not be as good at noticing what is going on around us as it would be potentially useful for us to be, nor as good at developing whatever we do notice, and puzzle about, into productive understandings for ourselves.

5.2 It might in principle be possible to help people become better able to both notice what is happening in the world around them (and inside their own heads, too), and to reach productive understandings that will perhaps improve the quality of their lives.

5.3 But we don't want people spending so much energy and time trying to 'notice' and to 'understand' that they can't get on with the rest of their lives. Becoming good at it must not become a burden in itself.

6. What Exploratory Practice is intended for.

6.1 Exploratory Practice is being developed in order to offer a sustainable way of *developing our understandings within our practice*, with the absolute minimum of intrusion, and the maximum potential for practical and personal benefit.

6.2 Exploratory Practice is not principally intended to offer a way of *changing* our practice, then, but if it produces satisfactory understandings then they should help us decide what if anything does in fact need changing, and what might be a satisfactory change to try to make. Trying out a proposed change, and finding out whether it does what it is hoped it will do to improve the situation, is the business of Action Research, not Exploratory Practice.

7. But Exploratory Practice is not just another set of procedures. Rather it is an approach based on a set of general principles.

7.1 The principles that are described below have been developed over a decade or so of practical experience and thinking (mostly in Brazil). They are still subject to development. There are currently two main principles, and the first of these involves four subsidiary ones.

7.2 The first main principle:

UNDERSTANDING - Prioritise understanding over problem-solving.

Working for understanding is more important than, a logical pre-requisite for, and potentially an alternative to, working for practical change.

From this first main principle three more subsidiary principles follow:

7.2.1 SUSTAINABILITY - Avoid projectisation. Instead prioritise sustainable effort.

If you work for understanding, then you will not allow yourself the otherwise convenient illusion that the world is composed of problems to be solved separately. Instead you will realise that the world is composed of continuously interesting 'puzzles' - things it is worth continuously puzzling over (which will occasionally justify forays into problem-solving, as and when appropriate).

7.2.2 MUTUAL DEVELOPMENT - Work for everyone's development, not just your own.

If you work for understanding because it is developmentally so rewarding to do so (in itself, for the continuously developing understanding and understandings it brings, and incidentally also for the problems those understandings will sometimes render soluble), then you will see (both egotistically and altruistically) that such benefits should be available to all.

7.2.3 RELEVANCE - Work on everyone's 'puzzles', not just on your own.

Since you are all in a social situation together, it will follow that in order to get maximum benefit for all you will all need to ensure that everyone's concerns are addressed, not just your own.

7.2.4 COLLEGIALITY - Work to heal the damaging rifts between people (especially between teachers and learners, and between teachers and researchers).

If all the above are working well then this should certainly help bring people together in a commonly perceived common enterprise (of working for understanding), rather than further separate them into different (and potentially competing) worlds.

Which bring us to the second main principle for practice-based research in the language classroom:

7.3 INTEGRATION - prevent work for understanding from becoming a burden.

Following the previous five principles (as suggested and deplored in subsection 5.3 above) could be very burdensome. The immediate concern for, in our case, language teaching and learning, need not and should not be sacrificed to the long-term concern for developing understanding. Any work for understanding must therefore be so well integrated into the pedagogy that it becomes a proper part of the teaching and the learning, not a parasite upon them. 'Exploratory Practice' has been developed precisely for this purpose.

8. All of which takes us back to the idea of 'bringing work to life'.

8.1 All the above principles stand (or fall) on the major implication throughout so far that working for understanding is somehow 'good for you' - that it promises greater 'job satisfaction', and that it promises to enhance yours, and everyone's, life more substantially than you can expect from 'merely' working for effectiveness. It is now time to try to sum up this position more explicitly in some propositions:

8.1.1 Working for an improved quality of 'life' in the language classroom, as a language teacher, learner, or researcher, is more valuable in itself than working for an enhanced quality of 'work' there.

8.1.2 It is also a more sure way of enhancing the quality of work should that be an appropriate goal.

8.1.3 Such considerations should also guide the steps of any external researcher trying to encourage, and assist, practice-based research.

But even these propositions perpetuate a work/life distinction we would probably do well to try to get rid of. So we probably need at least a third proposition:

8.4 We surely need a stronger sense of integration between life and work, within which 'work' is very clearly seen as a proper part of 'life', not something separate from it.

(NB: the field of education may be special, though probably by no means unique, in blurring the distinction between 'life' and 'work'. In other fields a job you cannot take home with you is likely to be more common.)

9. Concluding claim.

Adopting Exploratory Practice, with its foundation in the above rationale, principles, and propositions, may help to achieve this integration. If not, not much of lasting value will have been achieved.

Dick Allwright, Hong Kong, June 2001.
(Sections 1 to 6 adapted from Allwright and Miller, 1998.)