

Working for Understanding: Productive Tensions in Doing Exploratory Practice

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Working for Understanding: Productive Tensions in Doing Exploratory Practice

Presentation Overview

1. What is 'Exploratory Practice' (EP)?
2. What is #EPThursdays?
3. Productive Tensions in Doing EP:
 - a. Maintaining perspective while focusing on individual vs. group puzzles → **So many people, so many puzzles!**
 - b. Balancing the pull to investigate multiple puzzles while pursuing a single topic → **Pursuing a puzzle**
 - c. Creating structure to maintain the reflective practice without subverting the organic nature of EP → **Maintaining a practice**
4. Concluding Thoughts

Exploratory Practice (EP) as “Fully Inclusive Practitioner Research”

- **Practitioner research model** that seeks to support (language) teachers in **ongoing inquiry** about teaching and learning without it becoming a burden
- Invites practitioners to adopt the construct of a **puzzle** (rather than a problem) to frame questions about classroom life
 - Focus on **developing understanding**
 - Ex. “Why do my students ask so many questions in class?”
- Advocates for **teachers and learners** to work together on questions about teaching and learning (“fully inclusive”)

EP's 7 Guiding Principles for Exploring a Puzzle

(1) Put quality of life first.

Quality of Life

(2) Work primarily to understand language classroom life.

Understanding

(1) Involve everybody.

(2) Work to bring people together.

(3) Work also for mutual development.

Collegiality

(1) Integrate the work for understanding into the classroom practice.

Sustainability

(2) Make the work a continuous enterprise

Current puzzles

What does perspective-shifting look like in my classroom? How can I tell when my students are questioning their assumptions, developing greater open-mindedness, or considering perspectives different from their own?

How can I keep my intermediate Spanish students motivated?

Why are my students afraid to talk in Italian? How can I tear down those walls?

How do I address students' needs to have grammar made explicit (=taught?) in class without undermining the flipped classroom approach?

**When do I use or accept the use of English in class?
When is it productive?
When is it harmful?**

How can I encourage my advanced writing students to develop and adopt their own criteria for valuing good writing?

EP at D u k e

Do you have questions about your students' learning?
Are you looking for new ways to reflect on your classroom?
Would you like to reflect on your teaching in a way that doesn't overwhelm?



If so, please consider joining our "Exploratory Practice" group for the fall semester!

"Exploratory Practice" Reflective Teaching Group for Duke Language Instructors Fall 2018

What is Exploratory Practice?

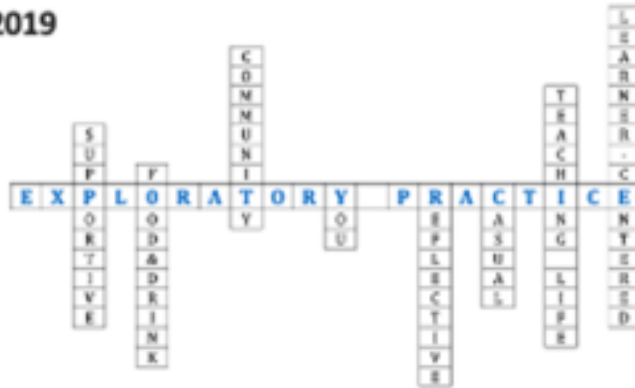
Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2001, 2004; Allwright & Hanks, 2009) has gained popularity among language teachers for its holistic approach to teacher reflection. In the model, teachers are encouraged to look at classroom life not as 'problems' that need to be solved, but rather as 'puzzles' one tries to understand better. A primary goal in the framework is to understand the life of the classroom in a manageable, sustainable way without leading to teacher burn-out. Thus, Exploratory Practice encourages drawing on pedagogical resources that are already part of teachers' good teaching practices (such as class discussion) and, importantly, including learners in the ongoing reflection.

Format of Exploratory Practice (EP) Groups

EP groups will be rather small (consisting of 3-5 people). Meetings will take place on campus (location TBA) every 2 weeks for approximately one hour from mid October to early December. At our first meeting, we will talk in more depth about the Exploratory Practice model and brainstorm possible puzzles and resources for information-gathering. Subsequent meetings will consist of group members sharing their puzzles with each other informally. Group members are encouraged to come to meetings with notes or a record of their puzzle development to ensure continued thinking about their questions.

Interested? Please contact Cori Crane at: cori.crane@duke.edu, by October 3.

**Exploratory Practice Reflective Teaching Group
for Duke Language Instructors
Fall 2019**



What is Exploratory Practice (EP)?

The reflective teaching model of EP encourages teachers to look at classroom life not as 'problems' that need to be solved, but rather as 'puzzles' one tries to understand better. A primary goal is to understand the life of the classroom in a manageable, sustainable way without leading to teacher burn-out. EP encourages drawing on pedagogical resources that are already part of teachers' good teaching practices and includes learners in the reflection.

#EPThursdays for Group Reflection on Teaching

Meetings will take place on the following Thursdays from 5:15-6:15 pm in the Spanish Language House:

- August 29 (initial meeting in 119 Old Chem to talk about exploratory practice and eat pizza)
- September 12
- September 26
- October 10
- October 24
- November 14
- December 5

Meetings will consist of participants sharing their puzzles about the classroom with each other informally. If you cannot attend all Thursdays, that's alright! We do encourage those interested, however, to attend the first meeting, where we will talk about what Exploratory Practice is. If you'd like to learn more about EP, visit our shared folder (<https://duke.box.com/v/EPDukeReadings>) to view and download readings. And if you can't make **#EPThursdays** this fall, we plan to offer another EP series in the spring.

Interested? Contact Melissa Simmermeyer (simmerme@duke.edu) & Cori Crane (cpc32@duke.edu) by August 27.

#EPThursdays

Fall 2019

#EPThursdays



#EPThursdays Spring 2020

#EPThursdays

Exploratory Practice Reflective Teaching Group for Duke Language Instructors



What is Exploratory Practice (EP)?

In EP, teachers are encouraged to look at classroom life not as 'problems' that need to be solved, but as 'puzzles' one tries to understand better. A primary goal is to understand the life of the classroom in a manageable, sustainable way without leading to teacher burn-out. So, EP recommends drawing on pedagogical resources that are already part of teachers' good teaching practices and includes learners in the reflection.

#EPThursdays for Group Reflection on Teaching

Meetings will take place on Thursdays from 5:15-6:15 pm in Classroom 101 (East Campus):

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| • January 16 | • March 19 |
| • January 30 | • April 2 |
| • February 13 | • April 16 |
| • March 5 | |

At meetings, participants will share puzzles about the classroom with each other informally. If you cannot attend all Thursdays, that's all right! We do encourage those interested to attend the first meeting though, where we will introduce the framework. If you'd like to learn more about EP, visit our shared folder (<https://duke.box.com/s/EPDukeReadings>) to view and download readings.

Interested?

Contact Melissa Simmermeyer (simmerme@duke.edu) & Cori Crane (cor32@duke.edu).

A word on productive tensions



Maintaining perspective while focusing on individual vs. group puzzles. **So many people, so many puzzles!**

Tension vs connection

Tension:

- Difficulty in choosing the right puzzle.

Connection:

- Reading the puzzle out loud.
- Creating smaller groups: connecting with similar puzzles: “what makes a good puzzle is a common puzzle”.
- From “why” to “how” to “what”: changing perspective. “Working for understanding (rather than problem-solving) is central to EP” (Exploratory Practice in Language Teaching, p. 108)

Pursuing your puzzle

- **Puzzles** not problems- start off on the right foot
- Ask not *how* (to achieve a goal, fix a problem) but ***Why? And What happens when...?***

Why do my students and I use English in my L2 class?

Which instances do we find helpful?

What happens when English is used in class?

Pursuing your puzzle

Observation

Make a list of instances of L1 use and create a student survey

Exploiting normal pedagogic practices as research tools to investigate learning

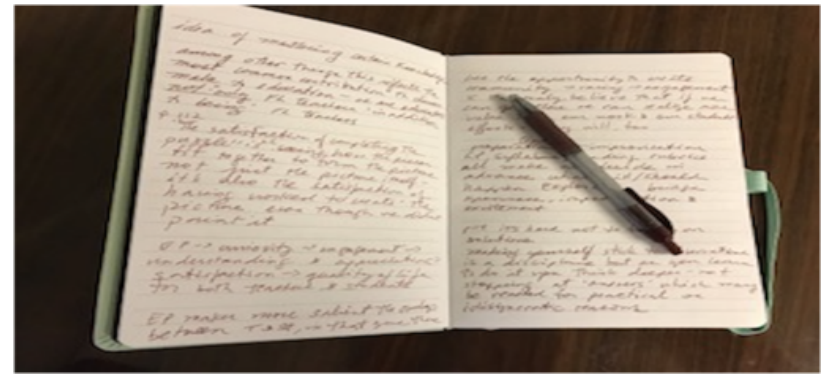
Conduct and discuss the survey in L2

Building and Engaging the learning community

Elicit feedback from students and colleagues and report back to them

Pursuing your puzzle

Journaling



gather data for focused reflection

make explicit your observations and questions

establish a record of your thought process

Sustaining the practice: Structure and Accountability

Questions:

- 1- Are structure and accountability necessary to our practice or do they risk undermining it?
- 2- If so, how can we achieve them without subverting some of the important premises of EP?

Structure & Accountability

Question 1

Why do we still need structure and accountability in EP?

- Modeling practice for students
- Sharing work with colleagues
- Meetings - equalizing time among speakers
- Moving forward with puzzling & staying engaged

Structure & Accountability

Question 2

How to achieve without compromising on important EP principles?

————→ BALANCE

- During EP Thursday meetings - time split between large-group discussions and breakout groups.
- EP Thursdays vs. other opportunities for impromptu meetings among subsets of larger group.
- Journals for note taking; but for whatever purpose is deemed useful by the individual.

Concluding thoughts...

- **Inclusive practitioner research**
 - teachers & learners
 - ongoing inquiry
 - reduces burn out
- **Puzzles vs Problems**
 - ongoing reflection about process
 - shifting perspectives
 - heightened awareness
- **Joy of teaching**
 - space to honor why we teach
 - exchange of ideas, community
 - have fun

Quality of Life

Exploratory Practice Reflective Teaching

Thursdays 5:15 - 6:15 pm
Classroom 101 (East Campus)

- **March 5**
- **March 19**
- **April 2**
- **April 16**





Further Reading

Recommendations on Where to Begin

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2. Allwright, D. (2005). Developing principles for practitioner research: The case of exploratory practice. *Modern Language Journal*, 89(3), 353-66.
3. Allwright, D., & Hanks, J. (2009). *The developing language learner: An introduction to exploratory practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
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- Mercer, S. (2013). Towards a complexity-informed pedagogy for language learning. *Rev. bras. linguist. apl.*, 13(2): 375-398.
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