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Exploring Grassroots, Innovative, and Creative Approaches to Language Learning Materials Development Through Inclusive Practitioner-Research

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This article is part of a collection of practitioner research on the theme of “Exploring Grassroots, Innovative, and Creative Approaches to Language Learning Materials Development Through Inclusive Practitioner-Research” for Issue 8 of the Learner Development Journal (LDJ8), edited by Anna Costantino, Assia Slimani-Rolls, and Nour El Houda Bouacha. Published once a year, each issue of the Learner Development Journal follows a Community of Practices approach over a period of approximately 18 months in which contributors work together, under the guidance of the editors, to share, respond to, and develop their research and writing.

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Introduction to *The Learner Development Journal* Issue 8: Exploring Grassroots, Innovative, and Creative Approaches to Language Learning Materials Development Through Inclusive Practitioner-Research

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The idea behind LDJ8 was born out of our professional engagement in learning development and practitioner research (PR). We—Anna, Assia, and Nour—have collaborated in various capacities over time to understand the development of teachers, learners, and materials. Assia, a scholar of Exploratory Practice and editor of the PR section of the *Language Teaching Research Journal*, has extensively focused on fostering the development of language educators in higher education. She has emphasised how vital PR is for the professional growth of language teachers, as it creates avenues to understand and engage with their specific contexts of practice. Nour's PhD research, supervised by Assia, revolved around learners' views, wants, and uses of their nationally prescribed textbooks. Her findings suggested that teachers and learners can reflect on their experiences and participate in materials development, evaluation, and adaptation despite systemic hindrances relegating them to the role of technician and implementers. Anna is an exploratory practice practitioner and language educator with an interest in pedagogic materials and their mediating role jointly played with learners and teachers. Together, we have endeavoured to explore these areas of work whose inherent interrelations, we believe, remain underexplored in language education.

When we learned about the scope of *The Learner Development Journal* (LDJ), we recognized it as a space that could catalyse our connections. Importantly, in drafting the proposal for LDJ8, we saw LDJ as a unique platform for other language practitioners to (1) explore how PR could bring together the perspectives of the learner, the teacher, and the materials; (2) discuss how the learner could play an active role in both understanding their learning practices and engaging with pedagogical materials; (3) fathom the nature of PR as a dissemination genre that enables both learners and teacher to find agency and voice.

Materials development, as Brian Tomlinson (2020) observes, is both an academic and practical pursuit. As an academic field, it began gaining recognition only in the 1990s. Since then, what started as a practical endeavor has steadily attracted researchers' attention, resulting in a growing body of postgraduate theses and published studies. With the increasing academic interest demanding more empirical research and sophisticated methods (Guerrettaz et al., 2022) to evaluate materials' effectiveness, we question whether it is possible to integrate theory and practice in a way that preserves the original practical impetus without allowing it to be overshadowed.

Materials development remains a practical endeavor, as evidenced by the growing number of conferences and workshops dedicated to its practice. It is a pursuit that can be approached "in design, as designed, in action, or in reflection" (Tomlinson, 2020, p. 4). Those terms also put learning design center stage as a key aspect of language pedagogy.

We want to highlight two additional aspects that capture the achievements of the exploratory inquiries and practice-related reviews presented here. First, Brian Tomlinson (2020) identifies PR as a promising area for the future of materials development. Similarly, Dat Bao and colleagues (2018), in their work on creativity, highlight dimensions requiring attention for learner-centred materials development: resisting routines, personalization, localization, and learner humanisation. These insights resonate strongly with the research featured here.

The body of work in LDJ8 shows that PR prioritises the skills, expertise, and possibilities that allow practitioners to start where they are and with what is familiar and accessible to them. This way of doing interrogates established knowledge and methodologies (Amanda Kira; Annie Minami; Mine Derince & Philipp Rost; Yaya Yao); and flattens hierarchies by bringing teachers/mentors and learners/mentees together as partners to humanise the classroom relationships (Annie Minami; Erzsébet Békés; Palmyra Baroni Nunes, Maria Isabel Azevedo Cunha, and Inés Kayon de Miller; Yaya Yao); moves boundaries, allowing practitioners to act as writers for PR with the support of reviewers and editors and enables them to widen their experiences further by engaging in book reviews (Erzsébet Békés, Melanie Mello). In this Journal issue, contributors focus on writing about aspects that "they" have identified as marring their practice and the methodologies "they" see fit to enable them to stimulate their students and make better sense of their practice. In doing so, the writers cast light on the progress that PR has achieved in bringing together practitioners to co-research their teaching and learning activities and co-produce knowledge and understandings in ways that they feel are plausible, meaningful, and relevant for them in making sense of their practice, and, by the same token, projecting themselves as professionals. The practitioners' contributions suggest that PR offers a viable pathway to balance the field's dual identities of theory and practice. Moreover, their focus on local adaptation and personalization of materials further demonstrates a profound commitment to addressing learners' needs. The articles in LDJ8 portray a constructive image of PR within which practitioners are capable of taking charge of the development of PR in order to deserve the recognition and respect that it merits.

PR in the form of reflective practice, action research, and exploratory practice, as used by the LDJ8 contributors, legitimises and brings to the fore teachers' "ways of knowing" and "ways of coming to know" (Johnson, 2006, p. 241). This knowledge is bound to influence teachers' practices and potentially students' opportunities for learning. As such, many have encouraged teachers' knowledge to be made public so it can be shared, discussed, and advanced further (e.g., Johnson, 2006; Allwright & Hanks, 2009). In response to the need to share teachers' research outcomes, various genres for disseminating teachers'

research have furthermore emerged, such as the popular presentational gallery style format, blogging, tweeting, and posting on social networks. However, in their LDJ8 articles, authors have used the framework developed over the last decade or so and presented in Barfield et al. (2024). In that the three of us, together with the authors and reviewers, have also engaged with this “community of practices” over the last 18 months, we believe it is worth reflecting briefly on some of the fundamental features which the LDJ8 reviewers and contributors have operationalised in the writing up of their PR articles.

The LDJ8 articles are driven not by a gap in the literature as generally done in academic research articles, but rather by the authors’ teaching concerns or puzzles that frustrate (and also fascinate) them in their practices. Hence, the puzzle should be placed at the heart of their research efforts. In actual fact, PR is not directly interested in gaps existing in the field of education. Rather, it is interested in encouraging practitioners to articulate, through their inquiries, the tacit understanding that motivates their classroom practice, although the LDJ framework recommends that the literature could be used to justify the findings. It was, however, intriguing for the LDJ reviewers to find, when reading the first drafts, that the articles were driven mainly by a standard literature review underpinning the basis of a conventional academic paper. Indeed, although some of the writers teach in the primary and secondary sectors, they are all postgraduate degree holders and have remained strongly influenced by the academic reporting format in which they were trained when conducting postgraduate research. We would like to highlight the importance of the guidance provided by the journal and discussed in Barfield et al. (2024). This guidance was instrumental for reviewers in respecting the authors’ claims and, at the same time, helping them sustain the authors’ efforts to write and rewrite parts of the drafts several times before they could capture their most inner authentic voice to represent their work in a distinctly PR genre. This dissemination genre is essentially based on teachers sharing teaching puzzle elucidations that are helpful to them and that, at the same time, offer researchers insight into practitioners’ work.

LDJ guidance stresses that authors should place practice at the heart of their writing; address an audience of teachers and also researchers, which PR is trying to bring into the fold; highlight the context of the study; bring to the fore voices, including those which are often unheard; articulate problematic stances from the different perspectives; and inform the readership about the learning that the practitioner has gained. In particular, LDJ contributors are encouraged to give attention to the potential implication that their inquiries and reviews have for classroom practice while, at the same time, the practitioner should be critical and avoid generalisations. In other words, it is crucial that practitioner-researchers represent a sense of the complexity of working with and reflecting on the classroom processes that teachers normally take in their stride so that their writing captures the intricate nature of investigating highly specific classroom contexts.

These guidelines have kept our community of peers, editors, reviewers, and writers focused, interested, and fully aware of the novel mission in which they have been bound: accomplishing the arduous task of making PR publication sustainable. This directly echoes the ongoing challenges that practitioners face in theorising their praxis in a world dominated by academic research. However, carrying out their enquiries and publishing their outcomes through taking part in a supportive community lets us see certain common themes and approaches that have emerged. Melanie and Erzsébet not only attempt to interpret the voices of the authors of the resources they have reviewed but also engage deeply with their insights to respond to critical instances of their practice. Translanguaging features prominently in the work of Annie, Mine & Philipp, and Yaya. As they bring their

stories and the practical instances to the fore, transanguaging is approached in its full richness—not simply as a technique for using the home language to address immediate classroom needs, but also as a stance for engaging bilingual and multilingual learners in leveraging their linguistic repertoires while remaining mindful of their cultural identities (García & Wei, 2014). The work of Palmyra, Maria Isabel, and Inés, and Amanda similarly addresses learner engagement, localization, and humanisation by narrating their journeys from puzzling moments in their practice to recognizing that the pursuit of understanding remains an ongoing process (Allwright & Hanks, 2009).

The following short summaries contain a brief introduction to each exploratory inquiry and practice-related review that make up this issue of LDJ8, offering a glimpse into their key themes, insights, and significance. (Please note that a commentary will be added in early 2025.)

Exploratory Inquiries

Amanda Kira, “Designing Social Media Tasks in a University CLIL Course: An Action Research Inquiry”

In her action research inquiry, Amanda explores the integration of multimodal tasks into an EFL CLIL course at a university in Japan. Driven by concerns with designing and implementing projects that encourage the creative production of social media posts, Amanda reflects on the challenges and outcomes of embedding multiliteracies into task-based learning. Amanda concludes by offering insightful strategies for fostering learner engagement in digital and multimodal communication.

Yaya Yao, “The Sound Behind the Mask”: Transanguaging Performance Poetry for Learner Development”

Yaya aims at liberating multilingual students from feelings of inadequacy when using their new language. Frustrated by institutional product-oriented exigencies, Yaya brings to the fore the potential that art-based pedagogy embodies in enabling students to make sense of their language learning efforts. Through transanguaging, her participant “Mohan” uses non-conformist learning materials such as poems and drawings, which allow him to reflect upon and engage with his own idiosyncratic learning, and lead him to eventually understand and develop his language use over time.

Palmyra Baroni Nunes, Maria Isabel Azevedo Cunha, & Inés Kayon de Miller, “Visions of a Game”

Palmyra, Maria Isabel, and Inés highlight how learner inclusivity in the classroom decision-making processes enables the participants to sustainably negotiate the development of authentic and meaningful teaching and learning materials based on the understanding of the environment in which the teacher and learners evolve daily. Their inquiry shows how and why such collaboratively mediated materials lend themselves to be constructively supported by all in their use in the classroom.

Annie Minami, “Reshaping the Secondary ESL Classroom: Using Exploratory Practice to Promote Student Participation at an All-Girls’ School in Japan”

Annie examines the use of Teacher-Initiated Exploratory Practice (TEP) to increase student engagement. Through innovative strategies such as translanguaging, flipped classrooms, and student-led activities, Annie highlights how learners’ confidence and classroom participation improved. Reflecting on feedback and her experience, she provides practical insights into creating a more inclusive and learner-centered environment.

Zeynep Mine Derince & Philipp Rost, “Think Outside the German Box: Plurilingual Awareness Strategies for English Language Classroom in Berlin”

In this autoethnographic account, Mine and Philipp explore the implementation of plurilingual strategies in an English language classroom at a multilingual secondary school in Berlin. Through Philipp’s experiences as a novice teacher and his collaboration with Mine as his university supervisor, the authors reflect on how plurilingual approaches can challenge the dominance of monolingual policies, particularly English-only rules, in language teaching. The study highlights how plurilingual strategies can create more inclusive, engaging, and culturally aware language classrooms.

Practice-Related Reviews

Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design (Dat Bao, 2018), review by Melanie Mello

Melanie’s review offers an insightful exploration of innovative approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT) materials. Drawing on her extensive experience as a German language educator and materials developer, she evaluates three thematic areas—creative pedagogies, specific resources, and teacher/learner involvement—and connects them to her own practice. Engaging with Bao’s insights, Melanie advocates for transformative approaches such as process drama, ICT integration, and literature to foster creativity and learner-centered environments.

Exploratory Practice for Continuing Professional Development (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019), review by Erzsébet Ágnes Békés

Erzsébet realises the relevance of the LDJ multidimensional support she underwent to construct her critically representative review of a book on a group of language teachers’ implementation of Exploratory Practice in their classrooms. She finds this supportive process significantly pertinent for her to use as a mentor herself in sustaining her mentees’ efforts to generate materials from which they understand how to create their own book reviews and simultaneously, maintain their professional learning.

Commentary

Brian Tomlinson & Hitomi Masuhara

A dialogic commentary between the editors and Brian Tomlinson and Hitomi Masuhara about exploring grassroots, innovative, and creative approaches to language learning materials development through inclusive practitioner-research in LDJ8 will be added in early 2025.

Author Bios

Anna Costantino is a language educator and applied linguist at the University of Greenwich and Regent's University London. She leads and teaches modules on Materials Development and Language Testing, and also contributes to the Research Methods module in the MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL at the University of Greenwich. As a practitioner-researcher, Anna Costantino is a member of the Centre for Research in Language and Heritage (CREL) at the University of Greenwich. Her research and scholarly interests focus on teacher and learner development, as well as practitioner research.

Anna Costantinoはthe University of GreenwichとRegent's University Londonで活躍する言語教育者・応用言語学者である。The University of Greenwichの応用言語学及びTESOLの修士課程で教材開発と言語テストのモジュールを担当し、研究方法論のモジュールにも貢献する。実践的研究者として、the University of Greenwichのthe Centre for Research in Language and Heritage (CREL: 言語と継承の研究センター)のメンバーでもある。彼女の研究および学術的関心は、教師と学習者のディベロップメント、実践者による研究に焦点を当てている。

Assia Slimani-Rolls is a visiting professor at the Open University (UK) and editor of the practitioner research section in the Language Teaching Research (LTR) journal. She is interested in academic literacy, professional learning, teacher mentoring, and teacher genres such as reflective journals, case studies, narrative writing for disseminating the understanding of their practice. Assia Slimani-Rolls recently co-led the development of [a special issue for LTR](#) on the challenges and practices to advance sustainable and inclusive practitioner research.

Assia Slimani-Rollsは英国the Open Universityの客員教授であり、the Language Teaching Research (LTR: 言語教育研究) 誌の実践者による研究セクションの編集者である。アカデミック・リテラシー、プロフェッショナル・ラーニング、教師のメンタリング、そしてリフレクティブ・ジャーナル、ケーススタディ、ナラティブ・ライティング等の教師に関するジャンルに興味を持ち、教師の実践理解の普及に取り組む。昨今、LTR誌で持続可能で包括的な実践者研究を推進するための課題と実践に関する[特集号の開発](#)を共同で主導している。

Nour El Houda Bouacha is a researcher, assistant lecturer, and supervisor at the Department of English, Faculty of Literature and Languages, University of Mohamed El Bachir Ibrahim, Bordj Bou-Arreridj, Algeria. She is also the primary person responsible for teaching English at the university. Nour El Houda Bouacha has an MA in English Language and Linguistics and a PhD in Applied Linguistics. Her research interests revolve around critical applied linguistics and syllabus and materials design and evaluation.

Nour El Houda Bouachaはアルジェリアのボルジ・ブ・アレリジにあるUniversity of Mohamed El Bachir Ibrahim 文学・言語学部英語学科に所属する研究者、助講師、および指導教員である。また、同大学における英語教育の主な責任者でもある。英語学と言語学の修士号 (MA) と応用言語学の博士号 (PhD) を取得している。研究関心は、批判的応用言語学、カリキュラムおよび教材の設計と評価などがある。

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