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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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Visions of a Game

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Based on our beliefs that teachers and students are life-long learners and knowledge-makers in the field, this collaborative and exploratory inquiry aims at understanding how sixth-grade students and their teacher work in their English classes at a public sector school in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Within the framework of Exploratory Practice (EP), an inclusive modality of Practitioner Research (PR), we intend to find out how and why the interaction between Palmyra and her students is creatively interwoven in their everyday classroom activities. During classes, the students and their teacher creatively negotiate how to carry out the activities proposed in the adopted course book materials by making changes according to their interests and needs. Within EP, we view these adaptations as Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs) and as chances for practitioners to investigate, express, and share their understandings of what they do. We believe that the construction of PEPAs by students and their teachers prioritizes the work to understand their quality of classroom life thus promoting mutual support and development. This collaborative autoethnographic text includes contributions of all the practitioners involved, their drawings, posters, and photos.

Com base em nossas crenças de que professores e alunos são aprendizes ao longo da vida e criadores de conhecimento na área, esta investigação colaborativa e exploratória visa compreender como os alunos do sexto ano e sua professora trabalham em suas aulas de inglês em uma escola do setor público na periferia, do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. No âmbito da Prática Exploratória (PE), uma modalidade inclusiva da Pesquisa do Praticante (PP), pretendemos descobrir como e por que a interação entre Palmyra e seus alunos está criativamente entrelaçada em suas atividades cotidianas de sala de aula. Durante as aulas, os alunos e sua professora negociam criativamente como realizar as atividades propostas nos materiais do livro didático adotado, fazendo alterações de acordo com seus interesses e necessidades. Na PE, vemos estas adaptações como Atividades Pedagógicas com Potencial Exploratório (APPE) e como oportunidades para os profissionais investigarem, expressarem e partilharem a sua compreensão do que fazem. Acreditamos que a construção das APPE pelos alunos e sua professora prioriza o trabalho de compreensão da sua qualidade de vida em sala de aula, promovendo assim o apoio e o desenvolvimento mútuo. Este texto autoetnográfico e colaborativo inclui contribuições de todos os envolvidos, os seus desenhos, cartazes e fotos.

Keywords

exploratory practice, practitioner research, potentially exploitable pedagogic activities, materials development, qualities of classroom life

prática exploratória, pesquisa do praticante, atividades pedagógicas com potencial exploratório, desenvolvimento de materiais, qualidades de vida na sala de aula

Before beginning the game

Based on our beliefs that teachers and students are lifelong learners and that “learners are interesting, at least as interesting as teachers” (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 1), this exploratory inquiry aims at sharing the work developed by a group of sixth-graders of about 11 years old

and their teacher, Palmyra, in their English classes at a public sector school in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The text you are going to read exploits the possibilities offered to us to build a Practitioner Research (PR) narrative (Nunes, 2022) within the framework of Exploratory Practice (EP), an inclusive modality of Practitioner Research (Hanks, 2017). We reflexively narrate our investigation about how and why Palmyra and her students engage in creating their own materials with a strong desire to expand and adapt the lessons interweaving everybody's contribution.

Along these lines, Palmyra, invited her colleagues, Bebel and Inés, and the students, as co-research practitioners, intended to reflect jointly to understand the development of the group as key practitioners of learning. In doing so, we believed to be building a community of learning interested in investigating the puzzles that emerged in Palmyra's and her students' daily classroom lives. With this in mind, we planned to write a collaborative autoethnography, i.e., a critical qualitative inquiry of our lived experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). So, we included the contributions of all the practitioners involved, with drawings, posters, photos, and multimedia recordings, which we consider to be Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs, Exploratory Practice Group, 2021). All participants – students as well as their parents and caretakers – have authorized the inclusion of the photos, drawings, and texts.

The title of this text is a metaphor that refers to an ability exercised and developed by soccer players during a game. One of the students used the expression to refer to what is needed to understand their English classes at school. According to this student, during a soccer match, each player has his own view of the game. We believe that the same happens in a classroom since each participant experiences the class from their own perspective. That is why we, Palmyra, Bebel, Inés, and the students, are all going to tell our stories, describing our individual visions of the game and how we came up with the idea of writing this text collaboratively.

We are educators living in Rio de Janeiro who love working together and sharing ideas. We also belong to the same Exploratory Practice Group, which meets monthly to discuss issues related to teaching and learning. Working together brings the possibility of creating a Community of Exploratory Practice (Ewald, 2015), in which teachers discuss what they do in their classrooms. We will now introduce ourselves briefly.

The players in this game

My name is Palmyra, I am a public sector English teacher who has been working in several schools in Rio de Janeiro for over 20 years. I am the mother of two young girls, a researcher, and, most importantly, an enthusiastic learner. Since 2019, I have taught children from the first to sixth grades at a public sector school in Guaratiba, a low-income community, in Rio de Janeiro, which is surrounded by beaches sadly unfit for bathing but with a gorgeous view. This community has long been ruled by militia, a group of paramilitary individuals who, exercising parallel power, control local public transportation and other services, such as the internet, and charge the civil population for their use. I consider my last three years of teaching the best of my life due to the learning opportunities my students and I have created during our lessons. We have been creating collaborative Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs), which are slightly adapted activities by teachers and students in order to enhance their understandings of what is going on in their classrooms (Exploratory Practice Group, 2021). In 2022, I started my PhD in Language Studies at PUC-Rio (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro), with Inés as my supervisor. The title of my thesis is

Cartographies of Our School Routine: What We Do-Know-Feel. Based on my experience as an English teacher, I decided to research my workplace, thus becoming a teacher and a researcher at the same time.



Photo 1. Inés, Palmyra, and Bebel

My name is Bebel, a nickname for Maria Isabel. I was born in a three-generation family of teachers who were pleased and proud to be teachers. This legacy led me to practice teaching at various levels and situations. Since very early in my life, I worked with English, Portuguese, religion, and reading and writing for adults. Besides teaching, I also love to practice and study the learning of languages, the work of teaching, cooking, drawing, and physical exercises, and I believe that experiencing learning of all kinds of matters leads to more understandings about learning, while it enhances the senses of self-fulfillment and belonging to the human race.

My name is Inés and I have been an English teacher for as long as I can remember. But I currently consider myself a teacher educator who, inspired by the ideas of Exploratory Practice, has been involved in practitioner research. Above all, in the past 20 years, I have come to understand that we are all life-long learners. This is why I am participating in this learning process with Bebel and Palmyra, with whom I have developed a strong sense of EP friendship and collegiality.

The collage of what the 37 students wrote about themselves, sharing their names, ages, where they live, and their likes and dislikes appears in Photo 2.



Photo 2. The students' collage

Since there were many descriptions, the students decided to collaboratively write a single text to introduce themselves as a group:

We are students from the sixth grade. We study at Bertha Lutz Municipal School located in Guaratiba, Rio de Janeiro. Sometimes, we misbehave, but we consider ourselves a great group of students. We are cool, very talented, and intelligent. We can do all the activities the teachers propose with ease. We enjoy playing soccer, working in groups, and creating different things. We like coming to school. This is our last year in Bertha Lutz. Next year, we are going to study at another school.

As co-authors and members of the Exploratory Practice Group, which has become a community of practice to us, we live some of the Exploratory Practice principles that guide our lives inside and outside the group, in a respectful way:

- Focus on quality of classroom life
- Work to understand quality of classroom life
- Involve everybody in this work for understanding
- Work to bring people together
- Also work for mutual development
- Minimize the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice
- Make all of this a continuous enterprise (Exploratory Practice Group, 2021, p. 8).

One of these principles, which we will share along the text, is to work to understand the nature or the quality of classroom life in our group (Gieve & Miller, 2006).

So, to understand what goes on in Palmyra's classroom, we realized to be working, in an integrated way, for our mutual development. Our interest goes beyond the "materials" that Palmyra develops to use with her students. Rather, we are all keen to understand what goes on in Palmyra's classroom when she and her students work with the materials and activities collaboratively co-created. Our guiding puzzle as practitioner researchers is:

- Why do Palmyra's and her students' collaboratively create and adapt classroom activities upon the coursebook suggestions?

However, our complementary puzzles are:

- What are the perceived participant understandings related to the process of co-creating their classes?
- What other unexpected understandings will emerge about this inclusive practitioner research process?

To discuss the puzzles above, our biggest challenges as practitioner researchers will be to express in words our lived human experiences, as well as to face "the linguistic demands of the writing process" (van Manen, 1977, p. 64). We are fully aware that it is extremely hard to put into words what we experience in our classroom lives.

Yet, our stories begin ...

Palmyra setting the background of the game

In Brazil, the daily routine of a primary English teacher at a public school involves entering classrooms where space is organized according to head teachers' preferences. Opportunities to interfere or display students' work are rarely offered without the feeling of intruding on someone else's territory. To solve this problem and, having noticed an unused classroom in the school, I decided to speak with the school coordinator and ask him if the students and I could transform it into an English room. The coordinator approved our request and since then, the English room became a space where we could all organize it to fulfill our needs, develop our student and teacher autonomies, and create new learning opportunities for everyone.

I believe this initiative went beyond simply creating a physical space. It could help rebuild the emotional, mental, and educational connections that were disrupted by the pandemic. The process of building the room created a learning environment, in which sharing experiences and stories fostered attentive listening and open communication, thus creating a sense of belonging. An example of this process is Photo 3, which illustrates two students' spontaneous initiative to represent the newly created English Room.

The notion of Practitioner Research made me realize that the classroom at the public school where I work is a place of constant co-production of knowledge. In spite of its simple appearance, with disconnected students, I feel that when I penetrate my classroom and move within it, I find the extraordinary - a learning community at work. If, on the one hand, the pandemic isolated us from social interaction, on the other hand, the face-to-face return and the possibility of co-building the English Room emphasized the importance of maintaining good relations among the participants, through interactions that ended up transforming the classroom into a richer interactional space.



Photo 3. Spontaneous drawing of the English Room by the students Mirella and Noemi (class 1601)

In pursuit of this friendlier environment, when my students and I started the co-construction of the English Room, the rows of desks were reorganized into two circles, one inside the other. As a result, the students, who had previously been looking at me, began to look at each other, as shown in Photo 3. Students could now see each other's faces, listen to their colleagues more attentively thus making our positions gradually become more horizontal (Freire, 1979). This attitude led my students and I to "participate in the dialogue and construction of knowledge" (Bohn, 2013, p. 89). So, with this new seating arrangement, a spirit of community of learning and opportunities began to be lived and shared among us all.

As I intended to integrate everyone into the work, following the ethical Exploratory Practice principle of integration, I aligned myself with Moraes Bezerra (2007) when she claimed the importance of creating environments where more careful listening is valued. After all, in collaborative work, if opportunities are created for the practice of attentive listening, everyone has something interesting and important to say. However, as I realize that my classes are always co-productions and not just the result of what I plan, as claimed by Allwright & Bailey (1991), the practice of attentive listening has been expanded. So, as I normally listen carefully to my students, reflect on their desires and include their opinions and visions in our daily classroom lives, so that we can transform the teacher's lesson plans into co-produced and

collaborative lessons. Through this attentive-reflective-inclusive-transformative-listening, we strengthen the learning community that we are creating.

By conducting qualitative and inclusive practitioner research, as inspired by Miller et al. (2020), the students and I are able to explore questions that are relevant to our specific context. This involves examining our experiences, which are involved in the process of knowledge-construction that is based on our understandings of the situations that impact our daily lives. We routinely reflect on stories that may have otherwise gone unnoticed if we did not take a curious and exploratory approach to understanding them. This allows us to share, in this text, our experiences with Inés and Bebel, by contributing to deeper understandings of what the students and I do in the classroom.

The day we all played together

Inés' vision of the game on 30th March 2023: Bebel and I traveled for almost two hours to get to Palmyra's school, which is in Guaratiba, a region in the outskirts of the city of Rio de Janeiro. We were excited to have been invited and were really eager to meet Palmyra and her students! As soon as we arrived, Palmyra came to the door to welcome us and quickly led us to her English Room. We were greeted with lots of smiles and lots of emotion! It was very moving to feel such a warm welcome! Yet, the students suddenly had to leave the room... It was recess time!

As soon as another group entered the classroom, they started to work on what they had planned for that class. There was no time to waste and they immediately shared the different materials to be used. They got organized in a surprisingly smooth way and started to work right away!

And this is when it all started. I managed to get closer to the students and wanted to know all their names. There were so many! Some were easy to remember, but not others.



Photo 4

I had some wonderful conversations in one of the groups: I was asked whether Bebel and I were sisters! A student wanted to know if she could call me “tia” (Aunt) or “vó” (Grannie)! I replied that they could choose. In another group, the boys wanted to know if I had ever met a celebrity! I told them how I met Pelé in Argentina when I was about their age. They found out that I was not Brazilian and we had a fun conversation in Spanish. I realized that their haircuts were inspired by some famous football players! I called Bebel to talk about soccer, because she loves it and she could easily communicate with them about this sport.

In line with EP, I enjoyed taking the opportunity to imperative like the expression “Let’s”! They seemed to understand it and produced the following signs:



Photo 5. Others in the same group, held on to the imperative, but with the following sweet messages:



Photo 6

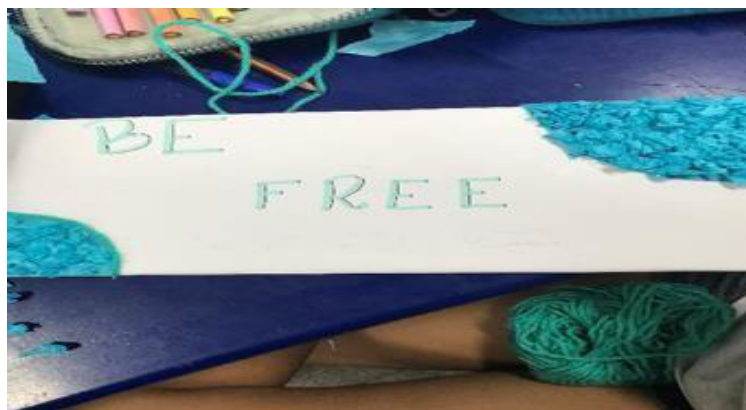


Photo 7



Photo 8

All of a sudden, when time was almost up, Bebel and I were given two lovely gifts, lots of letters, and a beautiful box with some personal questions.



Photo 9



Photo 10

We had a lovely time and we're very grateful to Palmyra and her students for having invited us to feel the qualities of their lives in their English Room!!!! I'm eager to keep in touch and to write about the process with Palmyra, Bebel, and with Palmyra's students.

Bebel's vision of the game on 30th March 2023: I came away struck by this student's comment to me: "*Professora, a gente quer usar visão de jogo na nossa placa.*" ("Teacher, we want to use 'vision of the game' on our sign"), says a 6th-grade-student from Palmyra's school in the small district in the outskirts of the city of Rio de Janeiro. "Great vision of the game" is suggested, and this is followed by a discussion about soccer and the qualities of local players. And some questions too: Do you play soccer? Who has a great vision of the game in Flamengo and Vasco? Why is a vision of the game important to all of us, not just to soccer players? I noticed that the students were working on signs suggested in the coursebook, with warnings like "Do not enter," "Keep out," and "Please, do not disturb." Palmyra accepted the students' suggestion to make door signs meaningful for their classroom and for the group, adapting the activity in their books to their classroom lives.

"*A gente quer fazer o cartaz com welcome mas todo mundo tá fazendo...*" ("We want to make a sign with "welcome" but everybody is making one..."). A boy and a girl are working together. They want to write something different from "Welcome." They end up using "Come in" to be

put on a sign, outside their room. I ask if they can see similarities between the two phrases and the words “welcome” and “come” are explored. *“Vamos fazer umas tranças com essas lãs pra botar no pôster.”* (“We are going to braid these wools to put on the sign.”) The pair works together and I help them with the braids. The students decide what the decoration will be like. The room is a creative mess. All 37 students, in pairs or groups, are busy preparing their signs, looking into boxes of pens, paper, thread, patches of cloth, string, and scraps of all kinds of material. Boys and girls work together grouped according to their interests and old-time relationships. Fortunately, the English Room is at the end of a long dark corridor and hardly anyone passes by. Some people might not even understand that a class was going on. If a coordinator or a supervisor had witnessed those groups of students working in such a chaotic way would say that no lesson was being given there. Exploratory Practitioners would say that a lesson was happening, but nobody was giving it – you need to put on exploratory spectacles to be able to have a great vision of the game.

Palmyra’s and her students’ visions of the game, diary entry 30th March 2023: It was such an experience. Just a few days before Bebel and Inés visited my English class, my six-graders and I delved into a specific topic outlined in the educational materials provided by the Municipal Secretariat of Education in Rio de Janeiro (2023).

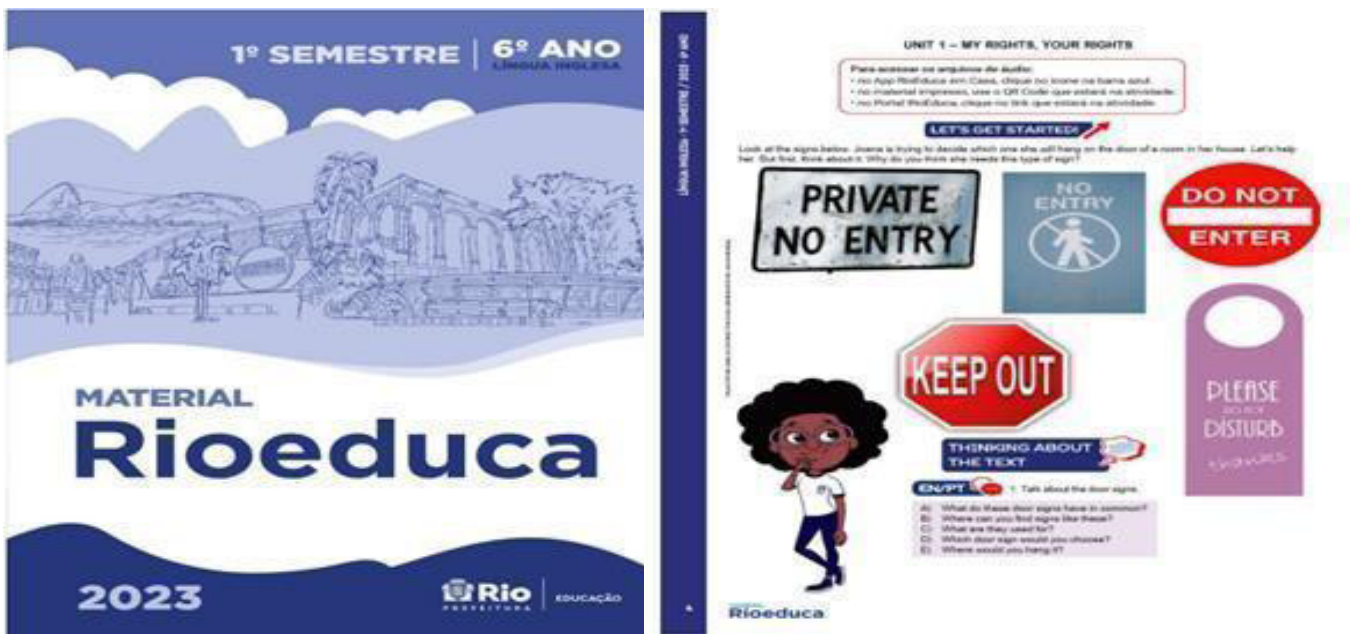


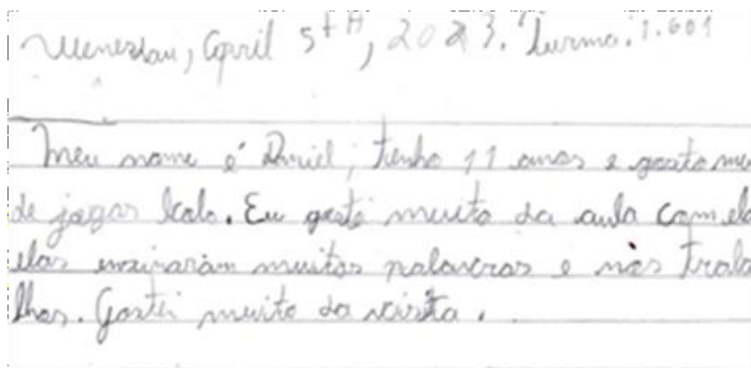
Photo 11. Coursebook material provided by the Municipal Secretariat of Education in Rio de Janeiro (2023) to be used in this class

The lesson centered around the importance of written signs and the first activity focused on helping a young female character to choose a sign to hang on a room in her house, such as “Keep out.” The topic sparked a lively conversation in which the students got actively involved by sharing insights about the activity to be developed. This is an example of a PEPA proposed by the students, who suggested creating their own material by expanding the coursebook activity. Thus, they designed written signs that would be relevant and meaningful to everyone inside the English Room.

We agreed to do this in our next class and planned to collect craft material for putting the signs together. Seeing their positive response, I could feel that this whole enterprise

proved to be immensely beneficial for my students and me, as they managed to show their autonomy, creativity, engagement, and critical thinking, as I illustrate below.

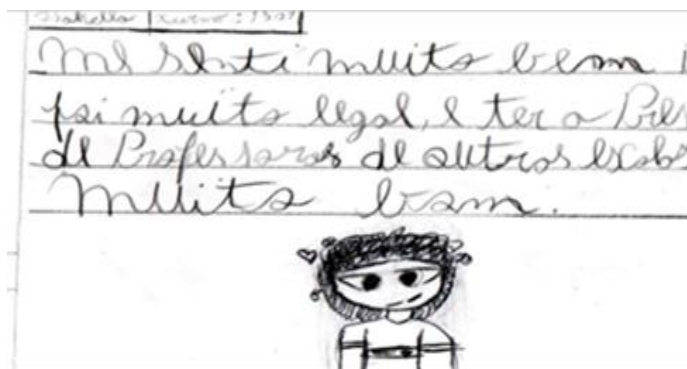
As usual, in the room, there were desks, whiteboards, cabinets, and bookshelves, as well as boxes filled with coloured paper pencils, crayons, scissors, and bottles of glue. The classroom was alive with the voices of different students and the three of us as teachers. In this lesson, everyone, including the students and teachers, acted as learners – we worked together, asked questions, taught, and learned from each other. The line between students and teachers was blurred, as we all shared the joy of learning. As a Practitioner Researcher and EP teacher, I couldn't have written this narrative without my students' help. Daniel's and Isabella's short paragraphs below illustrate their vision and perceptions of our classroom dynamics narrated. These selected contributions were handwritten in Portuguese, transcribed, and translated into English (Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively).



"Meu nome é Daniel, tenho 11 anos e gosto muito de jogar bola. Eu gostei muito da aula com elas, elas me ensinaram muitas palavras e nos trabalhos. Gostei muito da visita."

"My name is Daniel, I'm 11 years old and I really like playing soccer. I really enjoyed the class with them, they helped me with a lot of words and with the activity. I really enjoyed the visit."

Figure 1. Daniel's vision



"Me senti muito bem, pois foi muito legal e ter a presença de professoras de outras escolas é muito bom."

"I felt really good, it was very nice, and having the presence of teachers from other schools is really good."

Figure 2. Isabella's vision

Jade, Maiara, Bernardo, and Gael expressed their visions of the game by highly grading it and saying that it was "interesting" and "a lot of fun" (see Figure 3). It seems that Bernardo and Gael evaluated their class and also had a great time!


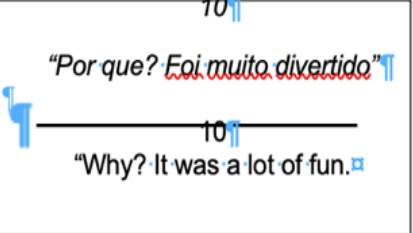
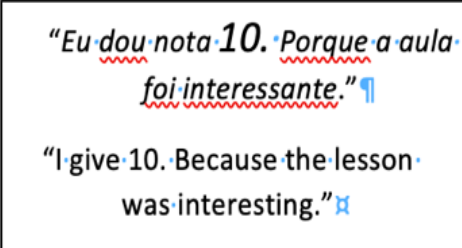
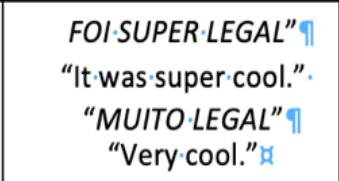
		
		

Figure 3. Jade and Maiara’s

Bernardo’s

Gael’s

We finished our lesson after some time. In my opinion, the 15 signs were fantastic! They read: “Welcome”; “Come in”; “Creativity”; “Empathy”; “Silence”; “Harmony”; “Respect our friends”; “Be free”; “We are perfect”; “Respect everyone”; “Smile and do your best”; “Let’s behave”; “Never give up on your dreams”; “Education, peace, learning, friends”; and “It’s raining candy and happiness in the English class” (Photo 12). The signs were of different colors and sizes, revealing the students’ individuality and their idiosyncratic ways of being creative. Students came up with most of the words and sentences while the activity was going on. Inés, Bebel and I assisted them whenever asked for help with translation, spelling, or handcrafts. The students used the materials available and their creativity to voice the feelings they wanted to share in the classroom, thus encouraging students’ autonomy and fostering everyone’s agency. It was clear to us that they valued the way they wanted to live in the classroom with harmony, empathy, respect, creativity, and an overall peaceful and hopeful atmosphere.



Photo 12. Isabella, Pedro, Enzo, and Gael’s sign

What we always do within EP

While we were living the experience described in the previous section, some issues and questions came to our mind, “Why do we live this kind of life in our classroom? What feelings promote such integration?” We believe that the quality of our life is related to the fact that the Exploratory Practice framework considers students and teachers as key practitioners of learning and teaching (2009).

As practitioners of Exploratory Practice, whatever we experience with our students becomes a source of several issues and puzzles, questions that emerge every day in an attempt to “work for understanding” the quality of our lives inside and outside the classroom. We do this in an organic way, as we don’t believe students to be “problem-shooters” or teachers to be “problem-solvers.” In our English classroom, we create learning opportunities all the time so that, in agreement with Allwright and Hanks (2009), we prioritize the qualities of our classroom lives, as we are all capable of taking learning seriously and, by making our own decisions, we can develop ourselves as practitioners of learning.

Since we were all in the same classroom, sharing this space at school, the making of the signs was a collective creation. Although the coursebook’s intention was to practice the Imperative, when constructing the signs the students were free to choose what they wanted to say and how. (There was no right or wrong.) Whenever necessary, we helped each other with the spelling of words, some translation, and the organization of the sentences. In our everyday classroom life, this is how we experience one of the Exploratory Practice principles – working together to collaborate for mutual growth.

Making our materials based on the coursebook is an important and regular part of our everyday classroom life not intending to improve the coursebook materials, but believing in integrating the people in the group and the pedagogy, within an investigative attitude. When we adapt activities within the EP framework, we do not focus on improving the quality of the materials. We go beyond improvement and move towards understanding what is going on among ourselves.

The construction of the signs was not the only example of students’ developing their autonomy and agency. We frequently expand the lessons of the coursebook as a way of transforming them into opportunities to understand relevant issues to the group (Exploratory Practice Group, 2021, p. 39). An instance of this practice was when we studied the areas of the city of Rio de Janeiro presented in the coursebook. Photos 13 and 14 display the coursebook activities (Municipal Secretariat of Education of Rio de Janeiro, 2023) about the regions of the city of Rio de Janeiro, in which the students were supposed to match the zones of the city and the colours on the map and ask each other questions about the various neighborhoods.



Photo 13



Photo 14

When we realized that most of the neighborhoods were unknown to the students, we decided to consult a map from the school library to better visualize the city's four regions (see Photos 15 and 16).



Photo 15

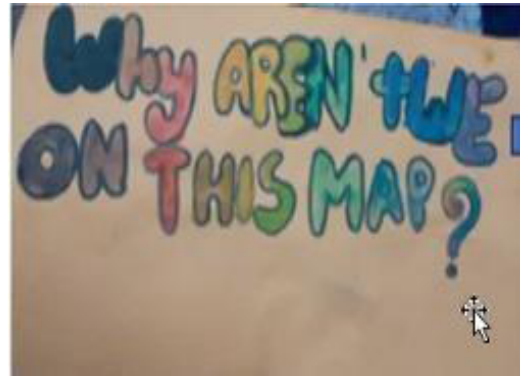


Photo 16

While critically exploring the map, we noticed there was no reference to all the neighborhoods of the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro. We were disappointed to realize that Guaratiba, where the school is located and most of the students live, was entirely excluded from this map. To reflect upon this issue and raise some understandings, we created exploratory posters with the question: "Why aren't we on this map?" As EP practitioners, we understand that the creation of posters can be an effective way to problematize local challenging questions – puzzles – and, in this case, to communicate the authors' outcry about the disrespect with the region's population.



Photo 17

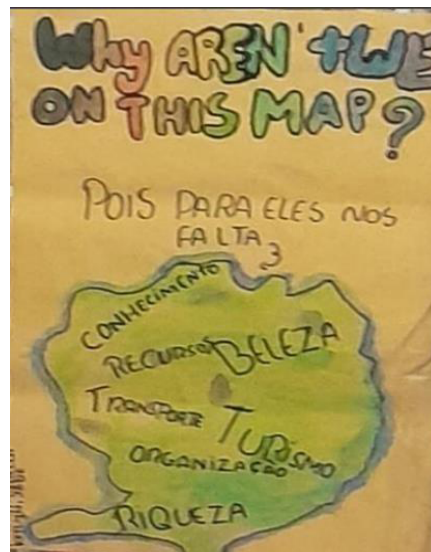


Photo 18

In trying to understand "Why aren't we on the map?", the students critically reflected upon some reasons why Guaratiba was excluded from the map. Showing their local knowledge as inhabitants of the region, the students based their interpretation about Guaratiba not being on the map by voicing the prejudice felt regarding the part of the city where they live: "Porque eles têm inveja das nossas belezas!" (Because they envy our region's natural beauty!) and "Porque para eles nos falta conhecimento, recursos, beleza, transporte, turismo, organização, riqueza" (Because for them we lack knowledge, resources, beauty, transportation, tourism, organization, wealth.) as shown in Photos 17 and 18, respectively.

Creating an exploratory poster “is a process that involves many people” (Exploratory Practice Group, 2021, p. 15), and it can be an invitation for the participants to “think intensively and share ideas openly” (hooks, 2013, p. 36), while searching for understandings of their lived realities. For this reason, exploratory posters may differ from pedagogical projects generally focused on language practice and uncritical thinking as they value participants’ outbursts of ideas, feelings, and posters focused on social claims, such as equity, ethics, and citizenship. Pedagogical projects follow pre-established schedules with deadlines, while posters may lead to many different paths, which makes all of this a continuous and sustainable enterprise.

Soon after the students gained the preliminary insights shown above, as they were working on their puzzle “Why aren’t we on this map?”, we decided to learn more about the flora and the fauna of Brisa Beach, located near the school. Although this beach is unsuitable for bathing due to the presence of a mangrove, its view is gorgeous.

On a scheduled outing, we went to the beach to take photos and learn some English words related to that environment. So, the students learned how to say mangrove, crab, capybara, vulture, grey boto, great kiskadee, marmoset, egret, toucan, and opossum.



Photo 19. A collage of Brisa Beach

Back at school, the students developed games, such as puzzles, memory games, and “Guess the Animal” with the vocabulary they learned. They even built a box to store these games, which were left in the room so that other groups could also enjoy playing them.



Photo 20. A collage of the games created

Being members of an Exploratory Practice community of learning, we understand that not only Palmyra, but also her students work to bring people together, to foster mutual understanding and respect. Because of that, we always engage in activities that involve creating our materials with a strong desire to expand and adapt the lessons according to everybody’s contribution.

The building of the signs, the creation of exploratory posters, and the development of games about the flora and fauna of Brisa Beach are examples of Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs). These activities required collaboration among all practitioners as knowledge-makers and provided opportunities for everyone to reflect on life both inside and outside of the classroom. PEPAs are creative activities that aim to integrate working for understanding with teaching and learning. Furthermore, PEPAs are a regular part of our daily routine which helps modify regular pedagogic activities to seek understandings about the quality of classroom lives (without the intention to change or improve our pedagogic practice). The richness of PEPAs lies in their multi-dimensional nature, by which both teachers and students jointly use their creativity to expand their coursebook materials.

From life in the classroom to life beyond

For more than 30 years, the Exploratory Practice Group of Rio de Janeiro has been inviting exploratory practitioners to go beyond the classroom. Since 1999, the EP annual event has welcomed numerous groups of students and their teachers to discuss, from the theme of each event to the puzzles and issues significant to each local community. At these events, students and teachers have the opportunity to jointly prepare and share their understandings of the lives they live in their contexts during poster presentations and workshops. These two modes of presentation are considered “the most productive means of transmitting PE’s work and ideas, due to their possibilities for exploring all types of interactivity to generate opportunities of learning for all” (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 230). Each annual event is a renewed invitation to experience Exploratory Practice and all its loving ethics of care and involvement with others (Freire, in Streck et al., 2008). My students and I were honored to participate in the 2023 event when we had the opportunity to show our posters with the puzzle “Why aren’t we on this map?” and to lead a workshop with the games based on Guaratiba’s flora and fauna. We also showcased portraits of Brisa Beach, our territory, and the students presented a stick theater performance featuring the animals from the mangrove. During the workshop, participants created written signs with messages that would be later on spread in Brisa Beach by the group of students.



Photo 21. A collage of poster and workshop participation

Going beyond their everyday context, the students faced the challenge of working with a diverse group of participants from other public and private schools, undergraduate university students, and teachers. By living their agentivities, my students highlighted their local idiosyncrasies and promoted the participants' integration. In this event, both my students and myself were not merely observers but also practitioners who took the chance to share the lives we live at school with students and teachers from various other contexts.



Photo 22. Theatre



Photo 23. Signs with messages



Photo 24. A collage of workshop participants' signs at Brisa Beach

Reflecting to understand why we all got together

We have described what joins us as members of a community of exploratory practitioners and conveyed the feelings involved when working in various contexts and in adventurous ways. By sharing so many pictures, we intended to portray moments lived inside Palmyra's classroom, ecological activities outdoors, at Brisa Beach, and lively participation in the EP event held at the university, two hours away from Guaratiba. The text conveys how we all managed to work together in an organic and integrated way, how the students decided to defy the school limits by going to an abandoned and polluted beach and how they worked in an academic environment on a university campus. This experience illustrates Allwright's proposition that learners can take learning seriously.

The reader may wonder what we all expected from these experiences. Inés and Bebel did not expect anything specific, but hoped to "live" and enjoy the experience, the

moment with Palmyra and her students – a group of very motivated, intelligent, and creative students who would enable us all to have a fun time working together. We were also curious to sense the quality of life inside the English Room, and how the group dynamics evolved. Palmyra hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the life that she and her students live in the classroom and to share with Inés and Bebel the creative, respectful, and unique work atmosphere. The students were hoping to meet and talk with Inés and Bebel and, for this occasion, prepared questions to get to know them better. In terms of material development, the teacher together with the students have managed to stick to the school materials but have expanded and adjusted them to the realities that surround them; they made the materials far more meaningful for themselves.

These experiences helped us live the principles of Exploratory Practice, enabling us all to prioritize understanding the group's interpersonal and affective relations, to be mutually responsible for the development of a learning community, and to create pedagogic activities that integrate pedagogy and search for understanding. As Allwright and Hanks (2009, pp. 166-167) put it,

Exploratory Practice involves: practitioners working collegially to understand what they want to understand, following their own agendas; not necessarily in order to bring about change; not primarily by changing; but by using normal pedagogic practices as investigative tools, so that working for understanding is part of the teaching and learning, not extra to it; in a way that does not lead to 'burn-out', but that is indefinitely sustainable; in order to contribute to teaching and learning themselves; development, both individual and collective.

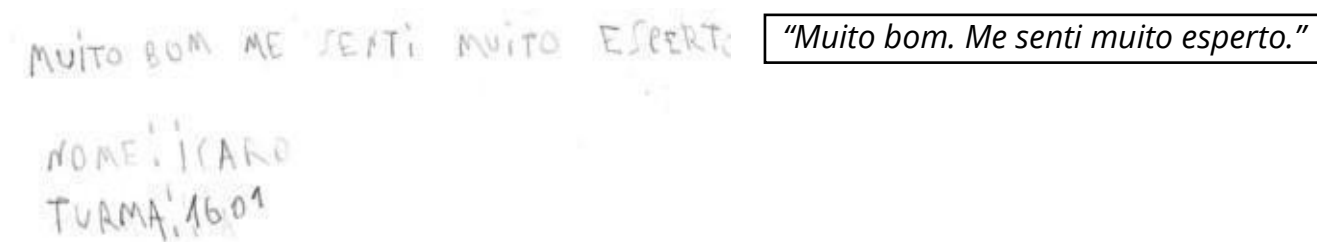
This set of principles is not meant to be considered a set of tools, but rather a set of ideas that orient an Exploratory Practice attitude, also inspired by the following propositions about teachers and students as learners:

Learners are both unique individuals and social beings who are capable of learning seriously, of taking independent decisions, and of developing as practitioners of learning. (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 15)

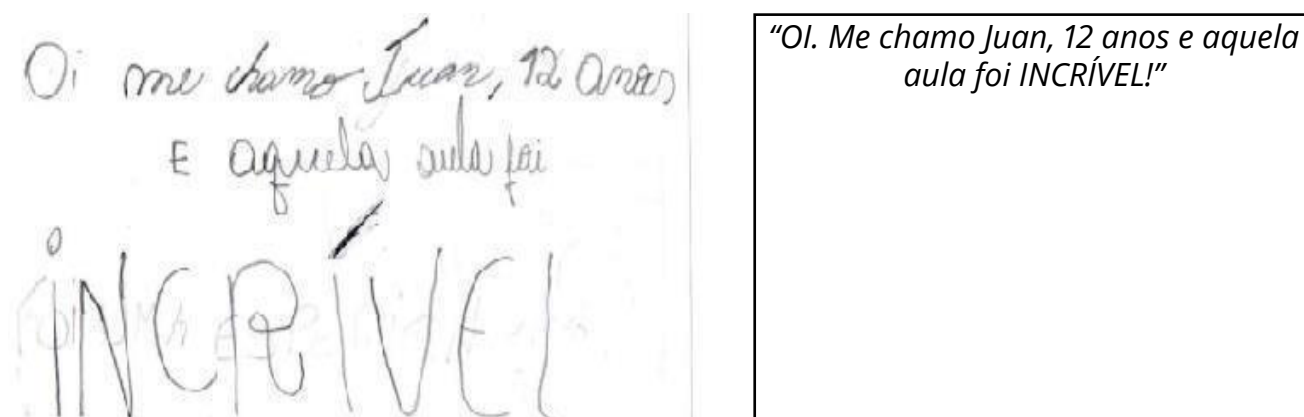
Regarding the narrative shared, it is clear to us that in Palmyra's class materials design is developed in a space where attentive, reflective, inclusive, and transformative listening is constantly practiced and collaborative work is frequent, so that teaching and learning are built through inclusive work. Furthermore, exploratory students and their teacher create a discursive space where they take opportunities to think and offer suggestions, prioritizing and valuing everyone's potential and agency. By adopting a pedagogical exploratory stance, the creation of PEPAs promotes the integration of work for understanding with classroom practices, aligned with the principles and propositions of Exploratory Practice.

The reader may remember that, along the text, some puzzles were raised and that the narrative was a way of building some understandings about why, for Palmyra and her students, classroom activities can "naturally" derive from the coursebook suggestions; what (un)expected understandings and emotions are related to the process of co-creation and inclusive practitioner research; and, why Palmyra and her students live this kind of life in their classroom and which feelings promote such an integration. As exploratory practitioners, the intention was to create a textual environment in which the group of teachers and students sought to develop "their voices to express their questions and seek to deepen their understandings in dialogue with their partners in everyday school life" (Miller, 2013, p. 21).

Through such integrated and inclusive work, affective layers emerge and show the uniqueness of teaching and learning. Icaro's text (see Figure 4), for example, illustrates how smart he felt during the lesson, and Juan (Figure 4) understood that the lesson was "Incredible":



"Very good. I felt really smart."



"Hi. My name is Juan, 12 years old and that lesson was INCREDIBLE."

Figure 4. Emerging affective layers in learning and teaching

We believe that what we do, know, and feel in the classroom are small epiphanies of our daily lives. It is what we all keep in our memories when we turn off the light and close the classroom door at the end of the day.

Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Tim Ashwell and Yoshi Kato of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.)*

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Palmyra Baroni Nunes graduou-se em Letras (Inglês e Literaturas) pela Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro em 1998. Em 2002, obteve o título de Mestre em Linguística Aplicada pela Universidade Federal Fluminense. Atualmente, está cursando doutorado

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