

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

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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*, “[Dialogic Commentary About Grassroots, Innovative, and Creative Approaches to Language Learning Materials Development Through Inclusive Practitioner-Research](#)”**

In their dialogic commentary Brian Tomlinson and Hitomi Masuhara explore the value of practitioner research into language learning materials development for empowering

its different participants, raising teacher awareness and engagement in local contexts of practice, and connecting practice to theory. They emphasise that practitioner research proceeds from puzzles that practitioners identify in their own practices rather than from gaps in the academic literature. Arguing for the participation of multiple stakeholders – learners first and foremost – in inclusive practitioner research and contrasting such practitioner inquiries with the objectifying stance of the positivist paradigm, Brian and Hitomi consider alternative holistic evaluation criteria such as plausibility, transferability, trustworthiness, and authenticity. They also note the importance of sharing practitioner research “not to prescribe or to urge replication but to inspire other practitioners to conduct and share research themselves.” In closing their commentary, Brian and Hitomi argue that inclusive practitioner research holds significant value for pre- and in-service teachers, as well as academic researchers, in illuminating the practical and localised realities of language teaching and learner development.

## 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 professor of applied linguistics and language education and visiting professor at the Open University (UK). 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は応用言語学と言語教育の教授であり、the Open University (英国)の客員教授でもある。『Language Teaching Research (LTR)』誌の実践研究セクションの編集者を務め、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、リフレクティブ・ジャーナル、ケーススタディ、ナラティブ・ライティングなど、教師が自身の実践を理解し発信するためのジャンルに関心を持っている。近年、[LTRの特別号「持続可能で包括的な実践研究の推進に向けた課題と実践」](#)の企画・編集を共同で担当した。

**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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## Designing Social Media Tasks in a University CLIL Course: An Action Research Inquiry

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Multimodal texts are ubiquitous in modern communication and prevalent on social media platforms. However, the processes of understanding and producing texts combining different semiotic modes are not self-evident. Although typical university students consume large amounts of social media content, they largely take a different approach to their posts than content producers or influencers. In 2023, I designed tasks and projects where second-year students at a university in Japan composed mock social media posts for a semester-long required EFL CLIL course called “Japanese Manga and Globalization.” To understand whether the students found these new tasks, which combined student-led investigation of English language texts with processes of creating social media content, engaging and effective, I conducted an action research inquiry. Analysis of student work and feedback about the tasks revealed some challenges students face when producing multimodal texts using digital tools. In this inquiry, I will report issues related to multimodal literacy and the use of digital tools I observed in my classroom. I will also share what I learned from guiding students through language learning tasks incorporating skills and strategies associated with the production of social media posts.

マルチモーダル・テキストは現代のコミュニケーションのいたるところに存在し、ソーシャルメディアプラットフォーム上で普及している。しかし、異なる記号論的モードを組み合わせたテキストを理解し、生み出す過程は明らかとはなっていない。一般的な大学生はソーシャルメディアのコンテンツを大量に消費するが、コンテンツ制作者、或いはインフルエンサーとは大きく異なるアプローチをとっている。2023年に日本の大学2年生を対象とした1学期にわたる必修のEFL CLILコース「日本のマンガとグローバル化」にて、模擬ソーシャルメディア投稿を作成する課題とプロジェクトを設計した。学生主導の英語テキストの調査とソーシャルメディアコンテンツ作成プロセスを組み合わせたこれらの新しい課題が、学生にとって魅力的かつ効果的であるかどうかを検証するために、アクションリサーチ調査を実施した。諸課題に関する学生の取組みとフィードバックの分析により、デジタルツールを使用したマルチモーダルテキストを作成する際に学生が直面するいくつかの課題が明らかになった。この調査では、著者が教室で観察したマルチモーダルリテラシーとデジタルツールの使用に関連する問題を報告する。また、ソーシャルメディアの投稿の作成に関連するスキルと方略を組み込んだ言語学習タスクを学生に指導する中で得た知見も共有する。

### Keywords

action research, multiliteracies, materials development, task-based learning, social media-based tasks  
アクションリサーチ、マルチリテラシー、教材開発、タスクに基づく言語指導法、ソーシャルメディアにおける言語学習用タスク

When I assigned group presentations to first-year students at a private Japanese university post-pandemic, I hadn't anticipated how the cohort that did at least some high school online would immediately turn to the Internet to search for ideas. Feeding the assignment question into Google's algorithm, students immediately accessed a list of “dos and don'ts” from a blog post that seemed tailor-made for this particular learning task. Sitting through the third blatantly plagiarized student presentation of said list, I realized that going forward I would have to specify what I had taken for granted until that moment—presentation content must be student-generated.

In response to the problem of students outsourcing their creativity and critical thinking to the Internet, I decided to focus on active, collaborative, student-led materials development as a pedagogical strategy. I thought that the affordances of social media with which students were already familiar could provide exciting new classroom tools while offering students a unique learning experience. Further, I expected that giving students a common purpose and a realistic, imagined audience that could potentially be accessed via social media would yield the results I wanted in the classroom, namely, motivation to communicate using English in a generally monolingual EFL context (Japan) and opportunities for students to

engage in original, meaningful, creative production of multimodal texts. Multimodal texts are composed by combining different modes to arrange various semiotic materials, such as text and images. As a result of those combinations, multimodal texts must be read and understood using different “grammar” than when interpreting text alone.

For over five years, I have taught a semester-long Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) class to second-year students at a national university in the Kanto region of Japan. CLIL is an approach to teaching within the constructivist tradition that centers communication about content in the foreign language classroom (Hemmi & Banegas, 2021). CLIL is understood in terms of “four Cs”—content, communication, community/culture, and cognition—and collaborative work on meaningful tasks is used to actively engage learners. Using an academic text and excerpts from English translations of Japanese manga (comics/graphic novels) as reading material, my course content introduced some basic history of the development of Japanese popular culture and its distribution and reception internationally, along with academic concepts useful for analyzing common themes in Japanese popular culture. Although the course was designed around reading and discussion, prior to this action research inquiry I was still assigning a standard essay as the final project. I felt that this format did not fit the flow of the semester, that it felt tacked on and, although on topic, seemed to exist merely to serve the purpose of completing an evaluation. I realized the shift from a semester’s worth of active, in-person discussions to a final writing assignment was a problem in the overall design of the course. It was time to develop a new approach to the final project.

In this action research inquiry, I recount the process of a) designing tasks in which students produced mock social media posts and podcast content, b) analyzing those student-created materials, and c) reflecting on questionnaire data and written student feedback regarding the tasks. Rather than superimposing my experiences and views of social media onto these new tasks, I wanted to gauge how students would approach the tasks authentically. The goal of this inquiry was to gather information to help improve the projects in future cycles especially by adjusting the scaffolding for the tasks in response to student needs uncovered during this cycle. Following Burns (2010), I organized the first cycle of implementing these changes which I report on here using the headings the Plan, the Action, the Observation, the Reflection.

## The Plan

My goal with this project was to redesign my course so that it would include both explicit instruction in multimodal literacy and realistic, creative tasks for language learning. For previous cohorts who completed the course to be examined in this paper, students had been assessed in three areas:

- class participation in group discussions about the course content
- weekly homework assignments including reading comprehension questions about the textbook, writing prompts, and comprehension questions about my original video lectures
- written projects in lieu of term-end exams.

A typical 90-minute class session included time for students to discuss the homework questions, as well as a small-group discussion guided by prompts distributed in class where they talked about their experiences with popular culture (at certain times in the semester students recorded these conversations to submit for credit). It also included a student-directed language learning task in which they used excerpts from English translations of well-known

Japanese manga titles, such as *One Piece*, *Full Metal Alchemist*, and *Demon Slayer*, to conduct a table read and work together to analyze/research the language of the text.

In the semester when this inquiry was undertaken, the syllabus contained one key change—three new projects completed over the course of the semester which would replace the final essay. My plan was to develop multimedia activities which centered student language-production as means to creative ends. To scaffold the productive activities, I decided to add social media use as a topic for group discussions and writing prompts so that students would have an opportunity to reach consensus with their group on the definitions of terms and share about their own patterns of social media use and levels of expertise.

Modern methods of communication are increasingly digital among all generations and with the spread of social media, our consumption of information and entertainment has shifted to multimodal content which is available to us on our smartphones practically anywhere. To put the experiences of my students in context, the Japanese Government reported 102 million Japanese users of social media in 2022 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, n.d.). The most widely used social media sites among Japanese of all ages are Line, YouTube, Instagram, X (formerly called Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok (Statista Research Department, 2023). In a survey of 1059 Japanese university students, Kimura (2023) found that 94.7% used social media with 84.8% on Twitter (now called X), 84.5% on Instagram, 27.1% on TikTok, and 17.4% on Facebook.

Social media thrives on multimodal content which is not read in the same way as stand-alone text. Since the New London Group's (1996) advocacy for the concept of multiliteracies, the need for explicit classroom instruction in multimodal literacy has been increasingly addressed in the field of education. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) predicted that "Not being 'visually literate' will begin to attract social sanctions" (p. 3). For Miller and McVee (2012), the skills related to producing multimodal texts are not merely necessary in professional contexts, but are "now required for civic, personal, and workplace lives" (p. 3). Multimodal communication, especially that disseminated over the Internet, has permeated our cultures and now has a conspicuous place in our daily lives.

That does not mean the processes of understanding and producing such texts are intuitive. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) posited a theory for reading images, concluding that it was necessary to understand images as functioning within their own "grammar" which is situated historically and culturally. Kress et al. (1997) observed that relying solely on the written language does not lead to an understanding of multimodal texts; it is necessary to consider the written language along with the other semiotic modes in the same text. Ledin and Machin (2020) characterized Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of multimodal analysis as an attempt to break down visual designs to their basic components to understand how they function and in what ways we employ these resources for communication.

Although awareness of the importance of multimodal literacy has increased, the situation in classrooms has not kept pace. Specifically within the context of introducing multimodal literacy in L2 instruction, Lotherington and Jenson (2011) observed that

We are now so socially enmeshed in digital literacy practices that the concept of optional extrication from the digital world is not realistic, yet language and literacy instruction continues to resist digitized multimedia and multimodal literacy practices as optional or secondary to flat textual practices. (p. 239)

Reinhardt (2020) considered the implications of students' contact with Web 2.0 and the shift toward social media as follows:

... L2 learners now, more than ever (a) have access to authentic, multifarious L2 usage and discourse contexts both inside and outside of class, (b) demonstrate a vast range of literacies, experiences, and dispositions towards technology, and (c) need autonomous learning skills to direct their own learning, as they engage in L2 learning activity on their own outside of the teacher's sight. (p. 235)

In order to properly address these conditions and provide effective instruction, he proposed new metaphors for understanding the role of social media in the learning process, arguing that these new methods of communication should be understood “not only as tutor, tool, or communities, but as windows, mirrors, doorways, and playgrounds” (p. 236). Social media as windows allow students to observe authentic L2 communication; as mirrors, it helps them to engage in identity work and play which reflects to them their emerging bilingual identity; as doorways, it allows them an entry to the communities of practice, and as playgrounds, they encounter places to experiment.

Based on my understanding of the importance of multimodal literacy and belief in the relevance of language learning tasks on social media platforms, I began designing the new projects. However, implementing such tasks would prove to be less than straightforward. Poore (2015) discussed the use of social media in classroom tasks as follows:

There is growing evidence that, because of their hyperlinked architecture, social media can prove more distracting than focusing... The trick is to design teaching and learning tasks that demand deep, considered engagement with a topic, as opposed to surface occupation with a technology or tool. (p. 7).

I certainly had my own view of social media based on personal experiences as a user with private (not publicly accessible) accounts (Facebook since 2007, Instagram for the past two years, and Twitter for two weeks once in the early 2010s), an “Elder Millennial” who can remember when computers were first introduced in my elementary school in the U.S., an educator at the tertiary level for 12 years, and a parent of teenagers with access to social media. Mine is an ambivalent relationship with the medium; I certainly consume more social media content than I produce, and until recently only viewed it as a tool to maintain contact with people I already knew in real life. I felt it was important not to make assumptions about how my students consumed and produced social media, but, rather, to enter into discussion with them as a learner. While trying to develop appropriate tasks and to strictly view them as “mock” posts, that is, materials that would not be released on actual social media platforms for consumption or critique, my foremost goal was for the assignments to build students' confidence as communicators through English and for them to produce materials that they could be proud of.

The plan for this intervention was to introduce tasks that would approximate the production of social media posts designed by a creative team for the purpose of introducing English study or other educational content related to the theme of the course (Japanese popular culture in the age of globalization). Poore (2016) argued that, while we think of recent generations as digital natives, it is not appropriate to expect every student to be social media savvy. She recommended educators who incorporate social media into their classroom routines remember the following:

(1) not all students grow up with digital technology at their fingertips, (2) that there is nothing “innate” about any group of people, but (3) that we should use any positive features furnished by digital technology for the benefit of our teaching and learning. (pp. 54-55)

Throughout this research cycle, I would need to keep in mind that the students might not be using social media in ways that I anticipated.

For this inquiry, I used an action research framework. Lewin (1946), whose work remains influential in the action research tradition, emphasized the importance of understanding one's unique research site to engage in an ongoing cycle of "planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action" (p. 206). My goal was to engage in reflexivity throughout this trial semester. Ermeling (2010) advocated focusing on a particular effect or expected result to examine during the research process, noting that because "[a] complex intervention such as teacher inquiry is likely to set in motion many effects" (p. 380), it is necessary to find a way to distinguish between outcomes that are due to the intervention and those that would result from pre-existing teaching methods/routines. While these new projects would influence everything about the semester, I needed to identify particular aspects of the experience from the students' perspectives that would inform decisions about keeping or adapting various activities in my lesson plans for future semesters. Burns (2010) recognized that action research is a local endeavor and researchers "must be cautious about making large claims or generalizations about [their] findings" (p. 133). She understood the benefits of the deep reflection undertaken during the research cycle in terms of how they impacted the workings of the classroom in practical ways, noting that AR "often has a dramatic effect on how teachers build their personal knowledge about aspects of their teaching" (Burns, 2010, p. 142). The inquiry would guide my planning and teaching processes but also had the potential to give me new channels to listen to students and foreground their experiences both in the course of the semester and in planning for future action research cycles.

For this inquiry, I also borrowed from the framework of exploratory practice (EP). Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2019) described EP as a method of inquiry which "prioritizes the development of teachers' understanding in context" (p. 11). Inquiries, usually referred to as puzzles, are initiated by the teacher to better understand the learners and specific learning context to improve the quality of life in the classroom. Hanks (2019) saw the EP framework as involving learners as researchers and "prioritiz[ing] working for understanding before problem-solving; it traverses/transgresses cultural boundaries of research" (p. 165). In EP there is an emphasis on making the data collection process and instruments subordinate to the course objectives and educationally enriching for the students. These classroom activities that double as data gathering opportunities are referred to as PEPAs—Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities. I was determined to collect and analyze valuable feedback throughout the process of designing and implementing the new tasks without distracting from the course objectives, focusing on students' responses to the new projects in terms of their novelty, user-friendliness, and effectiveness via activities that also served the students' learning.

## **The Action**

In Spring 2023, I reorganized the course for a class of 22 students. I adopted a flipped classroom, giving students homework assignments of reading the textbook and watching my recorded video lectures with accompanying comprehension questions for both. This allowed me to devote the bulk of class time to collaborative student group work. All in-class activities were designed to help students plan and complete the necessary steps for finishing three larger assignments in place of a traditional final examination. For these assignments, I provided guidelines for creating mock posts for a particular platform with the purpose of teaching English language learners something about the English language or of presenting an analysis of manga using the principles introduced in the

textbook *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization* (Tsutsui, 2010). For all of the assignments, students read, analyzed, and researched text from excerpts of published English translations of Japanese manga titles. Thus, the content of the projects could be compiled from what students read for homework and in class with their groups without additional research. Students worked with different groups for each project. For the first assignment, students were given 3 weeks to make a 5-minute video that could be posted to YouTube. They also worked on composing a thread of posts à la Instagram or X (the social media platform known as Twitter at the time) for 3 weeks. While the first two assignments focused on introducing grammar and vocabulary from the materials students examined in class, for the third assignment they spent 5 weeks applying the content from the textbook to create a 20-minute episode of a podcast in which they analyzed some aspect of the production, distribution, or criticism of manga.

In the next section, I will reflect on the design and implementation of the first two tasks, the YouTube video and the social media posts. At the time of designing the tasks, I was not aware of the gap in the popularity of podcasts between English-speaking countries and Japan. As it turned out, when I asked the students at the beginning of the third project, "Who has heard the word 'podcast' before?", only two students raised their hands and the rest simply shook their heads, "No." This was especially surprising considering that the Japanese word for podcast is the transliterated loanword from English, "poddokyasuto." My original plan was to give students creative freedom to produce content relevant to their own experiences. Considering the unanticipated, additional step of explaining what a podcast was and how to access them, I decided that the third project was not suitable for this exploratory inquiry.

While I did give students basic parameters for composing mock social media posts for credit, I also wanted to leave the assignments open-ended to allow them freedom to create posts that reflected what they saw in their feeds as opposed to priming them with examples from what had been provided to me by the algorithm on my own social media accounts. Nearly every week students produced materials as part of the classwork, typically collaborating on one image in groups of two to four students. For this activity, I made the expectation explicit that the materials would be multimodal through written instructions such as "With your group, discuss how to present your list of words and phrases visually in a creative manner." I also clarified in the class that I meant they should combine the content they chose to present with a visual image that would help other learners understand and remember it. This weekly activity provided students opportunities to get used to working with their groups (three different groups throughout the semester) before the "real work" of each project and, theoretically, the content generated in these preliminary activities could be incorporated into the final production.

The data set for this study comprises the materials students made collaboratively for the first two group projects, individual answers to class discussions that students gave by show of hands in class or in writing over Microsoft Teams (n.d.), written reflections about the projects students submitted along with the materials for credit, and responses to a questionnaire about the projects. The written reflections were submitted for credit within a week of the project deadline. The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the 15-week semester (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Timeline of Assignments**

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Project 1 Group Work			_____													
Project 1 Reflection							*									
Project 2 Group Work							_____									
Project 2 Reflection										*						
Questionnaire																*

## The Observation

### Project 1: Five-minute YouTube Video

For the first project students worked in groups of three or four to make a scripted, 5-minute YouTube video introducing original educational content that they designed from the course materials. First, students worked in groups to conduct intensive reading of manga excerpts in English. I instructed them to compile lists of any vocabulary or grammar structures that were unknown or difficult for them and then to engage in independent research of those language items. From the lists, they grouped a few items into a theme of their choosing and created a video that included images to support their explanations. The resulting product was an educational resource for an imagined audience of English learners around the world. Throughout this process, which was completed exclusively during the class time, I was available to answer their questions related to the project. However, I purposefully tried not to influence what they produced in terms of aesthetic or the delivery of the content in keeping with the larger goal of learning about students’ use of social media in order to design and scaffold realistic tasks.

First, I elicited student feedback regarding their previous experiences with social media. For one of the class discussions during this project, when I asked for a show of hands, no students reported that they had made YouTube videos before. I then asked students to submit their written responses to the question “Have you watched videos related to learning English? Describe one video or the theme and aesthetic of the channel” on Microsoft Teams. Of the 18 responses, six referred to media other than YouTube (four to specific foreign movies, and one each to Japanese anime with English dubbing and English-language cartoons) and one did not make the source of the media clear (“the news in English for English learners”). The remaining 11 responses included specific channels or reference to “YouTube” or “shorts feed.” Eight of these referred to Japanese channels which introduce English language for specific purposes (such as the Eiken standardized exam or university entrance exams) or English language and culture generally. Two students reported watching TED videos and one student did not include enough information about whether the channels were produced for a Japanese or international audience. From this data, I concluded that students were mainly consuming videos produced for a Japanese audience rather than an international one.

The Project 1 assignment resulted in six student-produced videos. To facilitate student communication, I set up private channels on Microsoft Teams. The channels served two main functions for the students: collect and organize digital materials in a central, online location and communicate and plan asynchronously outside of class. Students could also



submit their finalized files to me for evaluation within the channel. After informing them that I could also view everything posted in the channel, I quietly observed the students' progress on the projects. The following products resulted from this process:

- two videos where students filmed themselves
  - one skit (Group 6)
  - one "talking heads" style presentation (Group 4)
- four combining PowerPoint slides with voice-overs.

Table 2 displays the various visual elements that students chose to include in the videos. It is notable that five of the six groups opted to include screenshots of pages or individual frames from manga.

**Table 2.** *Visual Elements Students Included in Project 1 Videos*

Group	Screen-shots of class materials	Different font colors	Clip art	Images from the Internet	Icons	Hand-drawn images	References	Student-produced Animation	Scenes from Anime	Credits
1	○				○					
2	○		○					○		○
3		○	○			○	○			
4	○	○								
5	○	○	○	○						
6	○			○					○	

Of the four videos that included PowerPoint slides and voice-overs, three groups produced AI-generated speech for the voiceovers by using programs on the Internet.

**Example Project A.** Students in this group modeled the video on listening materials. Using free AI-generated voice software available online, the video included instructions for listening and repeating the English content. The Japanese translations were provided only after the images and English had been introduced and the viewers were instructed to repeat the English sentences twice. Image 1 contains a screenshot from the video. The colors are muted and the design is simple with bold, solid black lines complementing the black and white manga. The section of the excerpt from the manga that contains the target sentence on the slide has been marked by the students in a red frame. With the combination of icons and AI-generated voiceover and the nearly monochromatic color scheme (apart from the pop of color that calls attention to the source material), this video had what I describe as a futuristic feel.

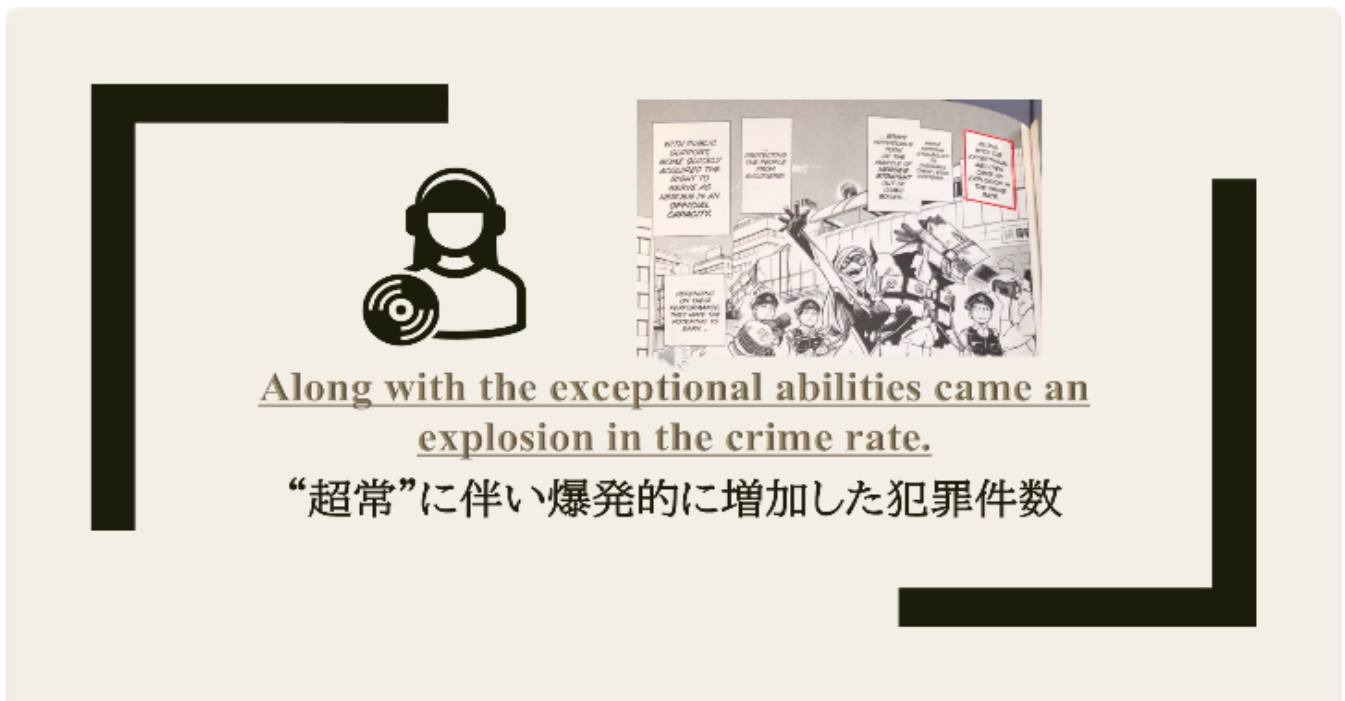


Image 1. Screenshot from the Group 1 Video

**Example Project B.** Students in another group assembled various elements to create rudimentary animation. After introducing the concept of onomatopoeia and providing examples on the same concept in the L1 (Japanese), they synthesized the onomatopoeia collected from the source materials of anime excerpts that had been distributed in class with an original story. The combination of the sound effects and background music with the simplified images (excerpted screenshots are shown in Images 2-4) gave the video the ambience of a retro video game. In this instance, the AI-generated voice contributed to the video game vibe, resulting in a fun and nostalgic feel.



Image 2. Screenshot from the Group 2 Video: Japanese Examples of the Concept



Image 3. Screenshot from the Group 2 Video: Simple Graphics and Storyline

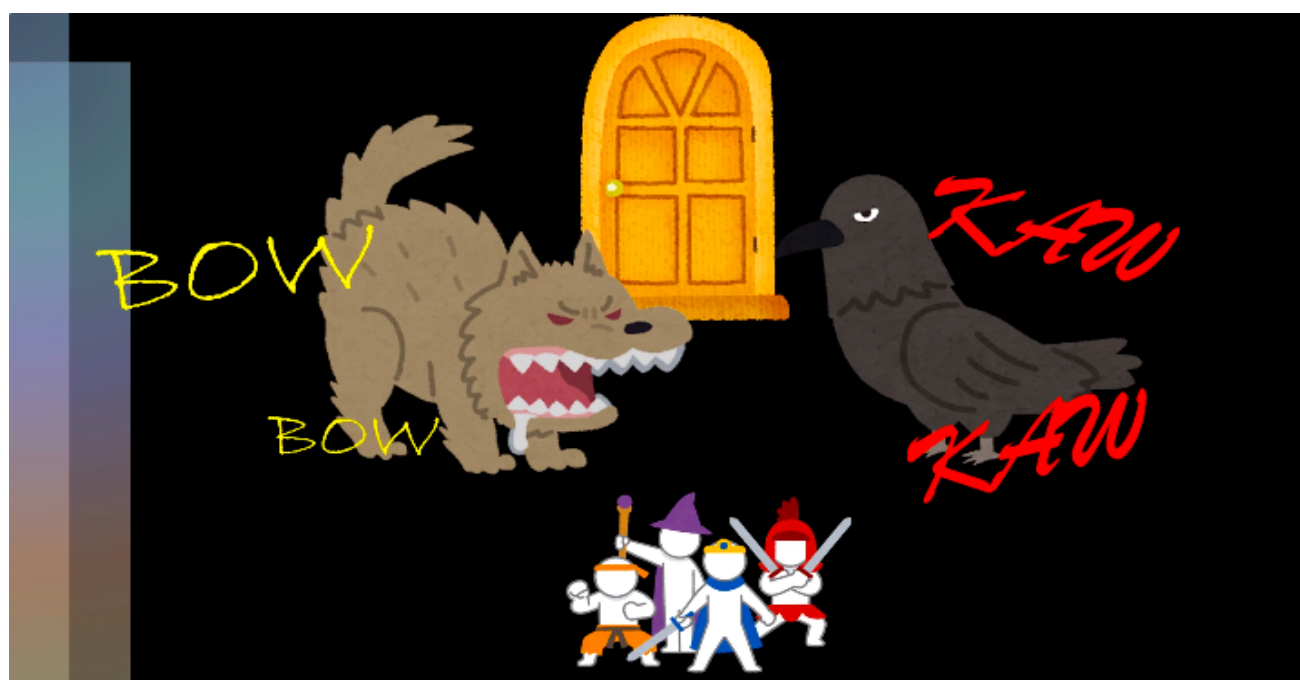


Image 4. Screenshot from the Group 2 Video: Presenting the English Target Language in a Novel Context

**Student Reflections on Project 1.** As part of the assignment, students also submitted their reflections on the process. I asked students to write a two-paragraph reflection that included a report of what they contributed to the project, an evaluation of how the group worked together, the grade that they would assign their group's project, and their thoughts about the project in general. In addition, I conducted a survey at the end of the semester where I asked students for feedback regarding each of the three projects. In this class of 22, 17 students completed the written reflection assignment for Project 1, and 16 answered the end-of-the-semester survey about the project.

In response to the anonymous survey about the project conducted 8 weeks after its completion, 15 of 16 respondents answered “yes” to the question “Do you think that Project 1 (a video for YouTube) met the goals of this course?” When asked to express their agreement with the statement “I feel that Project 1 was useful for me personally,” seven chose “strongly agree,” eight chose “somewhat agree,” and one chose “somewhat disagree.” Overall, it appears that students had a positive response to the project and found it useful. More nuanced evaluations were provided in the written reflections submitted 1 week after the project due date. I used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016) to categorize these student reflections on the project, considering students’ attitudes toward the process of making video content and what aspects they found challenging or rewarding. After extrapolating 15 separate codes through an inductive approach, I applied Braun and Clarke’s (2022) thematic analysis to answer the following research question: *What did students identify as salient affordances of this project?*

From the coded data, I identified five themes in students’ responses to the project. While developing the themes, I looked for trends in student answers that would help me construct conclusions about what specific pedagogical support I could provide in future courses to increase student satisfaction with the process of working together to create social media content. The themes I identified are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Theme Summary for Research Question 1

Theme	Characteristics
Editing videos was intimidating, but WE managed	After initially experiencing anxiety over their lack of technical skills, students noted gaps in quality between their products and the fare they normally view on YouTube. However, when students felt there had been a fair distribution of labor, they reported that the process was enjoyable and their technical skills had improved because of the group work.
With more time, we could have done so much more	Students noted dissatisfaction with the finished products in terms of the aesthetic, the method of recording audio components, and the level of quantity and detail of the content, but expressed optimism that they could have overcome these shortcomings with more time.
Group work success depended on similar levels of motivation and open communication	If students shared motivation, they could engage in open and enjoyable communication. Through active communication, students felt they could work together to distribute the tasks evenly among group members and have a fun experience. This communication was at times facilitated by Microsoft Teams.
In-depth investigation of only a few English words and phrases was possible	Using the Internet and dictionaries, students could focus on crafting a detailed, practical explanation of particular words and phrases. However, the additional task of preparing the video limited the time that could be spent on investigation of target language items.
Opportunities to learn English through group work and to practice presentation skills resulted in gains	Students could research and present information about English words and phrases within their groups during planning and preparation for filming. In the case of groups that recorded a “live action” video, students recognized the project provided opportunities to practice presentation skills.

First, in addition to students’ claims of no experience creating content for YouTube as reported above, they further reported initial feelings of anxiety toward using the tools of recording and editing videos. Without prior experience, it became necessary for students to research and experiment with the tools on their own. As shown in Table 2, different groups took completely different approaches to the creative process and the final videos contained completely different formatting elements. Students reported they had overcome the

initial stress of facing the assignment through active communication with their groups and establishing a fair distribution of labor. For example, one student reported,

Everyone in the group had no experience making videos and was very anxious to hear about the project. However, it was very fun to complete the video while talking with everyone.

With the exception of Group 2 whose video included student-created animation sequences thanks to what other students in the group reported as the work of one student, all students faced the challenge of the assignment on what appears to have been equal footing. This necessitated active communication as students worked out what they would be able to accomplish during the course of the project and tempered their expectations of the finished products.

While students could overcome the initial challenges of completing a novel assignment, many expressed that the allotted time did not allow them to master sufficient video production skills. Due to the lack of experience articulated in the previous theme, they could not just jump into the production process. Some student comments reflected the theme “With more time, we could have done so much more,” as they reported making concessions, adopting different formats than originally planned, and working outside of the allotted class time in order to make the deadline. In fact, the outsourcing of the audio material to AI voices was attributed to this lack of time by one student. Students also expressed a desire, had there been more time, to improve the videos through the inclusion or polishing of elements such as sound effects, end credits, and smoother transitions between clips. Further, some students wanted to commit more time to the English language learning content by introducing more detailed explanations of the words and phrases or by investigating more lexical items.

Although the videos themselves did not completely meet students’ expectations, many used the word “fun” to describe the process of engaging in collaborative work with their groups, as also reflected in the student comment representing the first theme. While group work was not universally successful, students were able to articulate reasons for their various levels of satisfaction and evaluation, which can be summed up in the theme “Group work success depended on similar levels of motivation and open communication.” Fortunately, most of these comments were positive and detailed either the individual’s concrete communication strategies or the cohesiveness of the group. One student did report that the different levels of motivation in their group had stymied the communication process, leaving this student dissatisfied with both the process and results.

The fourth theme highlights students’ reflections on whether this project helped them develop English knowledge or skills. Because the project required students to engage in specific tasks that, as previously noted, were not familiar to them in either an educational or private context, the bulk of the time was spent on planning and preparing the multimodal projects. The dual nature of the project resulted in a learning task where “In-depth investigation of only a few English words and phrases was possible.” Students noted that they had gained a deeper understanding of the target words and phrases by using tools such as the Internet and dictionaries to investigate the items and by and large they expressed satisfaction with the outcomes. One student described the process as follows:

We need to look deeper into the words to give a more detailed explanation, so we could learn the use of English word, like its meaning, idiom, and its image. In terms of learning the practical meaning of English words, this project is very effective.

However, another student saw this affordance as less than optimal for an English course, noting:

I did not think this project was good. There were two reasons. First, this is because I learned only a few grammars and vocabulary words. In my group, each member researched and presented one grammar or vocabulary word per person. Therefore, I learned only three grammars or vocabulary words at most. While there were three group work classes, there was too little established knowledge. Second, this is because the time to study English was very short. In my group, we presented with our PowerPoints, and it took long time to prepare them. I did not think that this is efficient way to learn English.

For this student, the split focus of the project was a detriment to English acquisition and the time spent preparing for the video did not prove to be a reasonable trade-off.

For some students, the limited number of lexical items mastered simply meant that they could develop other skills. The fifth theme—“Opportunities to learn English through group work and to practice presentation skills resulted in gains”—shows that for some students skills other than investigating or learning English words and phrases were a positive affordance of the project. One student expressed appreciation for the novel task as follows:

This project was an opportunity that we interact with classmates whom I hadn't talked so much. So, it was good opportunity for us. And group work is very good because we were able to make up for each other's shortcomings. Lecture is important for learning English, but I thought that cooperating others in this way, our English skill would improve more and more.

Group work provided opportunities for learning other skills and learning from and with the other students instead of from a unidirectional lecture. Although the number of discrete lexical items mastered was relatively low, as shown in the previous theme, the group discussions allowed students to connect with their classmates and work together toward a goal.

### ***Project 2: 10-item Thread in the style of Twitter (X) or Instagram***

For the second project, students were instructed to prepare a thread using popular social media sites with the objective of teaching someone about the English language through their posts. I decided to keep the parameters broad to see how students would attempt this project, so, apart from which sites to use for the mock posts and how many items to produce (a thread with 10 items on X [Twitter] or Instagram), my only instructions regarding the content were, “The posts that you make for this project should all be related somehow—same theme, same original manga/chapter from the textbook, etc.” I based the instructions for this activity on Poore's (2016) advice against using Microsoft Word to compose content intended for other platforms because of the difference in cognitive styles required by the different programs and potential problems when pasting content created in Word into other platforms. Accordingly, I included the following practical instructions regarding the composition of “posts”:

Research has shown that for many people, using a different program (such as Microsoft Word) to create projects for one platform (such as Twitter) results in them approaching the creative process in an inauthentic way. Use the actual platform (Twitter or Instagram) to create the posts. Post to “Private,” take screenshots, then edit the screenshots to cover your personal information (username, profile picture, etc.).

Using this strategy, I hoped to improve student satisfaction with their multimodal compositions by encouraging them to use appropriate tools.

Of the five group projects, two (A and B) were balanced with visuals and text, two contained no images (D and E), and one (C) utilized hand drawn images and emoji rather than screenshots or clip art. Excerpts from one of each category are displayed below. Image 5 shows the first three slides from Group A, an exemplary project. Image 6 displays the first three slides from Group D in which there appears to have been minimal consideration of a multimodal approach to introducing the information. Image 7 contains three non-consecutive slides from the Group C project. Images from this project were chosen to convey the “analog” approach taken to adding images to the posts. It appears that each group member contributed two corresponding pages, so I have chosen pages that were presumably composed by three different students working independently. These mixed results among the group projects in terms of the amount of visual content were further surprising considering that the in-class activities throughout the semester in which students created mock social media content were oriented toward multimodal materials production.



Image 5. Screenshots from Group A Project

Group A submitted 13 slides. Of the slides, 10 contained both English and Japanese and three were English only. It is noteworthy that all of the projects included some Japanese on the posts. This would seem to run counter to the original instructions that the project be for an international audience.

Three of the four students in Group A completed the reflections after the project. One student wrote:

Our content was based on the post on Instagram. I thought we can make the content similar to it, but we couldn't make it original, so I evaluated B for our work. Since I don't

ordinarily see many posts of learning content when I use SNS services, it was hard for me to imagine what kind of content to make.

Another student concurred, "We searched many posts on Instagram and I found these types of posts." In this case, it is clear that the students were using existing content on Instagram as a reference, with the risk of plagiarism. The quality of the project demonstrates that they successfully accessed and analyzed the content of other posts, as can be seen from the variety of elements, the clear pedagogical structure of the quiz format, the friendly tone to the viewer ("Let's think about it together!"), and the presence of hashtags. In fact, this was the only group to include hashtags in the project. Another student commented on the easy access to educational content through social media, adding, "Through this project, I decided to use Instagram and twitter well." Although the format of this social media project cannot be considered completely original, the student reflections revealed they had actively engaged in collecting and analyzing social media posts.



Image 6. Screenshots from Group D Project

Group D took an entirely different approach. The theme of these materials is indicated in the Japanese title "Useful phrases for when you want to answer questions vaguely." Every slide in this thread contains Japanese, with the first slide containing only Japanese. The source material is not indicated and there are no images on any of the slides. Each phrase is recontextualized in an original example dialogue.

Only two of the four members of Group D completed the reflections for this project. One wrote, "I don't usually post on Instagram so this project was a bit difficult for me. However, I had experience seeing similar posts, so I was able to mimic them." This highlights a difference in how students use social media. The other student described the process of trying to choose images which, apparently, were discarded for the final draft. "When I made pictures, I feel



*this is difficult. People won't read pictures that have many sentences, but few sentences are not informative. We have to adjust appropriate amount of sentences."* This observation reveals the student's concern with how to balance the semiotic materials in the project, demonstrating a clear understanding of the need to consider the audience. In its final iteration, Group D's mock social media thread relied on a single mode—written text. Matters such as font choice, font size, and background color are considered important in multimodal texts; however, the group clearly made a choice not to include images. Unfortunately, there is no data in the set to explain why.

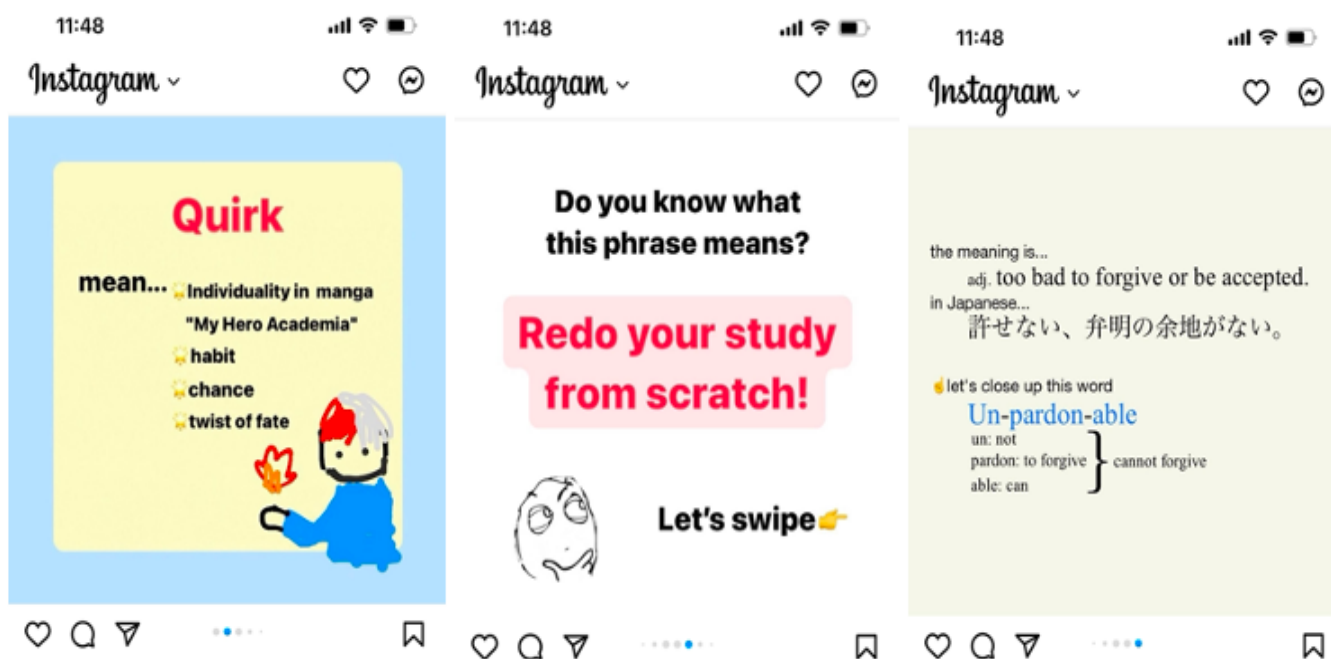


Image 7. Screenshots from Group C Project

Group C was the only group to include an apparently hand drawn (using digital tools) image and emojis in the posts. These slides were chosen specifically to display the variety of semiotic material included in the project. Each group member appears to have contributed a pair of slides, one that asks the viewer a question about a target word or phrase and a corresponding slide that explains the usage. In this thread, all of the slides except for the one bilingual slide included above were English only, so it would seem that most of the members of this group approached the project as one for an international rather than Japanese audience.

Overall, the projects used multiple modes and produced colorful posts that accomplished the objective of introducing English language content. While the use of different semiotic materials, the “modes” in multimodal texts, varied in the projects, there was across the board a noticeable absence of images that could be classified as memes. However, it is clear from student feedback that the projects reflect what students have encountered in their own social media feeds and through active searches for language learning materials.

In the end-of-year survey, conducted five weeks after the deadline for Project 2, 14 of 16 respondents answered “yes” to the question “Do you think that Project 2 (a thread of posts for Instagram or Twitter) met the goals of this course?” Among responses on a Likert scale to the statement “I feel that Project 2 was useful for me personally,” eight chose “strongly agree,” seven chose “somewhat agree,” and one chose “somewhat disagree.”

## **The Reflection**

Each of the projects presented unique challenges in terms of communicating the assignment to students, organizing the class periods effectively, and supporting students as they applied their prior knowledge and creative approaches to producing materials. In this section I will consider the challenging aspects of each project in terms of pedagogy: the range of basic computer skills that students brought to the projects, my own images of what I expected students to produce, the challenges of “reading” and “writing” multimodal texts such as memes, and my approach to evaluating the projects.

As students prepared Project 1, the 5-minute YouTube video, it became apparent that without a framework for producing the videos some students resorted to the familiar format of group presentations supported by PowerPoint slides, producing videos that closely resembled the sorts of presentations that they give in both English classes and courses conducted in Japanese. In EFL courses at a Japanese university, Hunt (2019) introduced film as a subject for study. He found that although students implicitly understood the grammar of film, explicit instruction in that grammar gave students analytical tools that could be used to analyze other forms of media. In the future, Project 1 could be better scaffolded by providing explicit instruction on how videos work, asking students to watch selected educational YouTube videos and tease them apart in group discussions while engaging in analysis of the different modes of communication and how they comprise a whole.

While some students fell back on familiar strategies to complete the assignment, a few students who already had experience using editing software produced materials that exhibited a grasp of how to create multimodal videos, demonstrating a high level of creativity. Dahlstrom (2021) observed that those students with prior knowledge of digital production skills, often obtained in informal settings, had an advantage over their peers. Dahlstrom proposed expanding student multimodal literacy to prevent the marginalization of those who lack such skills. To address the difference in skills and experience, a video lesson assigned as homework in this flipped classroom could be used to introduce video editing software. For instance, a demonstration of the basic functions of a commercially available software with a free trial period that students could take advantage of within the time frame of the project could be added to the course content, thereby explicitly informing students about the tools of the trade and providing an opportunity for hands-on learning of a specific program. That said, as shown in the thematic analysis of student reflections, the opportunity to engage in group work and tackle the challenges of new digital tools with their peers proved to be a valuable experience for many students. Considering the availability of online tutorials and the benefits of using a trial-and-error approach with most software, it may be appropriate to prioritize allotting more time for the project over providing more scaffolding. This is certainly an area where the ideal balance may depend on the mood of a particular cohort or the skills that groups in future cycles bring to the table. To improve students’ perception that they are indeed learning English through this project, a solution may be to set a translanguaging goal such as spending a certain percentage of the preparation time talking about the project using English as the base language or encouraging students to use the English version of a software and access English-medium tutorials.

While I was aware that the use of AI-generated voices is a common element in videos posted on the Internet, I was still surprised by students’ decisions to use such tools for this assignment since none of them had reported previous experience making YouTube videos. Although I was initially taken aback by the results, I came to think of the use of such tools as an effective scaffolding/motivating element. Hunt (2019) argues that “Development of

multimodal literacy awareness may offer opportunities for meaning making that extend beyond the learners' present L2 capabilities, while developing awareness of audience and rhetoric" (p. 129). Although I have centered speaking/discussion in this course, students appropriated an online tool to produce the audio component of the videos, effectively taking the pressure off group members to perform and compare their performances. Using the tool allowed them to control the quality of the video within the constraints of time and available environment for recording during the class time. In this case, learners exercised their agency, drawing on their knowledge of digital tools apart from my instruction. Through this experience, I learned a different way to think about scaffolding the projects from the students' initiative in accessing and using a tool that was not even on my radar. Their action challenged my preconceived notion of what a speaking project needed to be, forcing me to reconsider the goals of the project. If I wanted to prioritize realistic tasks, I would also need to be open to this novel semiotic material.

Project 2 demonstrated a different set of challenges for the students. For Project 1, simply turning on the camera and recording themselves speaking resulted in a sufficient combination of textual and visual elements. The reduction to two-dimensional, fixed images without voice recordings or sound effects meant that students would need to create or find various materials and plan and execute their arrangement. Of course, it would have been perfectly acceptable to allow students to make videos for these other platforms, though these would have been shorter due to the constraints of each platform. Instead of repeating the video project, I wanted to experiment with a different type of multimodal composition. However, it is certain that I underestimated the complexity of the task.

I thoroughly expected students to include Internet memes in their mock posts, either by combining existing viral memes with captions to introduce their educational content or by creating unique memes that presented the educational content in creative, memorable ways. Miltner (2018) identifies meme making and distribution as "a ubiquitous, arguably foundational, digital media practice" (p. 412). That students used social media platforms to compose their projects but did not include memes raises questions about meme culture regionally and across generations. It is possible that students are versed in the grammar of memes but lack a fundamental understanding of their function sufficient to create novel memes. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) concluded, multimodal literacy is not innate and should be taught alongside traditional literacy. Even though students are avid consumers of social media, it may not be automatically clear to them how the posts are functioning multimodally, especially considering the niche humor often encountered on social media platforms.

To understand the issues associated with Internet meme literacy in particular, it is further necessary to analyze the competencies associated with their production and dissemination. Knobel and Lankshear (2007) studied Internet memes to identify the differences between memes that achieved virality and Dawkins' original conception of "meme" as the unit of transmission of culture. According to Dawkins (1976), in order to replicate, a meme requires qualities of longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity. In addition to these qualities, Knobel and Lankshear (2007) found that the fecundity of Internet memes was observed in three patterns: humor, intertextuality, and anomalous juxtaposition. Further, literacy in memes is also highly dependent on an understanding of the shared experiences and practices through which people access emerging "affinity spaces" on the Internet. They saw the study of memes as a challenge to the dominant definition of digital literacies because, while "contributing a multimodal 'meme text' that has the maximum appearance of veracity... requires a range of finely-honed technical skills and competencies" (Knobel & Lankshear,

2007, p. 220), understanding memes requires understanding them within larger, complex systems of meaning. While I had expected students to be familiar with the grammar of memes, in fact, they seemed not to be aware of the genre. Further investigation about my students' exposure to memes is certainly needed to inform future scaffolding of the task in Project 2.

Finally, the issue of evaluation needs to be addressed in future cycles. As can be seen from the data, the projects revealed a range of skill levels when using digital tools such as editing software. Cartner and Hallas (2020) argue that multimodal literacies require a novel form of assessment in place of those developed for traditional print forms. The inclusion of carefully designed rubrics, distributed to students in advance of each project, could also serve as a scaffolding tool when students are approaching the daunting task of creating social media posts.

## Takeaways

Through this project, I realized the centrality of multimodal literacy to the ability to create materials that incorporate different modes. In order to successfully scaffold tasks that ask Japanese university students to produce multimodal texts, I resolved to keep these six points in mind moving forward.

### ***Don't make assumptions about students' social media use.***

It is not a given that students are using the Internet to study English or social media to consume English-language content. Instructors preparing to introduce social media-related tasks in the classroom should, if they haven't already, curate a list of social media channels and accounts that are producing high-quality, English-medium, English language instruction materials. I decided to show actual examples in future classes, such as the official Instagram account of Merriam-Webster Dictionary (@merriamwebster).

### ***Don't expect that because students consume large amounts of social media, they will be able to construct multimodal posts such as memes.***

Consumption of social media does not always result in the sort of reflection on and analysis of the hidden grammar of multimodal texts that is necessary to produce such texts. Scaffolding this process by guiding students through engaging in analysis of such texts using an existing academic framework may be an appropriate substitute for the productive tasks described in this exploratory inquiry.

### ***Don't expect that students are able to use editing software.***

While students may be "digital natives," different levels of access to and training in the digital tools required to compose multimodal digital texts result in potentially different skill sets even among peers who consume social media in comparable ways. Consider allowing students to sketch or storyboard their ideas or use other analog processes for creating their multimodal texts.

### ***Do provide a clear purpose for the tasks that is separate from creating social media posts.***

Because students may not have the skills to produce sleek multimodal texts, instructors may need to temper their expectations. This could have a significant impact on the methods of evaluation, considering that some students may be skilled in the production of multimodal tasks due to different learning and life experiences (some may even already be social media

influencers!). The evaluation criteria should be clearly communicated to students and instructors may want to consider maintaining a flexible approach.

### ***Do scaffold every step of the process.***

Even though social media is ubiquitous and communication is increasingly multimodal, traditional education systems have not yet adapted to a multiliteracies approach. In addition to presenting the academic concepts, demonstrating how to apply them is important. This may also require devoting some class time to demonstrating software and allowing students to experiment with the tools together.

### ***Do keep a reflexive approach throughout.***

Instructors should be open to student feedback and demonstrate receptivity to their ideas. Because these tasks may be new to the students and more challenging than expected, it is important to be open to making adjustments in terms of the schedule and length of assignments if they express they are having difficulties with the process. It is critical to always remember that the point of the tasks is to engage students in a topic rather than focusing on mastery of the tools.

## **Review Process**

This article was open peer-reviewed by Mayumi Abe and Paul Collett of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.*)

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吉良アマンダは中央大学経済学部助教。TESOLの修士号を取得し、関東地方の高等教育機関で12年間、外国語としての英語を教えている。マルチモーダル分析、教材開発、タスクベースの教授法に研究の関心を寄せる。授業や探究的実践の他に、西東京でハイキングを楽しんでいる。

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## “The Sound Behind the Mask”: Translanguaging Performance Poetry for Learner Development

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As a language instructor, researcher, and poet in Japan, I have experienced challenges in practicing arts-based pedagogy. Constrained by fixed proficiency benchmarks and summative assessments, my arts-based pedagogy in ELT often becomes too focused on product over process. Consequently, I wanted to explore the ways in which arts-based pedagogy could support language learner development in a more flexible context, integrating translanguaging into this pedagogical approach to amplify learners' existing semiotic resources and their multimodal journeyings in language learning. Here, I share understandings developed through an exploratory process with “Mohan,” an international student participant in a translanguaging arts-based workshop series implemented in collaboration with a university self-access learning center, a follow-up focus group, and two one-to-one discussions. Our dialogue probed the creative process and Mohan's subsequent linguistic development, anchored by his artworks and his experience as a student facilitator at the center. Throughout, the metaphors and symbols from his artworks became touchstones to which we referred to understand the shifts in his language development. These materials served as a crystallization of Mohan's mindset at the moment of creation, becoming an anchoring framework through which to identify the benefits of translanguaging arts-based approaches as well as future directions for development.

日本で語学講師、研究者、詩人として活動する中で、アートベースの教授法の実践に関して多くの課題に直面している。英語教育(ELT)におけるアートベースの教授法は、定められた達成基準や総括的評価に制約されるため、プロセスよりも成果に焦点を当てすぎる傾向がある。そこで、アートベースの教授法がより柔軟なコンテキストでどのように言語学習者の発展を支援できるかを探りたいと考える。また、その際、言語学習において学習者の既存の記号資源とマルチモーダルな探求を促進するために、この教育アプローチにトランスランゲージングも取り入れる。本稿では、留学生Mohanとともに、1)大学のセルフ・アクセス・ラーニング・センターと協力して実施したトランスランゲージング・アートワークショップ、2)ワークショップ参加者とのフォーカス・グループ、3)2回実施した1対1のディスカッションの3つの探索的プロセスで得た理解を共有する。Mohanと著者との対話では、アート作品とセンターでの学生ファシリテーターとしての経験に基づいて、彼の創造的なプロセスとその後の言語的発達について探る。作品に現れる比喩や象徴は、彼の変化の性質を理解するための重要な手がかりとなる。これらの素材は、Mohanの創作の瞬間の考え方を結晶化したものであり、トランスランゲージング・アートベースのアプローチの利点、および今後に向けた改善点や発展の方向性を結びつけるためのフレームワークとなる。

### Keywords

arts-based pedagogy, collaborative arts, creative language practices, English language teaching, multimodality  
アートベースの教育、共同創作、創造的言語実践、英語教育、マルチモダリティ

### Introduction

When I started working as an arts-based social justice facilitator in community non-profits, I thought of my work as activism, not education. In my hometown of Toronto and later in Hong Kong, I sought to understand my social location in dynamic, solidaristic process with others. I believed in justice and in our collective capacity to grow together through arts-based learning and action. Suffice to say, it was messy, painful, and joyous. After transitioning to English language education and classroom teaching in Japan and Thailand a decade ago, I have been puzzling on how to apply arts-based pedagogy in a way that evokes the solidarity, mess, and joy of my earlier work. This is grounded in a striving for non-hierarchical relationship and trust to channel what the participant in this study calls “the sound behind the mask” (Mohan, personal communication, June 30, 2023), or the feelings that lie past social niceties and attempts to conform to sociocultural expectations at the expense of our authentic feelings and selves. In response to institutional demands for summative assessments and standardized proficiency measures, my arts-based practices in school settings have often felt overly product-oriented and activity-based. This has led



me to ask: How can translanguaging arts-based pedagogy in English language classrooms support us to engage in holistic connection and critical reflection?

In this exploratory inquiry, I explore the ways in which translanguaging arts-based pedagogy can facilitate authentic connection and reflection for learner development. Translanguaging (García, 2009) has received great attention in language education in the past two decades and is defined as the “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (p. 45). This applied theory of language (Li, 2018) is informed by the way in which bilingual individuals, families, and communities cross state-defined linguistic boundaries in everyday interaction. This boundary-crossing is distinct from code switching as it allows bilinguals and multilinguals, terms used by García interchangeably, to express themselves through their holistic semiotic repertoires, which are inherently multimodal. In a growing number of studies, translanguaging is integrated with arts-based pedagogy (Hirsu et al., 2021) to amplify the affordances of both. Examples of translanguaging arts-based pedagogy in language education include studies on translanguaging performance poetry (Burton & Van Viegen, 2021), identity text poems (Dutton & Rushton, 2021), drama and role-play (Galante, 2022), creative movement, visual arts, and multi-arts approaches (Rajendram et al., 2022). Arts-based pedagogy is distinct from arts education as rather than instruct on medium-specific artistic skills, it integrates the arts into study on any topic to synthesize knowledge and “draw out the soul” (Oliver et al., 2019) across the disciplines. An arts-based approach involves affect-related (Rieger et al., 2016) and transformative (Dewhurst, 2011) benefits by facilitating self-awareness and connection (Greene, 2001).

Given these potential affordances, my goal in this study was to apply translanguaging arts-based pedagogy and observe its possibilities. I conducted the initial pedagogical process, a series of two 120-minute workshops, through the cooperation and in-kind support of a university self-access language learning center. I engaged in a dialogue with one of the seven participants, Mohan (a pseudonym), over the course of the next several months. This study focuses on these dialogues as we reflected on the initial creative process and his shifts since that time. I chose to focus on Mohan because of his role as a student facilitator at the self-access center. On the job, he engaged service users in conversation and supported them around their learning goals. Consequently, he had a unique perspective not only on how the pedagogical process impacted his own linguistic developmental journey, but also on how it might be implemented with visitors to the center, mainly Japanese undergraduate students.

In this article, I first discuss what brought me to this question, grounding the impetus of this study in my emic perspectives as a multilingual. Next, I explain my methodology and then proceed to share my understandings of the themes generated. In the discussion and conclusion, I propose some key understandings to inform future research directions in learner development through arts-based pedagogy.

## **Impetus for the Study**

I was born and raised in Tkaronto, a Mohawk name for what is colonially referred to as Toronto, Canada. The city is on land traditionally stewarded by several Indigenous nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. As a child at home, I spoke only Mandarin and Cantonese. In my Chinese community in downtown Tkaronto, I spoke Cantonese. At school, it was English and French. At home, early on, we communicated in Mandarin, and my mother and grandmother interacted in Hokkien, or Fujianese. My father's side, who we saw infrequently,

spoke in Shanghainese, Mandarin, and English. I was also surrounded by the languages of Portuguese and Italian in my neighbourhood, Little Portugal.

But these languages did not grow to co-exist in harmonious, mutually reinforcing ways. Entering a bilingual public school, linguistic hierarchies symptomatic of Canada's white supremacist "vertical mosaic" (Porter, 1965) mandated a silencing of my racialized mother tongues. As children do, I perceived these hierarchies instinctively and did my utmost to assimilate by evacuating any trace of Mandarin or Cantonese "interference." I was determined that my accent would be "Perfectly Canadian." I read everything my white classmates did such as the work of Judy Blume, Beverly Cleary, Roald Dahl, C. S. Lewis. These works, while still cherished, shared a dominant whiteness whose harmful impact on Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color is well-documented (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). So, I painted pictures of myself with blond hair in kindergarten. By age 10, it had become a chestnut brown, but never its actual color: black.

My linguistic development in Mandarin and Cantonese withered as I threw all I had into the project of assimilation. The result of this "subtractive bilingualism" (Lambert, 1981) was one kind of survival at the expense of another. In striving for linguistic accuracy, I attempted to achieve an unassailable position, becoming "more French than the French" (Derrida, 1998, p. 49). Although I enjoyed writing as a child, fiction was difficult, likely because my model texts did not reflect my experience. I couldn't seem to write in a voice that didn't feel like it belonged to someone else. In poetry, though, I could hear myself. The poem did not have to be grammatical. It didn't have to take a certain structure. It didn't have to stick to a single language; many poems mix languages in novel ways. It just had to feel right in some elemental way, a way that only I might understand or benefit from. Each poem was a universe, true and valuable on its own terms. Its terms—my terms—were enough. I continued to write poetry and began performing it at various venues, finding strength and affirmation in expressing myself, and in the connections to creative diasporic communities in Tkaronto.

Now, as an educator in Japan, these early experiences paired with the ways I saw native speakerism unfold in my classrooms informed my desire to explore the potentials of translanguaging poetry in the Japanese EFL context. The way that poetry as a genre invites linguistic play is inherently affirming of learner autonomy in linguistic development; after all, who says one must master a certain type or level of proficiency before playing with the dimensions of language—that is, of any discrete language, or of language as a concept? From another perspective, we could say that playing with the "rules" of language is an important way to not only understand our relationship(s) to language(s), but also to delineate our own dynamic terms of engagement with it. Playing with language through poetry, learners are encouraged to expand the possibilities of how they relate to language(s): a paradigm shift that can foster self-determination more broadly.

Poetry and, later, popular theatre (Boal, 1993) led to my work as an arts-based social justice educator in NGO settings in Toronto and Hong Kong. After a decade of this work, precarious due to the political nature of NGO funding, I went back to school for teacher's college and moved to Japan. I began working as a secondary school teacher and English Language Learning program coordinator at an international school. With the change in national and institutional context, my orientation to social justice and arts-based education was shaken. Living in a cultural context that was not "my own" caused me to question my right to critique and challenge the social order, especially as someone with Western privilege. As an artist, my relationship to my practice was interwoven with my activism, but it was difficult to see how my classroom teacher, activist, and artist selves could coalesce in new and

unfamiliar contexts. I struggled to name and explicitly infuse my values into my classroom teaching in Japan.

Why did my notions of “classroom teacher” push my other selves to step aside? Besides everyday institutional challenges, my identity as a classroom and language teacher was still nascent. In pushing myself to inhabit the role of teacher as knower and authority, I often defaulted to what I felt was expected of me by my superiors. Still, at staff meetings, I spoke up about social justice issues; I advocated for students, especially English language learners, and made some positive changes to the program. But in many ways it seemed impossible to integrate the roles of activist and teacher. So, if I was good at my job, I was strengthening the institution: a sellout. If I wasn’t, I was giving “them” a reason to discount me.

## Translanguaging

Teaching for another decade in Japan, with a stint in Thailand, I encountered the concept of translanguaging and was struck by its affirmation of multilingual realities through an asset-based approach. Learning about it inspired both grief and relief. I felt grief when I reflected on what a difference this paradigm would have made in my own formative schooling experiences. Although the literature confirms that inviting students to channel their existing linguistic knowledge (e.g., knowledge of Mandarin, Japanese, etc.) can help in learning a new language (Cummins, 1979), mainstream education has been slow to understand this.

I also felt relief at being seen as a multilingual and at finding a lens through which to perceive my proficiencies as a unified whole, rather than as wounded reminders of what might have been. Translanguaging offers an asset-based perspective on proficiency, focusing learners on becoming bilingual rather than “native-like.” As most of the global population is bilingual or multilingual (Canagarajah & Wurr, 2011), encouraging students to join this majority can foster pride in their whole language repertoire (García & Otheguy, 2020) rather than the kind of shame I experienced as a multilingual speaker of raciolinguistically (Flores & Rosa, 2015) marginalized languages. This “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) paradigm shift challenges us to reflect on “named languages” such as English and Japanese as social and bureaucratic constructs, rather than “natural” ones.

Furthermore, translanguaging is now understood to encompass not only the linguistic, but the multimodal, making it an intuitive fit with arts-based approaches in their integration of “sensuous learning and embodied knowledge” (Meltzer, 2019, p. 139). Multimodality refers to the ways in which we use and perceive multiple semiotic modes—aural, gestural, linguistic, visual, spatial—simultaneously, asking us to understand interactions in terms of modes rather than languages (Kress, 2010). As Li explains, “A key objective of the translanguaging project is to build a new way of thinking and talking about language not as sets of abstractable codes but as multimodal semiotic systems for meaning- and sense-making” (2022, p. 409).

## Methodology

I conducted two 120-minute workshops, as a series, in February 2023, in partnership with a university self-access language learning center. This partnership was inspired by the ongoing desire on the part of the center to offer a range of activities to its service users, and my desire to implement these activities in a setting freer from curricular constraints. The center provided in-kind, outreach, and staff support while I developed and implemented the workshop activities. The workshop process had four phases as outlined in Table 1:

1. Trust-building: Engaging in multimodal activities to facilitate connection among participants
2. Generating: Applying a language mapping process to help them brainstorm raw material for poetry
3. Crafting: Asking participants to draw on these materials to shape poems, with the support of optional writing prompts, and
4. Performance: Offering the opportunity for them to share their poems to an audience of center facilitators and invited friends.

I encouraged participants to draw on their entire linguistic repertoires throughout.

**Table 1.** *Description of the workshop phases*

Phase	Objectives	Sample activities	Duration in minutes (approx.)
1. Trustbuilding	To build a trusting and supportive environment conducive to risk taking  To set a warm, curious, and playful tone to the process	After inviting participants to co-create community norms, I used simple multimodal activities to facilitate holistic connection between participants (i.e., not limited to the linguistic/verbal), e.g., - Simple movement-echoing games (Boal, 2002) - Silent lineup - Boats/Buses icebreaker	40
2. Generating	To support participants in accessing memories, experiences, feelings, and ideas connected to language and the body  To support participants in putting their ideas on paper, in words, images, etc.	- Language mapping (see below) - Story of my name - Brainstorming lines connected to the language map (1 line per sticky note, affixed to the related area of the language map) with optional writing prompts, e.g., "My English is..." (Seltzer, 2020), "My Japanese is...", "My arms are...", "My stomach is..."	95
3. Crafting	To shape the raw material generated in the prior phase into a poem/piece	- Selecting sticky notes and/or ideas brainstormed onto their own language maps to create a patchwork of meaning	45
4. Performance (Optional)	To affirm and celebrate participants' creative processes and the group's co-creative process	- Participants had the option to share their poems to an audience of invited friends and center staff.	60

Language mapping (Table 1, "Generating") needs some elaboration as a novel integration of two existing methods: body mapping (Gastaldo et al., 2012) and language portraits (Krumm, 2007), also known as plurilingual portraits (Mohamed, 2020). I developed this integrated method to enhance creative reflection on language practices and affect in an

embodied way. Body mapping is an arts-based methodology that was first applied by Jane Solomon in the early 2000s in conducting needs assessment and healthcare advocacy with HIV-positive women in South Africa (Gastaldo et al., 2012). Since that time, it has been used in an array of contexts, but particularly in health and education. In body mapping, a life-sized outline of each participant's body is traced onto mural paper—they lie on the paper, in a pose of their choice, and another participant traces their outline onto the paper with a marker. Each person's body map then becomes a canvas upon which they express their feelings, ideas, and memories through a guided group process. The map serves as a tool for participants to connect to their experiences of and connections to their languaging through the body.

Integrating the language portraits method (Krumm, 2007) to the body map, participants were asked to color in the body according to their languages. In the original language portraits approach, participants are given an A4-sized sheet of paper with a human outline on it. They are then asked to assign each of their languages a color, and then to color in their bodies accordingly. English might be yellow, Hindi green, and so on. Language mapping encouraged the workshop participants to relate their embodied connections to their languages through their creative decisions and associations to color. Participants were then asked to expand on their ideas through visual or written means, using their body maps “as a canvas” in an open-ended way. In the crafting phase, I offered several optional writing prompts; the one most taken up was “My [English/Japanese/etc.] is...” (Seltzer, 2020), although most did not use these prompts in their final poems. I did not offer any model texts or performances to encourage a sense of openness, avoid limiting participants' creative interpretations, and lessen anxiety around the creation of a final product.

## Data Collection

Responding to an announcement disseminated by the center, Mohan participated in the initial workshop series in February 2023. He was 29 years old and had completed his undergraduate degree in India. Mohan was now at the end of his first year in Japan as a master's student at a national university in urban Japan and was also in his first year of working as a student facilitator at his university's self-access language learning center. His role at the center, along with his reflections on his Japanese language learning journeys and his relationships to English and Hindi, led to my interest in engaging him in ongoing dialogue around the pedagogic activities as related to his language development journey. As shown in Table 2, from February to October 2023 I engaged in periodic in-person dialogues with Mohan, and he received a ¥2000 gift card as participant honorarium at the second workshop and at each subsequent meeting.

**Table 2.** *Pedagogic and dialogic activities*

Date	Research interactions with Mohan (in-person)	Duration in minutes	Total number of participants
2 February 2023	Workshop 1	120	7
9 February 2023	Workshop 2	120	7
27 February 2023	Focus group discussion	90	3
30 June 2023	One-to-one dialogue	90	1
31 October 2023	One-to-one dialogue & participant validation of a preliminary draft of this article	120	1

I gained approval for this study from the Kyushu University Faculty of Design's Ethics Committee and gathered informed consent from Mohan at each meeting. Informed by a participatory stance, we discussed the boundaries around what could be included in the study throughout. The data used are Mohan's language map, poem, video observation of his poetry performance, and audio recordings and transcripts of the focus group discussion and dialogues.

## Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to generate themes that "are creative and interpretive *stories* about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594, italics in original). Given my participatory orientation, I engaged in member checking, also known as participant validation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) by sharing the beginnings of my iterative theme development with Mohan prior to the final dialogue. He responded to these proposed themes when we met, confirming some of my interpretations and rejecting others. As such, I would add the participant's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and our dialogic dynamics (as shaped by hegemonic constructions of researcher/participant, older/younger person, doctoral/masters student) to the intersection that Braun and Clarke (2019) identify.

### Mohan's Performance Poem

Below are the original poem Mohan created through the workshops and his own English translation of the work. In the translated version, translated lines are indicated with the use of square brackets. In the brackets, "H" indicates lines originally in Hindi, and "J," lines in Japanese.

#### Eyes filled with the feelings (Original)

ये आंखें ... ये आंखें जो कहती हैं ।  
ज़रा सुनने की ज़हमत तो करो ...  
These eyes speak what this heart feels...  
マスクの前の音も  
聞こえてね。。。 (それは大事だ)  
ये शरीर दखिता बड़ा है...  
पर ये दिल बच्चा है जी ...  
ever seen a flower petal falling on the sea,  
so gentle, so beautiful...  
私も同じと思います  
音なし。。。友達になると思います  
if you feel that it's easy for you to talk  
with me,  
it is the confident Indian talking...  
けど中の日本人は  
めっちゃ恥ずかしいだよ。。。  
だから。。。  
取扱注意下さいね～

#### Translated version

[H: These eyes... these eyes say something.  
Will it bother you to listen to them a little?]  
These eyes speak what this heart feels...  
[J: Can you please hear the sound  
behind the mask as well? (It's important...)]  
[H: This body, it seems big...  
But this heart, it is still immature, sir...]  
Ever seen a flower petal falling on the sea,  
so gentle, so beautiful...  
[J: I think I am similar to these flower petals  
I will become friends without making any noise.]  
If you feel that it's easy for  
you to talk with me,  
it is the confident Indian talking,  
[J: But the Japanese inside  
is very shy  
That's why, can you be a little careful in  
handling me?]

## Themes

The themes we generated were: (a) multiple selves in multiple languages, (b) metaphor as a self-made benchmark on the developmental journey, (c) understanding proficiency through the proportions of the poem in each named language, and (d) translanguaging performance poetry supporting learner agency.

### ***Multiple Selves in Multiple Languages: Masks and “The Sound Behind the Mask”***

In dialogue, Mohan discussed how the creative process served to “bring out the self” or the “selves” he felt he held in each of his named languages:

I feel that your personality changes with every language. ... I have a different personality when I speak in English, or when I speak in ... Japanese. In [English and Japanese], I can control my feelings, which I cannot do if I speak my native language of Hindi. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

Mohan explained that he projected a very confident English self, “maybe because I learned it in school,” and we discussed how this was illustrated in his poem. The lines originally written in English are more declamatory, while the ones written in Japanese and Hindi have a greater sense of questioning and appealing for understanding. Mohan also expressed a sense of needing to restrict the behaviour of his Japanese self, or what he referred to as “this Japanese guy,” or the Japanese self that he embodied when interacting in Japanese. He related this to conformist social dynamics in Japan, dynamics he had learned about from living here and, importantly, through his conversations with Japanese students at the center. Mohan used the metaphor of “the mask” and “the sound behind the mask” to convey the self he constructs to present to the outside world, a “formal” self, in contrast to “the sound behind” it, an “informal” self. His poem contains the line, originally in Japanese: “Can you please hear/ the sound behind the mask as well? (It’s important ...).” The literal translation would be “The sound in front of the mask,” but his innovative use of 前, or mae, references the Japanese concept of tatemae, 建前, literally “construct” and “front.” Tatemae is the public-facing, socially obligated self, which stands in contrast to honne, one’s “true feelings or intentions” (Buzzi & Megele, 2011, p. 84), Mohan’s “sound behind the mask.” His mask, or his “Japanese, tatemae self” is a formal, “uncontroversial guy” that he conveys in the poem in both Hindi and Japanese, although he described only experiencing this self in Japanese. The line: “This body, it seems big.../but this heart, it is still immature, sir...” is originally written in Hindi, but he connected the use of “sir” to his Japanese self:

Whenever I use “sir,” it’s not giving respect to someone ... It’s the tatemae thing, which I get whenever I speak in Japanese, which does not exist in Hindi or in English ... So it’s like, if I’m talking to someone, I would like to pay them respect in such a way that it hides my feelings. So the usage of “sir” is more, like, you know, I’m literally obstructing you ... I’m putting a block in front of me so that you don’t get close. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

So, while the Japanese and Hindi voices in the poem seem to be appealing to the reader for understanding, they are simultaneously foreclosing more authentic expressions. This demonstrates how arts-based pedagogy can be a powerful facilitator of reflection, as well as how the translanguaging dimension allows for metacognitive and meta-affective realizations on Mohan’s identities as a multilingual. This is in part due to the open-ended nature of the arts (Nakamura et al., 2024). In creating a poem, for example, the writer has great flexibility in what they say—the ideas and information they choose to include—and

in how they say it. This is also part of why the arts have been found to be so effective in supporting people to explore sensitive and traumatic experiences (Tumanyan & Huuki, 2020), which leads us into our next theme.

### ***Metaphor as a Self-Made Benchmark on the Developmental Journey***

Mohan's symbolism around "the mask" and "the sound behind it" along with the metaphor of the flower petals became important touchstones as we met in the following months. Eight months after the initial workshops, I asked Mohan to read his poem over again. He described this reading as revealing:

It was still winter during that time, so almost a year, and during this one year I have realized a lot of things have changed for me personally ... Before, I was accommodating to everyone. If they say, "The sky is green," I'll go and say that it's green. But [now,] if I know it's blue, I'm going to stick to that point: that it is blue. It's up to you if you agree with me or not (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023).

When I asked him if anything had changed to bring about this change, he explained that he had gone through two major life events: the death of a parent and a breakup. He discussed how the loss of his parent had catalyzed a questioning of the norms he had internalized in his formative years in India. With this questioning came a sense of turning away from his Hindi-language identity, for now, and turning towards inhabiting his Japanese self more fully: "In Hindi, I am frustrated with a lot of things about my life, so I pose questions: 'Why are you doing this? Don't do this!' ... That's my actual feelings" (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023). Soon after the passing of his parent, Mohan experienced a breakup with a Japanese person. This he described as a wake-up call, leading him to question his "masked" behaviour and shift his way of interacting in Japanese to one that was more direct and assertive, as the longer quote above indicates.

So that shy Japanese guy became more ... curious ... it's more like, I want to know more, to become confident in the language, and my whole life is more surrounded with [many relationships with Japanese people]. So that's why this shy Japanese guy is not shy anymore. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

Mohan also expresses his interactions in Japanese through the metaphor of a tree and its flower petals in the poem's lines:

Ever seen a flower petal falling on the sea, so gentle, so beautiful...  
[I think I am similar to these flower petals  
I will become friends without making any noise.]"

At our last meeting, when I asked Mohan how this poem would be different were he to write it today, he said, "I'm not the [flower] petals [being released onto the water] anymore ... Now, I would be the tree, releasing the petals" (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023). He described being the one acting, rather than being acted upon, reflecting a sense of pride in his progress and transformation. Mohan expressed a sense of curiosity and excitement at the growth of his Japanese self, wondering out loud how "this Japanese guy" would develop.

### ***Understanding Proficiency Through the Proportions of the Poem in Each Named Language***

Mohan identified another way in which the poem offered a reference point for reflection on his linguistic development by bringing up the idea of proportion. When I asked Mohan



how the poem would be different if he were to write it today, he explained that the proportion of the poem written in each named language would be different. Here, he associated proportion with proficiency rather than with creative or culturally-informed choice.

If I ever write this poem again, or any other poem again, probably there will be more excerpts from Japanese, less from Hindi ... yeah, least from Hindi, and second probably will be English, as always, and posing questions will definitely be there, in English, so yeah, it's different. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

This last statement about posing questions was related to my observation that in the original poem, the questions posed were almost all in Japanese or Hindi. Since working at the center for a longer period, Mohan realized that asking questions was now central to his conversational style in English:

[I] realize that I pose questions because I want answers... See, when I'm talking in English, [because] that's what I speak at [the center, that] has made me more like a person who is pushing other people to speak, and to do that, I have to ask questions. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

He also linked proportions to the idea of a time limit. In discussing his own trajectory as a language learner, Mohan described his current comfort levels with the languages in his repertoire along a continuum. About Hindi, his mother tongue, he explained: "I can talk [to my friends back home] for hours at length without stopping at all" (Mohan, personal communication, June 30, 2023). Mohan is extremely fluent and "totally comfortable" in English, but despite his academic prowess and confident communication style, his limit for conversing in it is two or three hours, and "I'll probably remember everything [I said] in English," which would not be the case for Hindi. He connected this sense of being more self-conscious in English to a kind of distance associated with a sense of control. Mohan initiated the idea of measuring his proficiency through the "time limit" he felt in each language. In his newest language of Japanese, then, his time limit was shorter.

### ***Translanguaging Performance Poetry Supporting Learner Agency: "In small terms, you can define yourself"***

Mohan expressed enthusiasm about the genre of performance poetry and expressed that he felt a high degree of agency in his creative choices for his text and performance. He highlighted the way the concision of poetry, as opposed to short fiction, which he had some prior experience in, supported his process:

I like to write stories ... but never tried poems ... it's better than writing a story—in small terms, you can define yourself. (Mohan, personal communication, February 27, 2023)

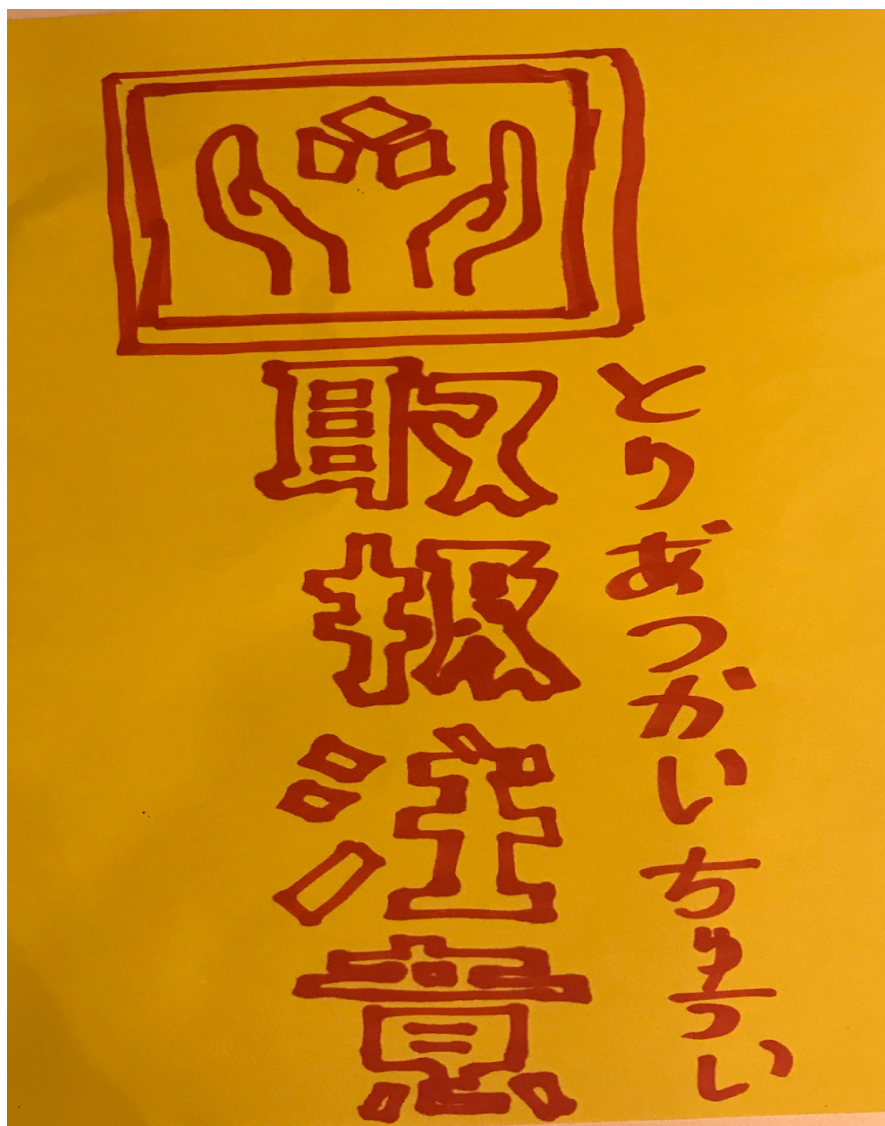
This concision coupled with the openness of the genre to wordplay and innovation allowed for a sense of freedom in the creative process.

Poetry... is about the expression, so it might not have a typical so-called pattern, but the way you say it is more important... so it's like, when I did it, I had my own way of expressing my feelings. So, there are parts which sound really good in Hindi and that expresses my feelings the best way possible. (Mohan, personal communication, June 30, 2023)

Mohan also appreciated the performance aspect of the process, explaining how it motivated him to innovate:

The performance matters. Like afterwards, if I have a performance [coming up] then maybe when I write, it will be very grand, or like the things [I include] will be very much more, like showmanship, because I like to do that kind of stuff. (Mohan, personal communication, October 31, 2023)

The translanguaging dimension of the approach coupled with the language mapping method could also be understood as fostering greater potential for exploration in multimodal terms. This multimodal awareness is illustrated in his intentional incorporation of additional multimodal elements to his poetry performance. As Mohan uttered the last line, he unzipped his hoodie and took out a yellow sheet of paper hidden there (Figure 1). On it he had drawn, in red, the symbol used in Japan to indicate fragile packages, echoing the last line: 取扱注意, or "Handle with Care."



**Figure 1.** Mohan's hand-drawn "Handle with Care" sign

Mohan also described the impact of the translanguaging approach and the language mapping process as important to his sense of being able to choose the best way to express his multilingual reality through both the map and the poem:

... There was this [Japanese] word which I used during [language] mapping. It's called as "otome" which is like a little girl [YY: Also "maiden."]. So, if I write "little girl" [in English], it ... does not sound that emphatic or something ... I can say it in my own languages, [but] something ... just does not feel right. But when you say [otome], it has a different meaning, because there's a culture behind that language. So ... it's not [just] about the whole general idea that this [named] language is more comfortable for me. I think there are specific [terms] where you feel comfortable when you speak that specific thing in that language. (Mohan, personal communication, June 30, 2023)

The use of translanguaging seemed to have supported his agentic resolve to capture a specific cultural concept or connotation in its language of origin. On a related note, Mohan talked about enjoying exercising even greater agency in selecting the parts that would "sound really good" in Hindi versus English or Japanese. This signals the potential impact of the translanguaging approach in facilitating agency in the learning process.

## Discussion

The pedagogic activities that facilitated the creation of Mohan's artworks and the dialogic process that followed hold clear strengths and areas for improvement, and certainly more of the latter than discussed here. But the pedagogical value of translanguaging performance poetry, along with the language mapping process that grounded the creative process in embodied knowledge, lies in their power as a "small" window into their creators' inner worlds. Mohan's artworks captured his perceptions of his languaging (Swain, 2006) practices at a moment in time, signaling to educators which questions to ask, or at least which to start with. Besides being concrete expressions of "mini-mastery experiences" (Vitale, 2012) that arts-based education can offer, his works acted as a touchstone through which to reflect on ongoing linguistic development: deeply personal artifacts crystallizing a moment in time and space. Translanguaging and the arts are a natural fit in working towards such reflection through sensory and "felt knowledge" (Million, 2009) zooming in on the multimodal nature of communication and expression (Hirsu et al., 2021) to facilitate connection and reflection in more holistic terms. As a vehicle through which members of a learning community might exchange and co-create understandings, translanguaging arts-based pedagogy offers kaleidoscopic potential for growth in both individual and relational terms. Taking this a step further, then, if I were to have created a poem in parallel and reflected on it with Mohan alongside our reflections on his development, how could our dialogue have been deepened or extended?

## Implications for Practice

Although our lives are multimodal, schooling has privileged text above other semiotic resources (Kalantzis & Cope, 2009). This may be all the more so in language education. As Jones (2020) points out, "it may be the very idea of 'language' itself (or at least 'named languages') that is the single factor working against the flourishing of creativity in language classrooms" (p. 2, emphasis in original). If we are to truly embody this creative spirit, though, it is critical that we engage in the dialogical meaning-making processes that follow artistic creation as non-hierarchically as possible. The more we, as educators, can engage with learners' diverse ways of knowing from a perspective that centers their worldviews, the more effective we will be at engaging in mutual development with our students, as partners in the practice of learning. Creative translanguaging processes can catalyze the building of new paradigms for conveying this development. Because it is not simply that dialoguing

around the poem, or some other artistic creation, will help us become better at teaching or advising the student, although it surely will. It can also expand both teacher and learner understandings of language and contribute to our capacity for empathy and for perceiving each other's strengths along with our growth areas. Of course, it can take time to build trust and develop the common language to express such embodied, often abstracted truths. In the dialogue with Mohan, as trust grew with each meeting, deeper understandings emerged. Focusing the process on trust-building and connection over (a particular vision of) skills development was critical to this result.

Finally, the flexible and condensed nature of translanguaging performance poetry was a key strength of the activities. Future research could explore how authentic, peer-created materials such as translanguaging poems can be instructive and supportive to learners as they develop their identities as emergent bilinguals. More research is certainly needed into the myriad ways that the centering of such creations can build learner autonomy and connectedness in language learning settings in Japan and beyond.

## Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Simla Course and Hugh Nicoll of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. (Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.)

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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.

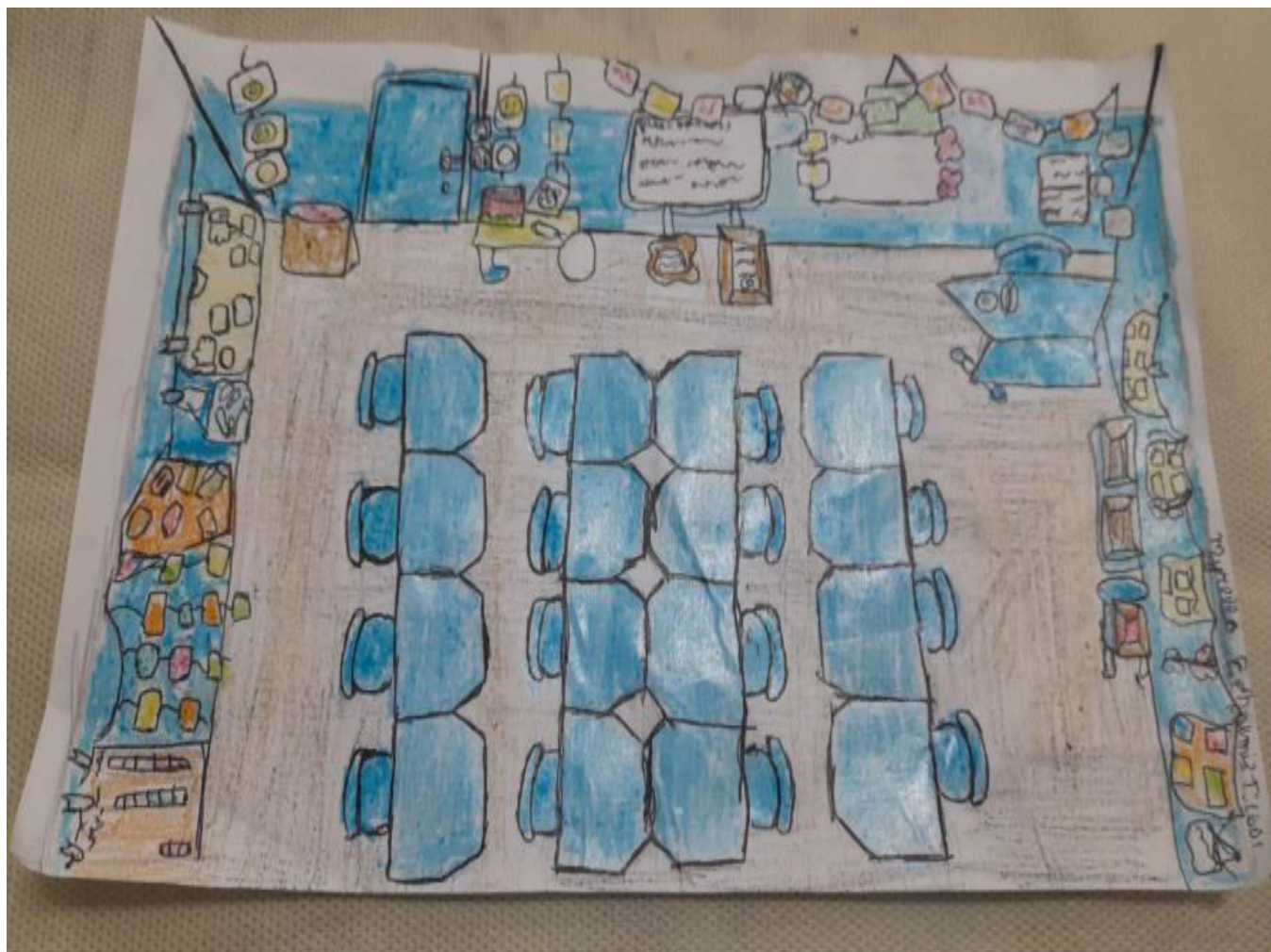
Yet, our stories begin ...

## **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

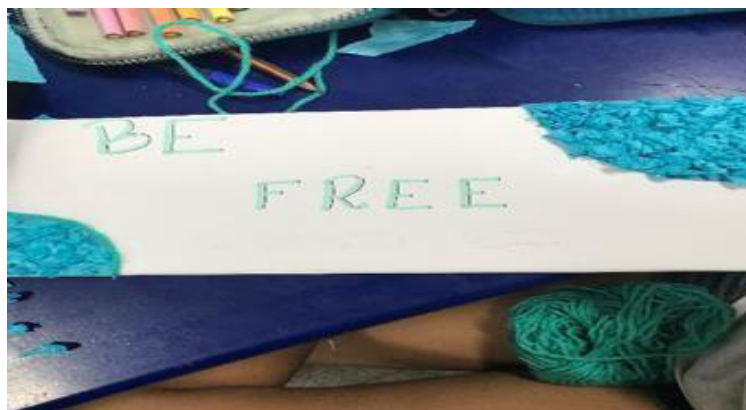


Photo 7



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).



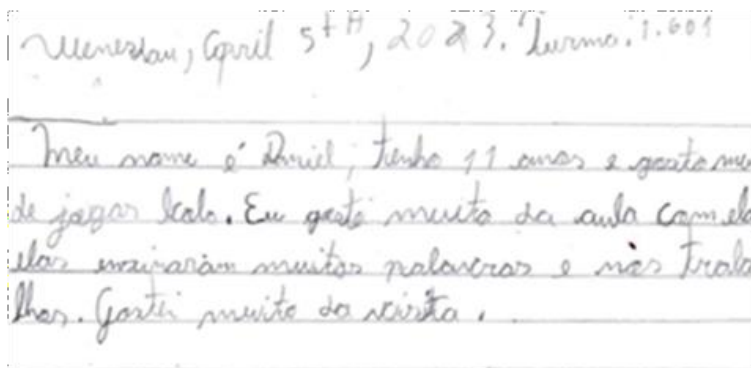
Photo 11. Coursebook material provided by the Municipal Secretariat of Education in Rio de Janeiro (2023) to be used in this class

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

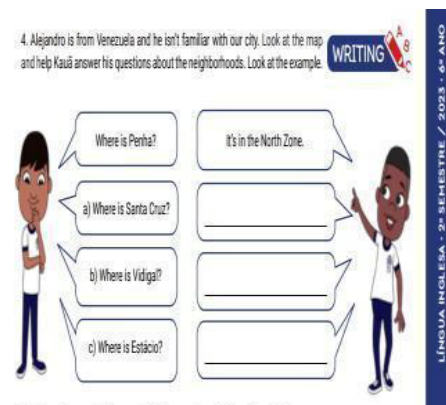


Photo 14

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

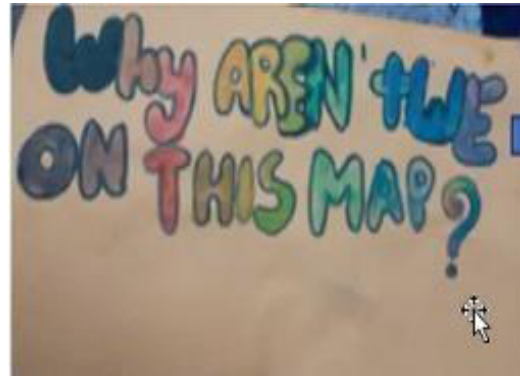


Photo 16

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

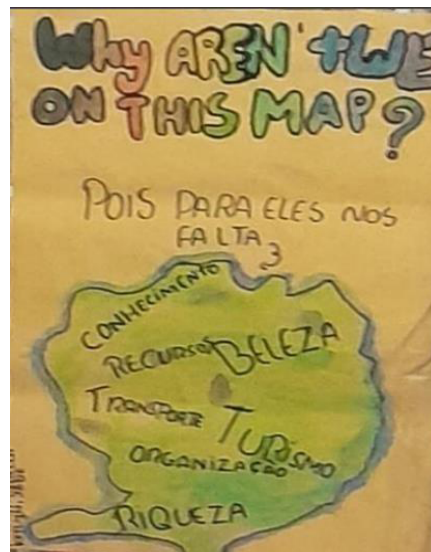


Photo 18

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.

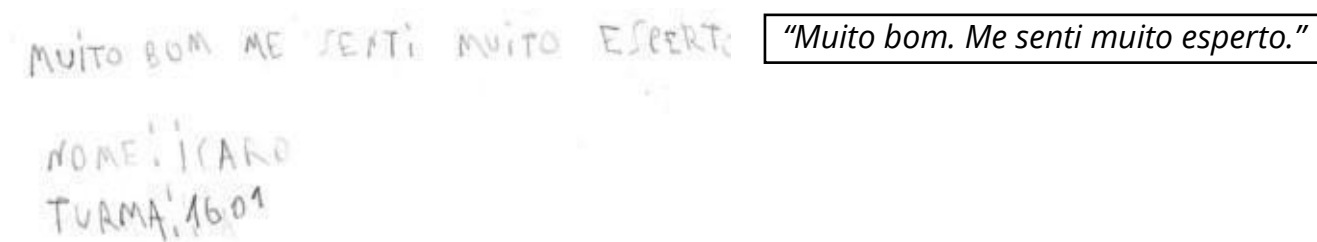
This set of principles is not meant to be considered a set of tools, but rather a set of ideas that orient an Exploratory Practice attitude, also inspired by the following propositions about teachers and students as learners:

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)

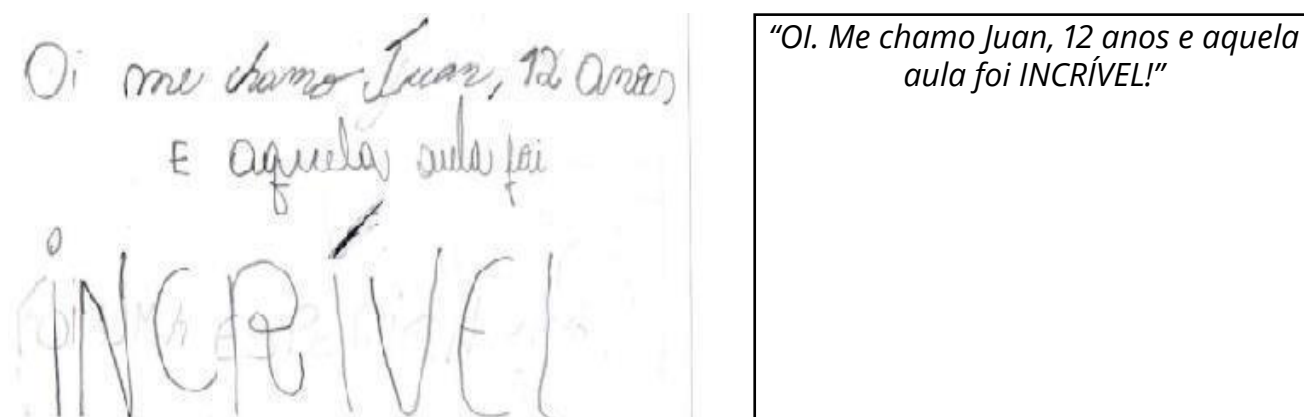
Regarding the narrative shared, it is clear to us that in Palmyra's class materials design is developed in a space where attentive, reflective, inclusive, and transformative listening is constantly practiced and collaborative work is frequent, so that teaching and learning are built through inclusive 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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## Reshaping the Secondary ESL Classroom: Using Exploratory Practice to Promote Student Participation at an All-Girls' School in Japan

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In this exploratory inquiry, I consider the use of Teacher-Initiated Exploratory Practice (TEP) as a tool in examining and investigating student participation in class activities at an all-girls' secondary English Conversation classroom in Kanagawa, Japan that I was teaching at in 2023. Beginning with a description of my journey as a native English speaking teacher (NEST) in Japan, I reflect upon starting a new job and how I could inspire my students to speak more in class. TEP influenced the framework of this research, in particular, the principles of getting everyone involved, bringing people together, and conducting the work in the spirit of mutual development (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). I then consider the puzzles I faced and how I came to use translanguaging and comprehension checks to achieve these goals. Initially, weekly classroom procedures are discussed as well as learner's reactions to these procedures including a flipped classroom approach, student-led greetings, and pair comprehension checks. In the final part of this inquiry I look in depth at learner feedback received via student surveys and an interview, particularly at how and why these contributed to an overall improvement in the student's output, which not only increased learner confidence but the quality of life of the classroom.

本探索的調査では、2023年に神奈川県的女子中等教育機関で担当した英会話のクラスにおける生徒の活動参加を高めることを目的とした教師主導の探索的実践(TEP)の活用について述べる。はじめに、日本でのネイティブスピーカーの英語教師(NEST)としての著者の経緯を紹介し、新しい職場で生徒がより積極的に授業に参加する方法を模索した経験を振り返る。この研究の枠組みはTEPの影響を受けており、クラス全員を巻き込み、生徒同士が協力し合って主体的に授業を進めるという原則が反映されている(Allwright & Hanks, 2009)。次に、直面した課題と、それらの解決に向けてトランスランゲージングと理解度チェックの具体的な活用方法について言及する。毎週、このクラスでは、反転授業のアプローチ、生徒主導の挨拶、ペアでの理解度チェックなどの取り組みが含まれる。生徒からのアンケートやインタビューによるフィードバックを考察し、これらの取り組みがアウトプットの向上にどのように貢献したか、また、生徒の自信とクラス内の学習環境の質の向上について考察する。

### Keywords

secondary English education in Japan, teacher-initiated exploratory practice, translanguaging, comprehension checks, student participation

日本の中等英語教育、教師主導の探索的実践、トランスランゲージング、理解度チェック、生徒の参加

### Setting the scene: New school, new students

On the first day of classes in a new secondary school I was teaching at in Kamakura, Japan, I walked into the classroom as I had many times before. Having taught in Japanese secondary schools for almost two decades, this was not my first time with a new group of students. I had worked all over the country and always enjoyed that first day of interaction. New students meant new possibilities to grow and learn, not only for the learners but also for me as a teacher.

The building of my new employment was newly constructed, fresh, and full of possibility. This sense could be felt in its hallways and classrooms. Older post-war Japanese schools that were built of concrete for earthquake resistance can be dark and unwelcoming. However, this place was none of those things. The light beamed through the windows, the shelves peppered throughout were dust free, all fixtures were devoid of scratches, and the building

was clean. I was inspired by the possibilities the school held and eager to form connections with my students.

Changing secondary schools is a matter of life for many contractual native English speaking teachers (NESTs) who live and teach in Japan, who are often given a maximum five-year contract. This stipulation, commonly referred to as the 5-year rule, was inspired by Article 18 of the Labor Contracts Act (2007/2018) that states from the sixth year, institutions must grant permanent contracts of employment for life known as *mukirodo keiyakuyaku*/無期労働契約 [indefinite employment contract]. Because of this, teachers often move around their prefecture or sometimes the country in search of their next place of employment. In April 2022, I was faced with this same challenge and, after careful thought, I decided to accept this position I had been offered at an all-girls secondary school in Kanagawa prefecture.

That first day in class, I introduced myself using a slideshow scattered with photos and passed out participation stamp cards which students would use to collect stamps during class. Participation was always something I strived for in my classes. I wanted students to speak and to speak a lot. In my mind, this is how they would acquire the skills needed to communicate in English. If students shared an answer to a question in class, helped the teacher erase the board, won a class competition, or did well during an activity, in the past, I would give the student a stamp as a reward for their effort. Sometimes this reflection of student involvement would be used to determine their participation score for their semester grade.

As this system was new to the school, I was eager to implement the stamp cards and see how my students felt about them. Several schools that I had worked for previously used stamp cards, and their use is popular in English conversation classrooms around the country. After its introduction, the stamp card had been successful in my junior high school (JHS) classes, and the students seemed excited and inspired by the stamp collecting to raise their hands and share answers. However, the senior high school (SHS) grade 1 students, teenagers who did not know one another, were reluctant to raise their hands or share answers, despite knowing participation was part of their grade. Perhaps, stamps cards were not the answer with this group of students, I pondered. Still unfamiliar with the school culture, I asked the head of the English Department his thoughts and he assured me that stamp cards were a tangible way for us to measure how often students spoke up in class. But that still didn't help me. There had to be a way that I could inspire my students to actively speak in class while ensuring that they felt comfortable to do so.

What follows is an account of how I used Exploratory Practice (EP) (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), a practice-based form of research, and the approach of translanguaging (Garcia & Wei, 2013) as tools to promote student participation in one of my SHS classes.

In this inquiry, I explain how EP and its principles were harnessed to inspire the learners and myself in the classroom. I outline how my students and I designed an interactive class in which we explored topics of interest in order to improve language skills and increase participation. Together using the students' first (L1) and second (L2) languages, we pondered puzzles such as if the use of translanguaging in pair comprehension checks would promote more student participation in our English class. Furthermore, we examined if student-chosen topics and greetings would also increase student participation. Using EP's Potential Exploitable Pedagogical Activities (PEPAs), which are "slightly adapted pedagogic activities that teachers and learners are familiar with" (Moraes Bezerra & Miller, 2015, p. 105), I designed lessons around our course textbook and employed the use of pair comprehension checks to get students talking more.

## Exploratory Practice and how it helped strengthen my class

When I started learning Japanese as a second language when I was 16 years old in rural Wisconsin, USA, and then at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I first began to form my own attitudes towards the teaching and learning of an L2. Rarely, if ever, did I seem to pick up the language and grammar used in lecture style classes or from rote memorization. Upon moving to the country, my strongest teachers were not professors who were experts in teaching Japanese but people I would meet out in the real world: shop staff who helped me and inquired about my lifestyle in the country, friends at a picnic who discussed current interests with me, and co-workers who I worked on projects with. I learned more when I was engaged in the process of the learning. Naturally, after becoming an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher myself, I wanted to find ways to avoid the traditional top-down teaching framework in my own classes and I found that Exploratory Practice (EP) was a fantastic approach to promoting this.

EP is a practitioner-based form of research that works directly with learners to address puzzles that may arise in learning environments. Just as I had wanted to solve puzzles in my Japanese language learning, I could use EP to investigate the relationship between myself (the practitioner) and the learners (my students) (Allwright, 2005). I had wanted to be involved in my language learning journey, and in the same way, my students are individual learners who can make contributions to their unique classroom setting. This means that instead of me designing lessons and then presenting them, the learners should be placed centerstage as they are “practitioners of learning” rather than “targets of teaching” (Allwright & Hanks, 2009).

Supporting this shift from teacher-dominated classrooms, EP consists of 7 key principles (Allwright & Hanks, 2009):

1. Put “quality of life” first.
2. Work primarily to understand the “quality of life”
3. Get everyone involved in the work for understanding
4. Bring people together
5. Conduct the work in the spirit of mutual development
6. Integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice
7. Continuously work for this understanding

I wanted to get everyone involved in the work for understanding (Principle 3) and to bring learners together (Principle 4) while working in the spirit of mutual development (Principle 5). I hoped that by asking students what they wanted to focus on in our class, they would feel more invested in actively engaging in the lessons.

### My practice

As mentioned previously, I was searching for ways to promote active speaking in my class. This conundrum invited an examination of students’ comprehension levels. Before, during, and after class, I would ponder: Do they understand what I’m saying? Do they have any questions they’d like to ask but are too shy to? How could I check their comprehension without putting them on the spot? If only there were a way that they could discuss with one another these questions. In the spirit of EP, I wanted to bring learners together (Principle 4) while everyone was involved in fostering mutual development (Principle 5). In short, I wanted my students to actively communicate with each other using all the tools available to them, whether that be their L1 or L2. Translanguaging seemed to be an easily accessible

solution to my problem as it allowed students to work for mutual development and understanding by using any language available to them.

Translanguaging, as originally defined by Williams (1994), is an approach that utilizes the switching between two languages to promote comprehension in active and passive language processing (Garcia & Wei, 2013). Though it may manifest itself as switching from one language to another as in code-switching, translanguaging is about using language to create an interaction and relationship between students and invites common understanding to take centerstage. Though the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) instructs secondary teachers to conduct their English language classes in all English (MEXT, 2014), in reality, this rarely happens. Most Japanese teachers of English (JTEs), though not all, instruct students using Japanese as the language of instruction and Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) instruct in English. Naturally, this gap from zero English to all English causes confusion and unease amongst students. The medium of communication deemed acceptable in one class but demonized in the next is often a cause of ongoing frustration for learners.

After thinking about how students were interacting in their other English courses, I wanted to explore how I could combine these mediums in my own class. By allowing my students to use their L1 to confirm information and brainstorm in my classes, they could work together to understand the material. I certainly didn't want to punish my students for having an L1 or forbid them from using it. After some time experimenting with translanguaging and learning more about it, I realized that it was the best solution to my problem of student comprehension in that student pairs can verify information in a safe and comfortable environment while using the familiarity of Japanese. Using translanguaging, the learners could ask questions to their partners while gaining self-confidence through peer support increasing their willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998). It was my hope by allowing students to do this, that they would start to naturally increase their English output.

This prompted me to formulate two puzzles:

- Could the use of translanguaging in pair comprehension checks promote more student participation in our English class?
- Could student-chosen topics and greetings increase student participation?

From April to July of 2023, over three months of classes, I used exploratory practice to discuss these puzzles with the students and how we could change the level of participation in our class. Our study was highly situational in the context of teaching and learning English in Japan, and, in order to understand the nuances of our exploration of the puzzles, I would like to set the stage by presenting some important background information about secondary English education in this country.

## Setting the stage: Secondary English education in Japan

According to the current revision of the National Standards for JHS and SHS English language instruction, JHS English classes are to be held a minimum of four times a week with "the emphasis on language activities in which students express their own thoughts and ideas" (MEXT, 2021). At my school, JHS students take English Communication four times a week with a JTE and English Conversation once a week with a NEST. Though MEXT recommends that these classes be mostly conducted in English, where student-centered language activities and grammar and expressions are to be learned inductively, the reality is that English Communication is typically a lecture-style course in which students listen to grammar and expression explanations in Japanese in order to take monthly written tests and prepare for national standardized tests - such as Eiken Test in Practical English



Proficiency (Eiken Foundation of Japan, n.d.), an English proficiency test administered to JHS and SHS students consisting of a written and spoken test, or high school entrance exams which have no speaking tests. In English Conversation class, conducted by the school's NEST, the national standards set by MEXT (2011) can be observed more plainly. Students engage in various real-life language activities in a mostly all-English environment with grammar and expressions being learned inductively through the activities. In terms of grading, English Communication is a required graded course and English Conversation is classified as an elective, though it is not optional, and therefore, a scored grade is not given to students. Instead, a 1-sentence comment is written on their transcripts describing their performance in the class from a predetermined list decided by the school.

Concerning the national standards for SHS, students are to take two English courses each academic year focused on autonomous learning with JTEs every year – English Communication and Logic & Expression. In addition, students take the graded course of English Conversation with a NEST. In English Communication, which is held four times a week, students focus on the 4-skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Logic & Expression, which is held twice a week, is a course which focuses on speaking and writing through activities such as debate and discussion. Again, the amount of English spoken in these courses varies widely on teachers' personal preferences with the more traditional, grammar translation method being highly favored by JTEs for its perceived ease in teaching students the grammar needed to pass university entrance exams. Despite this, English Conversation, taught by the school's NEST, is conducted in English only and is a graded subject in SHS. In my classes, though, slight variance does exist from semester to semester, the grade is made up of participation, a speaking test, a listening test, and a writing test. The breakdown of these grades is decided between the NEST and a JTE at the beginning of the term.

## How I stumbled upon partner comprehension checks

Japanese education is often based upon a top-down model of instruction, and students are not encouraged or expected to share their answers in class. At my school, students are typically not asked questions individually in their classes and can often become paralyzed when asked for fear of making a mistake. Though this issue is in large part based around the national and individual school culture, one NEST cannot expect to take this problem on alone and attempt to change a lifetime of expectations held by both Japanese teachers and students. However, English Conversation classes require just that – some form of communication between the members of the class, whether this be teacher-student or student-student. By taking the pressure off of the students to always engage directly with the teacher, pair checks are a way for students to utilize English to verify information with their peers without the social pressure of having to share an answer individually in front of the class. At least that was my hope.

Inspired by my new epiphany to implement pair checks, I began the class as always asking my students a few warm-up questions to begin, such as “What did you do this weekend?” After being met with silence, I instructed them in English to check with their partner. Some students hesitantly turned to the person sitting next to them while others seemed confused. As Japanese is my second language, I repeated the instructions in Japanese, and, after some smiles and a few giggles at their American teacher's pronunciation of their mother tongue, students turned to their partners and asked them the question. Walking around the room, I could hear that some students were asking the questions in English, some in Japanese,

some answering in Japanese, others answering in English. Some lower-level students were having an entire conversation in Japanese! However, even though it was not English that was being spoken, something became clear: My students are not shy or unable to speak about themselves. They were originally apprehensive because of the way in which I was asking.

After that, I began to experiment in all my classes with the ways in which I could promote my students to use both their L1 and L2 to increase student participation, and this inquiry is the result. I wanted to get the students involved and explore these issues with them, so from year 2, with permission from the head of the English Department, the students and I designed a class to promote an increase in student participation.

## **Measuring success: How I observed and got feedback from the students**

Getting feedback from my students was vital in using EP to involve them in the planning process. I received feedback from my learners in the form of student questionnaires, interviews, as well as audio recordings of the instructional sessions. As explained below, four students in the class are members of the school's English club - English Speaking Society (ESS) - and joined a group interview after the study. This recorded and transcribed interview focused on translanguaging, in which students shared their thoughts in a mix of English and Japanese. All students participating in the study agreed via written consent to have their experiences shared, however, to protect their identities pseudonyms have been used throughout.

## **Narrowing in: Our school, our classroom**

Upon entering SHS at our school, students are placed in one of two tracks: the international track (advanced) or the progressive track (standard). The international track class is determined by the score students receive on their entrance exam and Eiken test. In junior high school, two of the three homeroom classes are international track classes with one being progressive. However, in high school, there is only one international track class with the remaining four homeroom classes being progressive. Students take all of their classes with their homeroom class and the members do not change depending upon their level. Though rare, some progressive track students demonstrate higher English ability than international track students; however, after the entrance exam scores are calculated upon entering the school, students are not allowed to change from the standard track to the advanced track without undergoing a rigid screening.

The international track class that I discuss here consists of twenty-three 16- and 17-year-old students with four of the students in the class in ESS, the club activity I oversee with their JTE. I selected this class for its easy access, higher English ability as they are part of the international track, and their receptive, motivated attitudes to engage in non-traditional Japanese teaching styles. Prior to this study, I held an informal interview with the head of the English Department to discuss the puzzles my class were interested in exploring and how we could address these concerns. Through our discussion, it came to light that students struggle with expressing their opinions and critically thinking about passages in English. After consulting the current textbooks used, which are approved by the Ministry of Education (MEXT), I noticed that they do not include many opportunities for students to express themselves. Many of the grammar points listed in the textbooks explain the grammar in Japanese and have one-off example sentences as expansion. Relatability to real-life was non-existent, and, more often than not, the students bore quickly of the format

(Tomlinson, 2006). As the head of the English Department had previously mentioned that we could order a new textbook for the following year, I proposed using the global textbook *Reading Explorer Level 1* (Bohike et al., 2019) for its engaging visual materials, thought-provoking topics, and as a chance for students to use a new style of textbook.

In addition to using this new textbook, the head of the English Department and I brainstormed ways in which the students could become more involved in class and how to reduce teacher talk while increasing student-led discussion. First, to decrease teacher talk in class, we decided to use a flipped classroom approach. A flipped classroom does just as the name would suggest, whereby students work on activities outside of the classroom in order to create more time in the classroom for hands-on activities that emphasize pair and group work (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2019). This would give students more exposure to English spoken by a native speaker and would also be a way to indirectly extend the duration of the class as students would view the videos outside of the classroom. Students would receive, via *Classi* (Classi, n.d.), our intra-school communication network, a 3- to 6-minute video four days before class that they could watch multiple times at home. I made this video using *Canva* (Canva, n.d.) presentations and created a slideshow with my video recording. Each video contained a greeting, class announcements, introduction to a maximum of eight unfamiliar vocabulary words, and a listening activity in which I read a passage from a paragraph in *Reading Explorer*. After that the students were asked five questions, four of which were closed questions and one which was an opinion question. The questions were also written on the screen. Then, the class session would expand on the material presented in the videos and allowed us to delve more deeply into the subject matter with the time saved.

On the first day of class, I also asked the students via written survey what they wanted to work on in our class. Some common responses were more talk time with other students, group work, pair presentations, listening and speaking practice, writing practice, and more chances to talk with the teacher.

Based on this feedback, it became clear that the students wanted to increase their active speaking participation in class through group and pair work. In order to increase student confidence in speaking English, students could use translanguaging to verify information while speaking in the pair and small group settings.

The first way this was addressed is learner-led greetings were introduced. Traditionally in Japanese schools, each class begins with a student asking the other students to stand, bow to the teacher and ask permission for the class to start. Instead of the students bowing to me, I suggested that the students ran the greetings with materials they found thought-provoking. Students chose to introduce facts about topics of interest such as K-Pop music, other teachers at the school, and animals they were interested in.

Also, during the survey, students were asked to rank the topics from *Reading Explorer 1* in order of most interested in to least interested in. Students overwhelmingly chose animals as their most preferred topic, so in the spirit of principle 3 of getting everyone involved, we started with that in the first semester.

## Start of class: Quiz and student greetings

As mentioned previously, class starts a few days before we meet. Students watch an all-English video I made which introduces the topic and useful vocabulary, as well as a short listening activity. After the listening activity, students are asked five questions regarding the passage.

At the start of class, students take a 6-minute multiple choice and essay style quiz in which they are asked the same questions from the video to verify that they have watched it and comprehended the material. After the quiz, students in groups of three (decided by lottery the first day of class) conduct a 3- to 5-minute greeting to the class. Students typically tell an original story, conduct a quiz, or ask questions to the audience.

The following is an example of a student greeting at the beginning of class conducted by Ai, Sakura, and Mei (pseudonyms) during lesson 4 in the unit. Translations of the Japanese spoken can be found in brackets. The three students stand at the front of the room with one of their iPads, a required purchase, plugged into the projector.

Sakura displays the first slide and says, "Let's have an animal quiz!" A picture of a pig from the website Irosutoya (Irosutoya, n.d.), a free clipart website frequently used in Japan, is displayed.

Ai: Question 1: What percentage of body fat are pigs? 15, 30, or 60 percent. The word body fat is displayed in Japanese [体脂肪率]. What do you think?

During this point, although the students observing the quiz were not asked to discuss with a partner, they naturally did so as I had introduced translanguaging earlier in the course. Their eagerness to discuss the answer was evident.

Mei: Who thinks A? (hands raised.) Who thinks B? (hands raised.) Who thinks C? (hands raised.) The answer is C.

The class erupts with laughter, cheering, and comments are made about the answer.

Haruna comments in Japanese, 生物学で聞いたよかった! [I'm glad I was listening in biology class!]

Sakura: Question 2: How many hours a day do koalas sleep? 5, 10, 22. What do you think?

Again, the students turn to their neighbors to discuss their thoughts.

Ai: Who thinks A? (hands raised.) Who thinks B? (hands raised.) Who thinks C? (hands raised.) The answer is C: 22.

Again, the class comments on the answer. Yuko jokes, I am koala too! (i.e., I sleep as much a koala.)

Mami says, そんな寝るは知らなかった。 [I didn't know they slept THAT much.]

Mei: Final question. How many eggs does a sunfish lay? Sunfish is written in Japanese [まんぼ]. A. 3 eggs B. 300 eggs C. 300 million eggs

The class starts to discuss sunfish.

Mami again comments, まんぼうの英語が sunfish だ。知らなかった。 [Manbo is sunfish in English. I didn't know that.]

Sakura: Who thinks A? (hands raised.) Who thinks B? (hands raised.) Who thinks C? (hands raised.) The answer is: C.

Ai, Mei, Sakura: Thank you for listening!

The class claps for the presenters and the atmosphere is light and energetic. After the greeting I ask students to use translanguaging to discuss with a partner their reactions to Ai, Sakura, and Mei's greeting and provide feedback. Ai, Sakura, and Mei also receive feedback and participation points after class from me. One student comments in Japanese, 英会話の授業でそのことを習うは面白い! [Learning that in English Conversation was really interesting!]

## Delving deeper: student comprehension and translanguaging

After the student greetings, class starts with a warm-up question concerning the lesson's topic and students use translanguaging to discuss this topic. For example, Lesson 4 focused on color in the animal kingdom, so I asked students about animals and their camouflage. Fuka, who dreams of being a marine biologist someday, raised her hand proudly and stated that her favorite animal, the orca, is black and white. Everyone in class knows of Fuka's love for orcas, and I asked her, "Fuka, do you know why orcas have the color patterns they do?" She proudly proceeded in English to explain that the black and white pattern makes orcas appear smaller than they actually are and aids them in hunting prey. I smile in surprise at not only Fuka's ability to explain this fact to the class, but also at how insightful this information is. The class erupts in applause for Fuka and students praise her in Japanese. Fuka smiles and sits up a little higher, and it is visible that her confidence has grown after this interaction.

Next, students engage in a listening activity. A short listening passage is played, and the students follow along with the script. Afterwards, students are asked comprehension questions about the passage and encouraged to use translanguaging in pairs to confirm or check the information and answer questions displayed on the board. Then, I asked volunteers to share the answers with the class for participation points.

## Noticing changes in student participation

In general, compared to the previous academic year, the overall participation scores of students in this class drastically increased. The number of students who raised their hand or were willing to share their opinions or answers to the class more than doubled. Students laughed more, were less inhibited as seen by their willingness to communicate, and were more engaged with the material despite an increase in difficulty. This can be seen in the participation stamp card scores and the number of stamps collected, as well as observations I made. Though the Japanese school year consists of 3 semesters, participation scores were collected only in Semester 1 and Semester 2 due to the shorter duration of Semester 3, which is only 2 months. As shown in Table 1 below, the highest average is Semester 2 (2022); however, this is the longest semester lasting 4 months. Comparing the first semester, which is only 3 months, in 2022 and 2023, for the same class of students shows that students were indeed more willing to speak up in class.

**Table 1.** *Participation Scores Taken from Stamp Cards*

Semester 1 (2022)	Semester 2 (2022)	Semester 1 (2023)
Average: 8 stamps	Average: 13 stamps	Average: 11 stamps

## *How the students felt about the new class style: Survey results and student interview*

At the end of the semester, I gave students a blank piece of paper and asked them to write their feedback and any opinions concerning the course. Students were told they could

write in either English or Japanese and that the feedback would remain anonymous. Both negative and positive comments were encouraged, and the students were assured that this feedback was being taken for me to improve the contents of the class. As Japanese students are typically surveyed at the end of each semester via a multiple-choice questionnaire, they are accustomed to giving feedback and were able to provide their thoughts within the time frame of 5 minutes.

Here is a summary of the results of the surveys. The Japanese portion has been translated into English here and a full list of the survey feedback can be found in Appendix A.

Student-led greetings at the beginning of class were a major topic of discussion in the survey feedback. Students mentioned how this activity improved their confidence, curiosity, and knowledge of not only English vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures but also, their overall worldly knowledge. Manami comments that she “enjoyed listening to the stories and quizzes that everyone made up and was able to focus more during class because her brain could switch to English.” Shiori mentions that she enjoyed learning something new from her classmates, while Yu wrote that the greetings allowed her to learn more about her classmates as individuals because each group chose their topic of discussion. Furthermore, she writes “... there were words and phrases that I would never have looked up unless I had this opportunity and there were grammatical expressions that I didn’t know. It was fun to learn because we ‘looked it up’ ourselves.”

Touching upon the contents of the greetings, Rika shared that preparing for the greeting was enjoyable because they introduced their favorite things to the class. In addition, she observes “since I made the draft myself, I think it’s good practice for my English writing.” Kairi furthermore comments that the greetings were sometimes redundant because the style was usually the same - making a quiz or telling a story.

Concerning listening, Haruko comments that she was “able to actively listen to and try to understand her friends’ presentations” and that this helped her towards her personal goal of improving her listening skills.

Aoi, on the other hand, writes how much she enjoyed the group activities after not being able to converse due to coronavirus regulations at school and how this increased her confidence.

As mentioned in the student questionnaires and interview, students overwhelmingly enjoyed being taught by their classmates and developing their English. Listening to their peers’ student-led greetings helped them turn on their “English-thinking brains” and inspired them to pay more attention to what was being said. As one student noticed, this increased their vocabulary, worldly knowledge and confidence. In particular, after the COVID-19 pandemic regulations were lifted, students, who yearned for interaction with their classmates, genuinely looked forward to discussions. As most of their other classes throughout the day were lecture style, in our class they could converse with their friends and increase their confidence in speaking with others, not only in English but in Japanese too.

Students also commented on pair comprehension checks and the use of translanguaging. Being allowed to verify information via these checks increased their confidence and, by involving, this enabled everyone to develop their skills mutually.

## **Student interviews**

Outside of class, I conducted an informal qualitative interview with four students in the class who are members of the school’s ESS club. I have been co-advisor for ESS for two years and have gotten to know these four students quite well during that time. We have organized club events, gone shopping for materials, and chatted about our lives together. Our

relationship is positive and open, and they have commented several times how comfortable they feel chatting together. Yuzu, in particular, who spent 13 years living in the U.S., is open and honest with her opinions and comments. Because of this and their easy accessibility as the club meets twice a week, the four students were chosen for an interview. At the start I explained to them that they could answer in either English or Japanese, and that I was conducting this interview to gather student opinions about the new class style. What follows is a summary of the interview and key points that pertain to the class. The full transcript of the interview can be found in the Appendix B.

On May 17, 2023, after the ESS club, Yuzu, Lulu, Aozora, Riri and I sat down for a 13-minute interview about our class. We sat in a circle and I did my best to create a relaxed atmosphere with lots of smiles and laughs. I also used translanguaging to make them feel comfortable.

Upon being asked what they think about pair checks, Yuzu comments that “it’s a good thing because if one person doesn’t understand the question or answer, they can check with their partner.” Lulu agrees, saying “there’s a lot of things I don’t understand or catch so I think pair checks are really good.”

Yuzu mentions that she wished pair checks were used in another class she finds particularly challenging. The lack of pair checks makes her feel uncomfortable and sometimes even petrified.

Concerning the use of translanguaging during the pair checks, several interesting comments were made. Yuzu makes the point that during the beginning of the semester, her classmates and her said the answer to their partner in Japanese and then translated it into English. When a question was asked, they translated my question into Japanese and then discussed the answer in Japanese before translating it to English.

However, after knowing that my class has a lot of pair checks, the students now sit closer together and do everything in English, depending on who they are sitting by. Yuzu states, “If the other person in the pair is not at the same comprehension level, I tend to start the discussion in Japanese.” Riri mentions that she is sometimes apprehensive to say the answer quickly because she wants to give her partner time to think. She doesn’t want to “show off” her English level. The students also commented that the timing and length of the pair checks were adequate.

The interview with the four students in ESS reflected upon the spirit of working for mutual understanding and how this manifested itself in class. Students mentioned that they observed the level of their partner and, depending upon this, made a decision about translanguaging – using Japanese with students that may struggle to understand and English with those who did not. This point illustrates that students were not only concerned about their own levels, but also the proficiency of their peers.

## **My own reflections on the class**

As teachers, we all have that one class that sticks out in our mind each semester, that group of students who not only strive to do their best and grow as learners but also transform you as a teacher. The students in this study have definitely been that group for me the past two years. They responded so well to our activities in class and strove to push themselves until they could comprehend the material. I honestly believe that this was because of the exploratory practice principles that I tried to follow – valuing collegiality and inclusivity of learners as partners in the teaching and learning processes – and because of the translanguaging we employed. By asking students what they wanted to do and how they wanted the class to be conducted, I took away the teacher-centric atmosphere and shifted the focus onto them. They

chose the topics, they discussed the materials, and, for the greetings, they created the PEPAs that we used. Over the course of the semester, the greetings became more engaging as each group strived to match the level of effort of the previous group of presenters.

Concerning the use of translanguaging during pair comprehension checks, the output of students increased ten-fold. At the beginning of the semester, when asked a question, the room would remain silent and students hesitated to speak up. After changing the flow of the class to include pair comprehension checks without restricting them to English, the classroom was filled with student discussion. It was such an honor and a privilege to go on this journey with my students, and I felt very proud of them for their continued efforts.

## Summary and looking forward

This study utilized exploratory practice to assess student needs from a teacher-led stance of EP. The collaborative work instigated by the EP principles of collegiality and learner inclusivity have contributed to making the class more student-led with less teacher talk, I used translanguaging to help students to engage more fully with listening and reading materials. The results show that translanguaging and pair comprehension checks can increase student motivation and participation. Looking forward, I would like to continue to use EP and have students design the class even further. Instead of having student-led greetings only, we could, using the principles of EP, have the entire class be student run. Students could choose the listening materials based off of a topic they decide, and we could base the class around that. We could determine the topics by survey in the beginning of class and put students in groups according to their interests. The list of possibilities is endless when employing EP as each student can contribute something unique to the class based on their experience and desires. I look forward to trying out different ways of designing future classes with my students and would encourage other language teachers to do the same.

## Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Anita Aden and Jim Ronald of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.*)

## Author Bio

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南アニーはのテンブル大学院日本東京キャンパスでTESOLの修士課程を取得し、現在は鎌倉女子大学高等部・中等部で英語教師として、英語コミュニケーションコースの企画と指導に携わっている。現在の研究テーマは、カリキュラムの作成、Exploratory Practice、授業における生徒の自己効力感・参加意識の向上など。近い将来、大学教員への転身を希望している。

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## Appendix A

### Student Survey Results

Note: The surveys are written as they appeared on the paper with translations provided in brackets. If the student wrote in English, no translation is given.

**Student 1:** 授業で扱うトピックが興味深く、取り込んでいて楽しかった。もう少し英検のスピーキング練習の回数を多くしてほしい。[The topics covered in class were interesting and fun to take part in. I would like more speaking practice for the EIKEN test.]

**Student 2:** 今年も去年も最高です。[This year and last year are very good!]

**Student 3:** 今年は1年のときよりも少し難しかったなと感じましたがアニー先生が盛り上げてくれたので、楽しく学ぶことができました!!また、3人グループでの発表があったことで以前よりも目が覚めた状態でのスタートができています。次の学期からはもっとグループの活動がしたいです!!マスクは付けていてもコロナ対策が緩くなったのでもっとコミュニケーションを取りたいです!あと、単純にみんなで英語ゲームみたいなのをしたいです。夏休みにNESTの先生たちとやってみたいにミッションっぽくして楽しい思い出作りたい!!いつも楽しい授業をありがとうございます。[I felt that this year was a little more difficult than the first year, but Annie Sensei made it exciting and fun to learn! I also feel that having to present in groups of three has helped me focus on English more actively than before. I hope to do more group activities next semester! I would like to communicate more because the regulations against coronavirus protection have loosened and we are wearing masks! I also want to play some kind of simple English games with everyone. During summer vacation, I want to make fun memories with the NEST teachers by doing some challenges! Thank you for your always fun classes.]

**Student 4:** I think you teaching was very good, but I want to speak very well. So more chances please. 今年も一緒に楽しい授業にしましょう!! [Let's make a fun class together this year!!]

**Student 5:** 今年は去年なかったgreetingがあったり、前日までに動画を見てくるquizなどがあったから、授業のスピードが昨年より速かったように感じた。もうちょっと英検の面接の時間がほしかった。Greetingは3人・1組でできるのは楽しかったです。みんなが作った話を聞いたり、クイズを考えたりするのも楽しかったし、脳が英語に切り替えられるので、より授業に集中できた。今年は難しかったけど、アニー先生が楽しく授業してくれたので、昨年に引き続き楽しく学習できました!いつも楽しい授業をありがとうございました。[I felt that the speed of the class was faster with the greetings, quizzes, videos we watched before class. I wish we spent more time practicing for the EIKEN interview test. The greeting was fun because we could do it in groups of three. I enjoyed listening to the stories and quizzes that everyone made up, and I was able to focus more in class because my brain could switch to English. It was difficult this year, but Annie Sensei made the class fun, so I enjoyed learning again as I did last year! Thank you for always making the classes enjoyable.]

**Student 6:** Compared to last year's class, I think it is better. For example, I think the greeting is the best thing. It might be hard for everyone to speak in English, but I think it will improve everyone's English.

**Student 7:** This year's class is a little difficult for me, but very interesting. I want to talk English more, so this year's class is good for me. I want to speak well too, so I will study harder than last year.

**Student 8:** I like the greetings that my classmates do first in class. It's fun to learn what I didn't know and listen to the new story. Also, I enjoy communicating with my classmates during class.

**Student 9:** This year's class was helpful for me to study English. For example, the quiz was difficult for me, but the video helped me to improve my listening skills and to think about many kinds of natural phenomenon. It was fun and I enjoyed the class.

**Student 10:** This year's class is better than last year's. This year's class is fun and interesting. I want to improve my English ability this year's.

**Student 11:** Listening [sic] and reading are few [sic] difficult for me. But, this class is fun. I like the greeting. I knew something. It is interesting [sic]. Thank you for teaching.

**Student 12:** 今年の授業はグリーティングがあったことが印象的だった、自分たちでストーリーや講成を作るのが楽しかったし、他のチームもみんな個性がでていて面白かった。こういう機会じゃないと調べることのなかった単語があったり、知らなかった言いまわし文法があった。そういうのを「自分で調べた」ので楽しく学べた。スタンプをもらおうと積極的になれたし、スタンプが増えることで自信にもつながった。[This year's major change is that we have the greetings in the beginning of class. It was fun to make our own stories and lectures, and it was interesting to see the individuality of the other groups. There were words and phrases that I would never have looked up unless I had this opportunity, and there were grammatical expressions that I didn't know. It was fun to learn because we "looked it up" ourselves. I wanted to be proactive to get stamps. The more stamps I got, the more confident I became.]

**Student 13:** 英語で話す機会や自ら考えて話すことが増えたことがよかったです。友達の発表を見ても積極的に聞きとったり、理解しようと努力できました。リスニングも頑張りたいです。映画をリスニングできたり、話が理解できるように力をつけたいです。[It was good that I had more opportunities to speak in English and to think and speak on my own. I was able to actively listen to and try to understand my friends' presentations. I also want to work on my listening skills. I want to improve my ability to listen to movies and understand what is being said.]

**Student 14:** 授業は色々な文章を読めたのがすごく楽しかったです。今度も面白い文章を授業で取り扱ってほしいと思いました。グリーティングもクラスの皆の発表もとても良かったのですが、一人ずつの発表でも良いと思いました。[I really enjoyed reading a variety of texts in the class. I hope that the class will cover interesting texts in the future. The greeting and the presentations by everyone in the class were very good, but I thought it would also be good to have individual presentations by each student.]

**Student 15:** 自分が好きな動物に関するクイズがあって、楽しかったです。グリーティングもチームのみんなで協力して、どうやったら、クラスみんなが興味をもってくれるかと考えながら作成するのも楽しかったです。他のメンバーの発表の中でもおもしろいオリジナルの物語や、初めて知る事もあったりして、たくさん学びがありました。アニー先生が作ってくださった小テストの動画も見るのが楽しみで、小テストで良い点がとれるように対策できました！スピーキングのテストが難しかったので、授業でもう少し対策したかったです。[It was fun to have a quiz about my favorite animals. It was also fun to work together as a team to create a greeting, thinking about how to make it interesting for the class. I learned a lot from the other members' presentations, including some interesting original stories and things I had never heard before. I also looked forward to watching the quiz videos that Annie-sensei made for us, which helped me to prepare for the quiz so that I could get a good score! The speaking test was difficult, and I wish we could have prepared more for it in class.]

**Student 16:** もう少しゲームもしてみたかった。となりと話す時の時間を少しだけ長くしてほしい。時間が足りなくて最後の問題までいけなかった。[I would have liked to play a few more games. I would liked a little more time to talk with the person next to me. I often didn't have enough time to finish discussing the final question you asked us.]

**Student 17:** 今年の英会話のクラスは楽しいです。授業の前に、自分が好きなものとかを紹介させてもらえるのが良いと思います。自分の興味があることを発表するので、準備するときも楽しいし、自ら原稿を作ったので、英作文の練習にもなると思うのでとてもよいと思います。発表することによって、発音するのが苦手な私でも、スタンプがもらえる機会ができるのでありがたいです。[I am enjoying this year's English Conversation class. I think it is good that we are allowed to introduce our favorite things to the class, because we present what we are interested in, so it is fun to prepare for it. Since I made the draft myself, I think it is good practice for my English writing. Concerning the presentations, I appreciate the opportunity to get stamps even though I am not good at pronouncing words.]

**Student 18:** It was so much harder than last year, but so much fun making posters and talking with everyone!

**Student 19:** 授業の内容は英語だけじゃなく、他のことも学べるので楽しかったです。[I enjoyed the class because I learned not only English but also other things.]

**Student 20:** I think this year's new class style is not bad. But I don't know greeting is needed. The reason is we usually make quiz [sic] and story. It is good but I think we will make something is good...? Sorry, I have no idea.

**Student 21:** みんなの発表を聞くのと動物の範囲の時の動画を見たり、クイズに答えるのが特に楽しかったです。英検は私には少し難しかったです。間違えるのが怖くてスタンプチャンスの時手をあげられなかったので、来学期は手をあげたいと思います。[I especially enjoyed listening to everyone's presentations, watching the video during the animal unit, and answering the quizzes. The EIKEN style speaking test was a little difficult for me. I was too afraid of making a mistake so I hesitated to raise my hand during the stamp chances, so I would like to raise my hand more next semester.]

**Student 22:** I think this year's class is nice. I like student greeting. It is fun and I can get interesting knowledge. And one more, the videos sent to Classi are also interesting.

**Student 23:** 文章がよく分かっていないことがあった。クラッシの動画は単語がところどころ分かるけど、内容がつかめないことがあったから、リスニング力をつけたいと思った。グリーティングはチームの人と内容考えたりするのが楽しかったから、次の学期もやりたい。[Sometimes I didn't understand the sentences well in the reading passages. About the Classi videos, I want to improve my listening skills. I could understand some of the vocabulary words but could not grasp the meaning of some of the sentences. I enjoyed making the greeting as a team and thinking about the contents, so I would like to do it again next semester.]

## Appendix B

### Transcript of Student Interview with Yuzu, Lulu, Aozora, Riri (after ESS club May 5th, 2023): 13-minute interview

**Annie:** Now, I'm interested in improving my classes and I have some questions for you. In our class, when we do a listening activity or I ask you a question, I say "Pair check" and you speak in pairs. Sometimes in Japanese, sometimes in English. それどうですか? そのみたいなやり方? [What do you think about that and the way its conducted?]

**Yuzu:** I think the pair check thing is a good, because when you ask a question, you always do the pair check. If one person doesn't understand the question or answer, they can check with their partner, you know? I think it's a good idea.

**Annie:** Thank you, Yuzu. How about other girls? 日本語でもいいですよ。 [If you want to answer in Japanese, that's ok too. ]

**Lulu:** Me too. ゆずと同じだから分からないことがいっぱいからそうやってチェックするはめっちゃいいと思う。 [I'm the same as Yuzu. There's a lot of things I don't understand or catch so I think pair checks are really good.]

**Annie:** OK. So, そのチェックする時にだいたい英語か日本語か? [During those checks what language do you mostly speak, English or Japanese?] []

**Yuzu:** だいたいはじめに日本語だね。 [At first in Japanese. And then with English.]

**Annie:** Japanese first? And then English? Ok. Why?

**Yuzu:** Because first we think about the answer in Japanese. And then we can translate to English.

**Annie:** なんか日本語で喋る時に do you feel like Ahh, 日本語喋ってるからあまり良くないとか。逆で日本語で最初落ち着いている and then like どう思いますか? [Well, when speak in Japanese, do you ever feel it's not good because we are in English class? Or does speaking Japanese first help you to gather your thoughts and then what do you think?]

**Yuzu:** Yeah, I think most students feel more comfortable speaking in Japanese first and then like translating to English.

**Annie:** 日本語で話す時にどんなことについて話すの? [When you speak in Japanese, what are you discussing?]

**Yuzu:** First, we check what Annie Sensei's question translates to in Japanese, and then we think about the answer in Japanese.

**Annie:** So first you translate the question. And then you say the answer in Japanese.

**Yuzu:** And then we do English.

**Annie:** OK. Do you ever do everything in English first?

**Yuzu:** (laughing) Now, we sit closer to each other because we know Annie Sensei's class has pair checks. So we say in English first now. Because we sit close to each other.

**Annie:** OK. Do you think it depends on who you are sitting by? Does it change depending on who you are sitting next to?

**Yuzu:** Yeah, yeah. It changes. For example, if the person who sits next to me doesn't understand English that much, I would translate the question to Japanese first, and then tell them and explain. But like Ai and Aozora, if they understand English, then first I'm going say it in English.

**Annie:** Do you feel embarrassed or shy to say the Japanese quickly in case your partner may not understand?

**All:** Hmmmm.....

**Annie:** Do you think that or no?

**Yuzu:** We don't think that.

**Lulu:** Ummm. No.

**Annie:** It's totally fine?

**Riri:** A little.

**Annie:** (to Riri) A little bit?

**Riri:** Yeah. 確かに。ちょっとだけたまにあまりすぐあのこれはこうだよって教えない方がいいかなって。 [Sometimes, I am careful a little bit. I don't want to quickly say "This is the answer!" so I might wait awhile.] I want to give my partner a chance and 英語のレベルあまり見せたくない [I don't want to show off my English level.]

**Annie:** How about Aozora?

**Aozora:** I don't remember so much, but recently, I sit next to Yuzu and Riri so I don't remember.

**Annie:** OK, what about the timing? I often show the question on the slide, and then I ask you to talk with a partner. Do you think I do too much? Do you want more? Or less pair checks?

**Lulu:** うん。うん。うん。 [Yes. Yes. Yes.]

**Annie:** It's good?

**Lulu:** Yes.

**Annie:** Do you ever think – なんでアニーが今回しなかった?寂しかったな? [Why didn't Annie do pair check this time? Do you feel disappointed from lack of pair checks?]

EVERYONE LAUGHING...

**Annie:** Is it too long or short?

**Lulu:** 今の方がいい。 [It's good now.]

**Annie:** And 自信について聞きたいですけど。どうですか? [And I want to ask you about your confidence speaking in English – do the pair checks help increase your confidence?]

**Yuzu:** うん。 [Yes.]

**Annie:** How? For example, in other classes if the teacher doesn't ask you pair check do feel confused?

**Yuzu:** Oh, it means like, if in the other class if the other teacher asks you a question and then like don't do pair check, do I feel uncomfortable?

**Annie:** Uncomfortable or confused? Or do you have low confidence?

**Yuzu:** Oh yeah yes, yes, for like example, in classic Japanese class, our teacher always asks us a question but he goes by the 出席番号 [calls on us by our student number] and I know it's coming but when he asks suddenly, I don't understand. First of all, I don't understand the story and I don't understand the question, I'm so confused. But like he, you know, asks me over and over for the answer. なんで分からない? [Why don't you know the answer?]

**Yuzu:** 怖くて、怖くて [It's so scary. It's petrifying.] and I'm like so embarrassed.

**Annie:** So even though you know it's coming, the pressure.

**Yuzu:** The pressure.

**Annie:** Of having to share without checking with other people is...

**Yuzu:** Is so embarrassing and confusing. Uncomfortable.

**Annie:** And how does that make you feel about the subject of classic Japanese?

**Yuzu:** I hate it.

**Annie:** So it decreases your motivation.

**Yuzu:** Uh-huh.

**Annie:** Because you can't.

**Yuzu:** Yeah, because he keeps asking me even though I don't understand it. マジで怖い。  
[Really, it's so scary.]

**Annie:** OK. I see.

**Yuzu:** Another teacher calls on us in order by student number, but he helps us. He gives us a hint. And stuff so that makes me feel a little bit more comfortable.

**Annie:** OK. That's really interesting. Thank you. What about pair check sometimes I don't tell you the answer. Sometimes I don't say the answer – what do you think about this style? Is it still helpful?

**Lulu:** Um...

**Annie:** Do you want the answer said every time? For example, What's the biggest animal? My question is "What's the biggest animal in the world? – Pair check."

**Lulu:** Umm...

**Yuzu:** It might take time, but maybe you should say the answer after every pair check.

**Annie:** OK I see. What about if it's an opinion question? Do you want the teacher to ask a few groups their opinions or is that too much pressure?

**Yuzu:** We need to practice speaking English and maybe sometimes you need to ask a pair to share.

**Annie:** OK, thank you. Any more comments? No, ok? Thank you so much – you helped me so much.

## Think Outside the German Box: Plurilingual Awareness Strategies for English Language Classrooms in Berlin

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Despite a growing interest in and around multilingualism and plurilingualism in language teaching in school context, many teachers still prescribe to monolingual approaches in their classroom practice. This applies especially to English language classrooms in which English-only policies and native speaker ideologies are still dominant at the expense of leading to feelings of guilt, reluctance, or frustration among students. Therefore, it is crucial to explore practical applications of plurilingual approaches and strategies and what they can offer in classrooms in terms of promoting and advancing a more egalitarian, linguistically just, and pedagogically motivating language instruction. Drawing on a small-scale autoethnographic study, in this article we explore the potential of plurilingual strategies in English language classrooms and how English language teachers can leverage students' plurilingual abilities. More specifically, the article examines the experiences of a novice teacher implementing plurilingual strategies in a Berlin classroom and the implications for language education policy. It also reveals the teacher's understanding of plurilingual competence and the various ways that plurilingual strategies can be integrated into English language teaching while in communication and dialogue with the university instructor during the internship. Our findings and understandings suggest that plurilingual strategies can raise awareness of student languages, affirm language identities, and promote more inclusive language classes.

教育現場での言語教育において、多言語主義や複言語主義への関心が高まりつつあるものの、多くの教師が教室内の実践において依然として単一言語アプローチに固執している。この傾向は特に英語教育の現場で顕著であり、英語オンリーポリシーやネイティブスピーカーのイデオロギーが今なお支配的で、その結果として、生徒が罪悪感や消極性、フラストレーションを感じる事態を引き起こすことがある。したがって、複言語アプローチや方略の実践的応用を探り、より平等で言語的に公正で教育的に動機づけのあるインタラクションを教室内で推進することが重要である。本稿では、オートエスノグラフィー研究に基づき、英語教育の現場における複言語方略の可能性と、英語教師が生徒の複言語能力にどのような影響を与えられるかを探る。とりわけ本稿では、ドイツ・ベルリンの教室で複言語方略を実践した新任教師の経験と言語教育政策への示唆を検証する。また、インターンシップ中に大学講師とのコミュニケーションや対話を通じて得られた教師の複言語能力に対する理解や、英語教育に反映できうる複言語方略を明らかにする。研究結果は、複言語方略が生徒の言語に対する意識を高め、言語的アイデンティティを肯定し、より包摂的な言語教育を促進する可能性を示唆する。

### Keywords

English language teaching, plurilingualism, plurilingual awareness strategies, plurilingual tasks, inclusive language education

英語教育、複言語主義、複言語意識方略、複言語での活動、インクルーシブ言語教育

### 1. Introduction

Contemporary research has called for multi/plurilingual approaches in education for various reasons including more inclusiveness, social cohesion, effective teaching as well as justice (Cenoz, 2017; Kubota, 2016; May, 2014, Wei & García, 2022). However, specifically in English language classes, monolingual approaches can be systematically materialized with English-only mottos, and native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006). Ideologies are sometimes openly and sometimes subtly performed in tasks, instructions, and class rules.



Some language students are imbued with a sense of guilt, reluctance, or frustration when tasks like “English-only” are introduced into these lessons. These feelings often come from students being forced to use English. They may be negatively evaluated, even punished, if they don’t. This is exemplified by the story of the “German Box,” a box with speaking tasks designed by the English teacher for the students. Whenever the teacher caught a student speaking German, the box was handed over to that student to draw a task and prepare a talk for the next lesson. In this class where Philipp was an intern, the use of German in the English classroom was forbidden and punished accordingly. This experience was one of the main triggers for this practice-based inquiry. Having observed the silenced students who were ironically expected to speak more, we decided to reconstruct this monolingual box that closes the opportunities for languages other than English into a plurilingual box that is open to, and welcomes, all languages. Our hope was that our proposition of employing plurilingual strategies for English lesson plans could counteract the monolingual language policies and would raise consciousness for plurilingual pedagogies and be a hope for more inclusive language classes.

Departing from here, we, Philipp and Mine, have decided to conduct an autoethnographic research and report the collaborative writing process of the researcher (Mine) and the instructor (Philipp) in the implementation of plurilingual practices and strategies in English classes in Berlin, Germany. Drawing on our own autoethnographic vignettes and personal observation notes, we try to provide a first-hand account of classroom research on plurilingualism. To do this, we have looked into three key elements based on the existing literature and the dialogue and reflections we shared: the potential use of languages other than English, the pedagogical resistance areas of teachers, and the implications for the implementation of plurilingualism in English language programs.

Our research questions sprang from (a) Philipp’s experiences and his dialogical engagement with Mine, as his internship lecturer, and (b) Mine engaging dialogically with Philipp. The three questions formulated for our practice-based inquiry are:

1. How are plurilingual strategies experienced by an English teacher in the classroom?
2. In what ways is teaching English experienced with plurilingual strategies in a multilingual English class?
3. What do plurilingual strategies bring into the English class in terms of cultural and social awareness, and identity confirmation?

## 2. Conceptual Framework

This exploratory inquiry stems from Philipp’s puzzle about the English-only teaching practice in multilingual classes and Mine’s concern about how to apply plurilingualism to practice in language classrooms. As we seek to understand the background of language teaching practices in Germany, we also would like to illuminate the pivotal concepts that inform our analysis of the current landscape of language education in Berlin’s schools. Exploring the literature on monolingual habitus, plurilingualism, and plurilingual strategies paves the way for comprehending the underlying principles and frameworks that guide language education policies, both broadly and within the specific context of Berlin’s unique educational environment. However, as the main aim of this article is to focus on the implementation of a series of pedagogical tasks seeking to dwell on the linguistic repertoires of the students and facilitating the ensuing dialogues and learning that takes place, we are not going to go into the details of the concepts, but rather provide a broad map of the concepts and conceptual

frameworks that are critical for understanding the perspectives we are relying on and the practices informed by these perspectives.

### **2.1. Monolingual habitus in the German school system**

Why the trouble advocating plurilingualism in education? This is a legitimate question for us as educators, and the answers are there when we delve into the system of schooling and language policies of Germany. Going back to the 19th century, Germany embraced a tradition of monolingualism among its populace leading to the concept of the “monolingual habitus” that became a fundamental and integral component of the German state school system (Gogolin, 1997; 2008). This inclination is still evident to this day in educational standards, structural precedents, and the school curricula. Additionally, the tradition of monolingualisation influences the language-oriented perspectives, attitudes, and actions of educators, which in turn make it difficult for school children living in a multicultural and multilingual society (Gogolin, 1997).

In multilingual societies, not only the national languages but also other dominant languages, often tied to power, can impose a monolingual habitus. The socially and politically defined boundaries of such “named languages” as English are politically constructed and ideologically bound (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 281). English, for example, possesses market value, therefore is externally imposed, enforcing specific sociocultural and political norms, thereby limiting linguistic diversity.

The monolingual habitus can be acknowledged in English language classrooms where the dominant ideology of native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006) prevails, reinforcing English as the exclusive medium of instruction. Native-speakerism establishes a normative perception of English and its pedagogy, influencing how teachers and students perceive their linguistic and cultural identities. This ideology often creates a dichotomy between those perceived as native and non-native speakers, shaping interactions within bilingual families, diaspora communities, education systems, and academic discourse (Swan et al., 2015). English thus maintains its stronghold within the classroom environment, resisting the inclusion of learners’ languages during instructional hours.

### **2.2. Plurilingual Classrooms and Students**

Plurilingualism has been defined by the Council of Europe as “the repertoire of varieties of language which many individuals use, and is therefore the opposite of monolingualism” (Beacco, 2007, p. 8). In this sense, a plurilingual classroom is a classroom in which the strategy is to embrace and exploit the linguistic and cultural diversity of the students in order to maximize communication, subject learning and plurilingual/ pluricultural awareness (Piccardo et al., 2021). This definition is distinct from multilingualism, which, in contrast, is understood as a situation where various languages coexist within a specific geographic area, with individuals potentially speaking only their distinct language and these languages being utilized independently of one another (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013). In other words, multilingualism is used to refer to the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level, while plurilingualism describes the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user.

### **2.3. Plurilingual Strategies**

While focusing on a plurilingual lesson plan of English for this inquiry, we considered the five strategies from the Plurilingual Guide by Galante et al. (2022) as a reference point.

The researchers introduce (a) cross-linguistic comparisons, (b) cross-cultural comparisons, (c) translanguaging, (d) translation for mediation, and (e) pluriliteracies as plurilingual strategies for teaching, which they explain as follows:

- a. **Cross-linguistic comparisons:** Engaging students in comparing linguistic features such as grammar, syntax, phonology, and morphology, as well as language use across languages can enhance learning and value their linguistic repertoire.
- b. **Cross-cultural comparisons:** Learning a new language offers an opportunity to explore diverse cultures, customs, values, beliefs, and language usage. Cross-cultural comparisons foster critical thinking, highlight knowledge construction, and expose students to various cultural perspectives.
- c. **Translanguaging:** Plurilingual individuals are recognized as those who engage in translanguaging. They possess a diverse set of linguistic and other semiotic resources, allowing them to leverage their knowledge in any language they are proficient in, depending on the context.
- d. **Translation for mediation:** Incorporating translation activities, such as translating new vocabulary into known languages, enhances engagement and retention.
- e. **Pluriliteracies:** Plurilingual instruction views students as active social agents utilizing diverse literacies like visual representations, photographs, gestures, and digital skills.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Autoethnography

We base the research methodology of this study on autoethnography, a qualitative research methodology that combines elements of autobiography and ethnography. In language research, autoethnography is an approach to understand language learning, language use, and language identity from an individual's perspective (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). We strive for exploring the possibilities and advantages of plurilingual means for language classes and also for connecting our personal experiences to wider cultural, political, and social understandings.

The article itself talks at times, and we create dialogues for ourselves and the reader through the personal and narrative-driven flow of autoethnographic writing (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). In this way, we believe we can convey our experiences, insights, and interpretations better to readers.

This research involves the researcher and the teacher—us—reflecting on our personal experiences within the classroom culture and using our experiences to gain insights and to generate knowledge about specific settings, which in this case, is the multilingual English classes. Since our research questions are inquiring what we would like to implement and see in English lessons based on plurilingualism, our perspectives and experiences are definitely very connected to the questions themselves.

Therefore, this research involves self-reflection driven with our own personal experiences with languages; a year-long fieldwork that encompasses an English lesson plan with plurilingual tasks; teaching and observations; data collection from own personal narratives and field notes; reflexive analysis of data, interpretation of the findings, and writing process.

To ensure the privacy and anonymity of our participants, we have refrained from identifying the students or the school where we gathered data. Given our extensive experience working across various schools and with numerous students, the particular class in which we introduced the plurilingual lesson remains unidentifiable among the broader context of our research.

### 3.2. Our stories along with the German box

**“Mine” the researcher:** I have been offering courses at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU Berlin) since 2019 which focus on ecology of Englishes and critical literacies. I have also observed many language classes during internship semesters and have discussed with prospective teachers ways to promote social justice and create more equity in learning environments by being more inclusive of students’ plurilingualism. By employing translanguaging as the main approach and encouraging students to use their linguistic repertoire in learning English, plurilingual tasks provide both an identity confirmation and empowerment on students’ part. By opening up space for translanguaging, students’ languages find meaning and place in the educational setting that leads to a promotion of greater equality and inclusivity. I believe that simply acknowledging linguistic diversity in classrooms is not enough however; teachers must actively incorporate and celebrate this diversity in their teaching. For this to be successful, teachers need the necessary skills and practical models to effectively implement plurilingual strategies.

I consider myself an engaged language teacher, a critical teacher educator, and a researcher committed to multilingualism and plurilingualism in education. I was born in a bilingual family with an American mother and a Turkish father. I was raised in a country built up on monolingual ideologies that made life difficult in many aspects for many schooling kids whose home languages were minority languages. I married a Kurdish man and acknowledged the political situation of the education system even more widely and deeply. We moved to Berlin, and I was introduced to some other kind of monolingual norms in Berlin schools where I supervised many prospective English language teachers during their internship semesters at HU Berlin. Through this experience, I observed language classes and discussed pedagogical approaches with mentors and teachers, some of whose pedagogical practices followed the “monolingual habitus” by neglecting the unique opportunity to turn students’ plurilingual abilities into pedagogical strategies. As I started working on small-scale projects on plurilingual strategies with English teachers who work in Berlin schools that can potentially have more than 30 different languages, I understood more deeply the necessity and potential of integrating plurilingualism into language teaching. This made me realize even more the significance of having direct contact with the key actors who are teaching in their own settings, but who are mostly not close to the world of academia and policy makers. It is the language teachers, however, who can provide us with a solid grounding from which viable perceptions on the use of languages can be crafted. I am lucky to have met Philipp who made it possible to create a dialogic path for plurilingualism.

We, I and Philipp, opt for autoethnography for similar reasons; however, our journeys are distinctly different. My introduction to autoethnography with Philipp was unexpected. I met him as an undergraduate student at HU Berlin where Philipp was then focusing some of his studies on critical literacies, multilingualism, and World Englishes. So when I met Philipp - once again - during his English internship period at a school with 33 languages, in a class of 9 languages, he told me the story of the German box. The box itself reminded me of Pandora’s box. It seemed like a curse, a punishment on students with the way it was designed and implemented; however, in a plurilingual reality it could be turned into a resourceful tool. With the idea of plurilingualism in mind, Philipp and I decided to make our research serve as a pillar for reconstructing the story of the German box. This collaborative endeavor of ours is an attempt towards generating knowledge and practical strategies to support teachers in developing plurilingual skills and models. We would like the German

box to transform into a plurilingual box in and from which all languages are welcome and acknowledged.

Philipp has carried out a narrative ethnography, something like a bridge between his academic curiosities and personal lived experience. His story tells the bitter truth of the realities - the gap between what he has learned throughout his studies and what he faces in his work places; that is, the schools and also the challenges, the spaces he tries to open up for what he truly believes in. My story accompanies his story with my observations as an academic, teacher, and plurilingual person in the transnational community in Germany.

***“Philipp” the teacher:*** In 2021, I enrolled at HU to pursue a Master of Education degree, aiming to become an English teacher. Throughout my studies, I have become particularly interested in linguistically diverse classrooms in Berlin. I studied pedagogical concepts such as language awareness and translanguaging (Wei & García, 2022) and came across notions like native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006), World Englishes (Kachru, 1992) and homogenization (Flores, 2014). These concepts brought me to reevaluate who truly “owns” English and to scrutinize the underlying institutional raciolinguistic policies, prompting me to consider my future role in either enforcing or challenging these structures.

Furthermore, my studies included critical literacy teaching theories developed by Freire (1970), Ada (1988a, 1988b), and McLaughlin & DeVoogd (2004), which profoundly challenged my own perceptions of education and language. Teaching English started to represent more than the mere transmission of language (Freire, 1970); it emerged as a powerful tool to confront injustices—a personal understanding that positions teaching English not just as language instruction but also as a potential decolonizing project, woven into the fabric of history and diversity (Wei & García, 2022).

With the knowledge and questions gained from my previous coursework, I began my internship at a secondary school in Neukölln, Berlin. During this time, I had the opportunity to observe a variety of English language classes, with a specific focus on a ninth-grade class (14 - 15 years old). One of the things that stood out to me was the “German box” - a tin box in the shape of a red British phone booth filled with snippets of paper containing 1-minute speaking tasks for the students in the class. Whenever the teacher caught a student speaking German, the box was placed on their desk. This way, the box could wander around the room throughout the lesson. The student who had the box on their desk at the end of the lesson had to draw a task and prepare a talk for the next lesson. These tasks included prompts such as “talk about the last book you read” or “tell three jokes to the class.” Here the use of German in the English classroom was penalized.

The German box practice resulted in a dynamic of its own. The box was moved independently by the students to other desks. After the teacher made it clear that only she was allowed to rearrange the box, there were more interruptions where students reported each other for speaking German—nobody wanted to end up with the German box. It became apparent that there was a certain arbitrariness on the part of the teacher as to when and against whom she penalized the use of German and when she did not. I had the impression this negatively affected the relationship of trust between the students and the teacher.

This experience functions as one example of the glaring gap I experienced between the discourse at university and the practices in schools. There seemed to be a disproportionate focus on language purity, with less emphasis on empowering students to express themselves and be heard. After discussing my observations with Mine as my mentor in my internship, she encouraged me to design a lesson that would empower students through plurilingual teaching strategies.

### 3.3. The School Setting and the Plurilingual Lesson

#### 3.3.1 Overview of the Gymnasium

In Berlin, a “Gymnasium” is a type of secondary school that typically spans six years, covering grades 7 to 12. This educational path is focused on academic learning and culminates in the *Abitur* examination after grade 12, which serves as the qualification for entry into higher education.

Students are obliged to learn a foreign language starting at the age of 8 or 9 in the third grade, with English typically being the first language choice. Several primary schools in the state of Berlin even offer English starting from the first grade when students are 6-years old. By the time students reach grade 9 (14-15 years old), most have been studying English for about 7 years, and at this stage, within the Gymnasium system, they are expected to have reached B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

I (Philipp) began my internship at a Gymnasium, located in Berlin Neukölln, a culturally diverse district. The student body at the school is also diverse, with two thirds of all students speaking a language other than German as their family language. Moreover, the school offers extracurricular activities and provides welcoming classes that are designed for newly arrived students with limited or no proficiency in German (Neumann et al., 2019).

#### 3.3.2. Plurilingual Lesson

I will continue by presenting an English lesson plan, including the plurilingual tasks, as well as strategies used by students. I follow this with a reflective discussion between Mine and myself, including example language portraits and reflections produced by the students. By separating the plurilingual English lesson into these two parts, I aim to make it easier for my peers to follow along and understand how the lesson was implemented, as well as to engage with the discussion and reflections that Mine and I had after the lesson.

The lesson plan below outlines activities designed to help students reflect on their language backgrounds and experiences.

Description of Students: Grade 9 (14-15 years old), B1 English level

Lesson Length: 45 mins

Lesson Objectives - Students will be able to

- Reflect on their language backgrounds and experiences.
- Use multiple languages and mix languages in communication.
- Build community and understanding among students with diverse language backgrounds.
- Express personal experiences in writing by using a mix of languages.

Materials Needed:

- Music
- Body outline templates and crayons
- Writing materials

Room Setup:

- Tables and chairs are arranged along the sides of the room, leaving a spacious open area in the center.

Activity   Time	Procedure	Materials
Opening (10 mins)	Standing in a circle, each student shares their name and a language they would choose to wake up speaking fluently the next day	None
Atom Game (15 mins)	<p>Music &amp; Movement: Play music; students move freely to the beat.</p> <p>Grouping: When music stops, call a number (e.g., "Four atoms!"). Students form groups of that size; those left out just join a group. All groups discuss the same question given to them for around 2 minutes. Start music to break up the groups and start a new round.</p> <p>Use of English: Instruct students to use as much English as possible, filling in with other languages as needed.</p> <p>Reflection: After several rounds, ask: "What did you learn about your classmates? What surprised you?"</p>	<p>Music</p> <p>Discussion Prompts: How many languages do you speak, and how well? / Which language do you use daily, and why? / Do you feel different when speaking different languages? / Which languages are accepted in your environment? Are there any languages you can't speak somewhere? / Identify the least represented language in the group; teach a short phrase to others for presentation.</p>
Language Silhouette (10 mins)	<p>Students draw their languages inside body outlines, using colors and placing languages in different parts of their body (head, heart, hands etc.).</p> <p>Students present their portraits to a partner, explaining why they have placed each language in a specific place, as well as the choice of color.</p>	Body outline templates, crayons
Writing (5 mins)	Students write a short text describing their language portrait, using around 50% English.	Writing materials
Wrap-Up (5 mins)	Each student shares "How are you now?" and "One takeaway from the lesson."	None

**Figure 1.** Plurilingual English Lesson Plan

## 4. Discussion

When we revisit our research questions, three main reflections stand out for our discussion. Philipp's reflections on his lesson allow us to understand how teachers can employ plurilingual strategies to create a space for students to use their knowledge of different languages and to empower their student selves and language learning processes through this awareness. Accordingly, we propose the term "plurilingual awareness strategies" (PAS) as a more precise descriptor than the generic label "plurilingual strategies." Mine's reflections on the lesson itself and the discussions with Philipp dig into the ways of how teaching English could be experienced with PAS in a multilingual English class. The last part of our discussion explores the relation of PAS with cultural, social awareness, and identity confirmation. We look at this through the lens of pedagogical resistance areas and identify areas with room for improvement.

### 4.1. Our reflections on the lesson

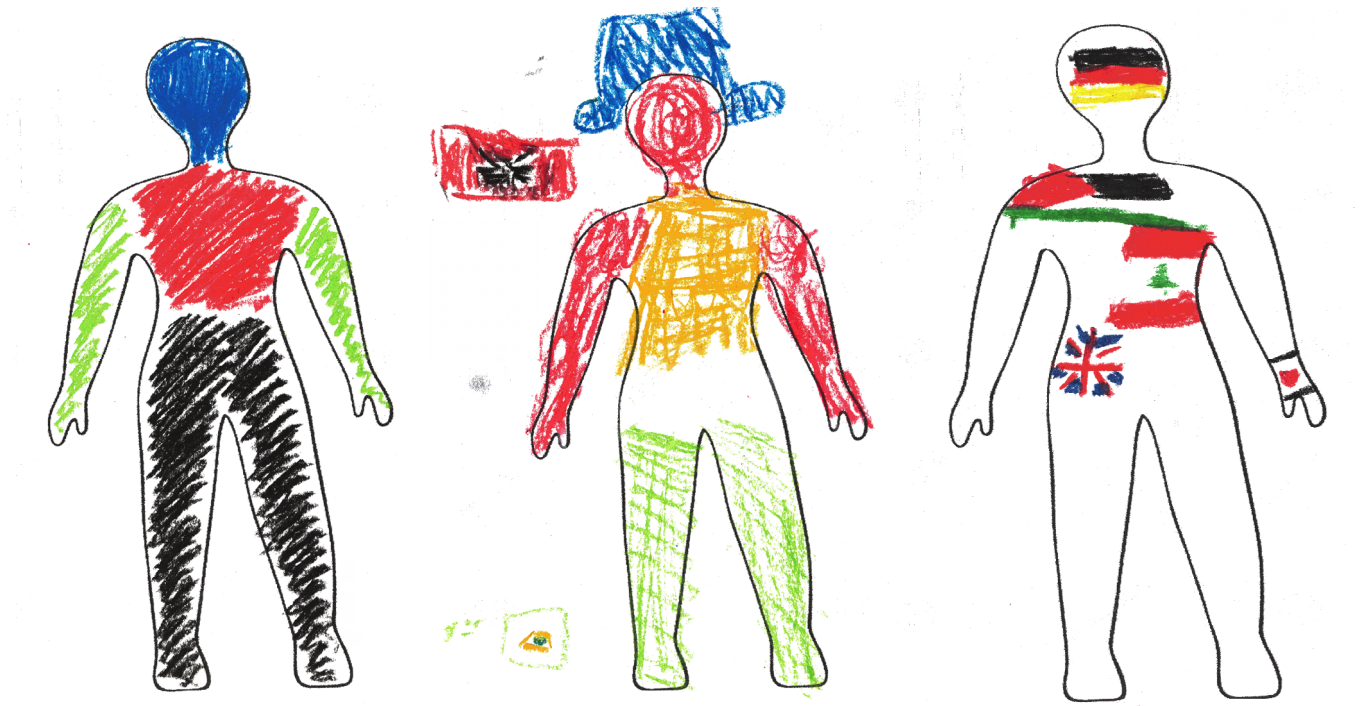
**Philipp's reflections:** The lesson's goal was to encourage students to express themselves in a variety of languages by encouraging them to understand and appreciate their diverse linguistic backgrounds. On the whole, the students responded well, though some of them expressed excitement and agitation due to unfamiliarity with the new rules, which shifted away from a traditional monolingual approach. Furthermore, the unusual classroom setup, with desks and chairs pushed to the sides of the room to create open space, sparked their curiosity. Overall, I experienced a fairly inclusive atmosphere during the lesson.

The simple opener of asking what language they would like to wake up speaking fluently served as both an icebreaker and a link into our main topic. It encouraged students to reflect on their language preferences and desires while immediately highlighting the linguistic diversity in the classroom. Some students responded to the question in terms of academic success, mentioning languages such as French or English that they were struggling with in school. One student mentioned Mandarin Chinese due to its complexity, its significance as one of the most spoken languages in the world, and the low effort required to learn it in this scenario. Others mentioned learning the languages of their parents, grandparents, or other relatives as a way to connect more deeply with their cultural heritage.

The Atom game served as a catalyst for students to reflect on their diverse range of language experiences. Students shared insights into the number of languages they could speak, where and from whom they learned these languages, and the contexts in which they commonly spoke them. They also highlighted different emotions and perceptions they experienced in sharing their language diversity: Some students were surprised by the diversity of languages used by their peers, especially those close to them. For instance, many students were unaware that one girl's home language was Thai.

Creating their language portraits (see Figure 2) served as an intuitive introspective activity for the students and provided them with a visual representation of their linguistic identities. Pairing up, they shared their creations, fostering meaningful dialogues about the reasons behind their choices and the symbolism of colors. Some students used national flags to represent languages (as in the portrait on the right in Figure 2), indicating a strong connection between language, cultural identity, and strong beliefs in the nation-state construct. The use of national flags highlights the significance of language as a cultural marker influencing the sense of self.





**Figure 2.** Student Language Portraits

Transitioning from the visual and oral aspects of the lesson to the written, students transformed their reflections into short personal texts. This not only reinforced their newfound insights, but also gave them an opportunity for them to express themselves meaningfully while using at least 50% English. This translinguaging approach to writing can be viewed as an artistic expression, as well as a linguistic representation of their identities, as shown in these three student commentaries:

I chose bleu for German in my head because I think in German and I speak German the most of the time. I chose red for Arabic in my heart because Arabic is my motherlanguage. I chose black for English in my legs because I don't speak that Language often. I choosed green for french because i like french and I like green.

I was born in Germany. So I speak and think German So I drew the German Flagg at my head. I drew the Lebanese Flagg in my Heart bc its my mother language. I dont speak Arabic all the Time I usually speak German. I drew the UK flagg in my hips. I speak English every Day with friends out fun. And I speak with my Mom English too but just for fun. I love the English language.

<sup>1</sup> أنا ما بحكي عربي كثير، بس يعرف أكتب وأقرأ. أنا بحكي مع أمي وأبي خليط عربي وألماني، بس بحكي ألماني أكثر.

(originality and anonymity preserved)

Overall, I experienced the students as being very motivated to complete the tasks. The lesson provided an opportunity not only for me and the students to explore the variety of languages in the classroom, but also for their regular English teacher to view linguistic diversity from a different angle. Given the striking difference in student engagement when plurilingual strategies were employed, this plurilingual lesson sets out to be an example for the role of these approaches in motivating English language learning.

1. I don't speak much Arabic, but I can read and write. I speak a mixture of Arabic and German with my mom and dad, but I speak more German. (DeepL, 2024)

**Mine's reflections:** I was Philipp's instructor during the internship period that lasted for six months so I had a chance to observe his classes more than once during that time. One of the very first notes from my class visits said: "Philipp is quite attentive - also tries to connect on an emotional level, asks students personal experiences. He immediately understood *trust* is an important issue and connected immediately with students on a different level." That's exactly when I realized Philipp is a teacher with a conscious mind of different layers of understanding and appreciation. My observation notes found meaning when I had a chance to observe Philipp's English lesson with plurilingual strategies.

Philipp prepared the plurilingual tasks with diligence. He did not instrumentalize or manipulate them for his own benefit, but opened up space for the students so that they could personalize the tasks. The plurilingual tasks presented during the lesson were welcomed by the students although they were initially surprised at being allowed to use their own languages. One of the students asked the teacher if he could really use his home language—also a shared language with some other students—during the task. I realized that students were a bit unsure and hesitant about the idea of speaking a language other than English in the English classroom and waited for confirmation from the teacher before they went ahead with the plurilingual tasks.

The lesson itself had a different flow of energy as it was the first time that the students were invited to join some activities with their own languages. The students contributed with their first or home languages, some of which were Arabic, Croatian, Danish, German, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Thai, and Turkish. It seemed like they were proud to be able to display a part of their multiple identities which may have led some of them to drawing flags next to some of the languages they could speak.

My interpretation is that the students almost immediately started employing the plurilingual strategies of pluriliteracies (Galante et al., 2022). The students became active, critical social agents. They purposefully and collectively transformed the "silhouette task," intended to open space for home languages, into a diverse visual task that showcased their linguistic and cultural backgrounds through languages and flags. During the portrait task where students are usually expected to represent their plurilingual identity, the students added the multilingual texts, the flags, and they orally presented their portraits afterwards.

As Galante et al. (2022) propose in their research project "Plurilingual Shift in Language Learning," I was able to observe that, when given the opportunity, these students also made use of translation for mediation and cross-linguistic comparisons via comparing meanings and linguistic features across the languages they spoke. Working metacognitively, they explored the pronunciation and the translation of various words and sentences. The teacher gave them the task of teaching each other one sentence of their languages to show how the task could be represented and explained in languages other than English.

I could see how translanguaging proved effective for them in grasping content in a new language (Galante et al., 2022). Translanguaging could be seen in the natural flow of how the students excitedly exploited all languages they knew, interplayed with the materials in these languages, as well as how they in fact brought their completed tasks to a discussion in English at the end. Some students employed the postponing strategy (Plurilingual Lab, n.d.) at times when they were stuck on a word in English. They then discussed and confirmed it with some other students who speak the same home language before they went on with the English version.

As a final note from my observations, I could wholeheartedly say that the PAS functioned in a natural flow and with a great stimulus when the teacher encouraged the students with

the specific task instructions prepared for this lesson. The class spirit was really high at the end of the class hour. I could see that the students were still talking about the languages they discovered among class members. What caught my attention the most was that the student speaking Thai was surrounded by some students who were very interested in getting to know more, not only language wise but also more about herself and her identity. Her use of Thai suddenly made her popular and one can say that she was happy to get the attention and the rest were happy to confirm this. Languages in this lesson became a proud reflection of the students' identities, of who they are.

## ***4.2. Our reflections on the pedagogical resistance areas of teachers***

Pedagogical resistance for us refers to the difficulties and roadblocks that arise when trying to implement plurilingual strategies in the classroom. The reflections that follow on particular cases of resistance highlight the continuous effort to close the gap between educational theory and real-world application while providing insights into the challenges of overcoming these obstacles.

### ***4.2.1. Pedagogical resistance areas encountered by Philipp***

**Philipp:** I have encountered some areas of resistance further along my teacher education. These instances occurred after I implemented my plurilingual lesson and discussed it with Mine.

The first one of these instances is the roundtable discussion. Attending a winter school event at HU, Berlin on "Exploring plurilingual and multilingual teaching practices" was a thought-provoking experience. After a panel discussion on plurilingual teaching practices, I engaged with a teacher trainer who raised concerns about the practicality of plurilingual strategies. He argued that English speaking time was already limited, and incorporating other languages might further reduce it. This conversation reinforced the challenges of bridging theory and practice in the classroom.

After finishing my Master of Education, I started teacher training. I had to confront my own internalized monolingual habitus. In the first weeks, students would ask me questions in German, and I would respond in English. However, I soon realized that allowing this would impact my final teaching exam negatively, having in mind the system I was entering. I faced the dilemma of promoting English as the classroom language, even though we all knew German.

To challenge this, I adopted a humorous approach by pretending not to understand German during lessons. However, this strategy backfired in one instance when a student excitedly shared a story in German, only to be met with my feigned confusion. When I asked him to repeat it in English, he suddenly lost interest and claimed his story wasn't important. This incident made me realize that I had unintentionally stifled communication.

### ***4.2.2. Mine's reflections on pedagogical resistances***

**Mine:** From my own observations, I can express that the monolingual tendency is deeply rooted both in society at large and in language teaching and also in academia in Germany. That is the case despite the fact that linguistic diversity is the defining character of Berlin, where I have been living for seven years now. This kind of monolingual positioning inevitably spins on all the wheels of the system, including schools. During my school visits I have encountered many incidents that vote for the monolingual habitus in English language classrooms. Some were subtle, but others were direct like the example of the German box.

The insistence on native-speakerism and an English-only perspective are still out there in our English language curricula and in the mindset of English teachers. Although many students are plurilingual and can employ elements from their languages in additional language classes if given the opportunity, the boundaries between their own languages and target languages are “defined or hard” in school settings (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013, p. 592). Cenoz and Gorter (2013) rightly argue that English language teachers are expected not only to use only English, but also to avoid referencing elements from their first languages or other languages they have in their linguistic repertoires. Moreover, teachers can also refrain their students from speaking German and all other languages that are in the students’ repertoires by introducing strategies such as the “German box.” In our case, the English teacher uses the box as a restrictive method to prevent students from using other languages. She treats it as a Pandora’s box full of evil languages, and therefore students who use them are punished because students should only speak English in an English class.

Task instructions, clarifications, feedback mechanisms, and praising are also carried out only in English, which mostly restricts the emotional and motivational aspects of the language learning process.

With a plurilingual perspective in mind, we sought to make our research a cornerstone in reconstructing the narrative surrounding the German box. We envisioned transforming this box into a plurilingual space where all languages are valued, enabling students to use their diverse linguistic repertoires to express their cultural and social identities, thereby fostering additional language learning.

## **5. New Questions and Renewed Struggle**

There may be many questions revolving around the plausibility of the implementation of PAS in English classes. Research states that time- and content-related questions on such plurilingual lesson plans and more questions in terms of teacher training, material use, motivation, identity confirmation, and investment (Cummins, 2006; Darwin & Norton, 2015; De Costa & Norton, 2016) are just some that promptly stand out.

What has been discussed throughout this inquiry is the frequently-overlooked practice-based aspect of plurilingualism in language education. We realized the need of plurilingual lessons in the multilingual classrooms of Berlin due to our encounter with many student languages. Our readings, discussions, and enthusiasm facilitated a plurilingual lesson plan for the English class. The lesson itself became an engaging practice connected to students’ life paths, encompassing their linguistic repertoires, cultural backgrounds, and educational customs.

However, much work will be needed to exploit the full potential of plurilingualism in teaching languages and in what other ways it can contribute to inclusive education. What we have worked on serves as an example for an English language lesson plan advocating for plurilingualism. We hope many teachers may benefit from it and take it to the next level.

In conclusion, it is crucial for teachers and language policy makers to keep in mind that many students in Berlin undertaking the acquisition of an additional language are plurilingual. Some have received education in diverse cultural traditions, educational systems, and communities, and they often possess a repertoire characterized by diversity. Therefore, this multifaceted linguistic and cultural repertoire must be acknowledged as valid within the educational context. This can be done through the inclusion of plurilingual competence and strategies by teachers and in the curricula of language classes. This is how we can achieve more meaningful tasks and inclusive activities and maintain students

with strong drive and genuine interaction. This is also how we can break the monolingual mindset that is forced upon the students' lessons and their lives.

## Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Shu Hua Kao and Akiko Takagi of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.*)

## Author Bios

Dr. Z. Mine Derince is a teacher educator, a researcher, and an engaged language teacher committed to fostering criticality in English language education. She has been offering courses in Master of Education at the English Language Education Department, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin since 2019 and she works on curricular projects on plurilingual strategies and critical literacies with English teachers. Mine also has many years of experience in Istanbul at Marmara University School of Foreign Languages as an instructor, academic coordinator, and administrator. Her research interests mainly include critical literacy, plurilingualism and multilingualism, language planning and policy, language curriculum and material design, and World Englishes. She has presented papers at international conferences, published articles in educational journals, coordinated and participated in research projects on family multilingualism, plurilingualism, social cohesion and ELF awareness.

Z. Mine Derince教授は英語教育における批判的思考の育成に従事する教師教育者、研究者、そして実践的な言語教員である。2019年よりベルリンのHumboldt-Universität zu Berlin英語教育学部の教育学修士課程で授業を担当し、英語教員と共に複言語戦略と批判的リテラシーに関するカリキュラムプロジェクトに取り組んでいる。イスタンブールのMarmara University School of Foreign Languagesで教員、アカデミックコーディネーター、運営者としての経験を有する。批判的リテラシー、複言語主義・多言語主義、言語政策・計画、カリキュラム及び教材設計、World Englishesの研究に関心がある。国際会議での発表、教育ジャーナルへの執筆、複言語主義、社会的結束、ELF（共通語としての英語）への意識、そして批判的教育学に関する研究プロジェクトに参加している。

Philipp Rost earned his Bachelor's degree in English and Theatre from HBK Braunschweig and TU Braunschweig, followed by a Master of Arts in Theatre Education from UdK Berlin. He also holds a Master of Education in Theatre and English from UdK Berlin and HU Berlin. He has extensive experience in theatre education, having worked in the theatre education department at Schaubühne Berlin. Currently, he has completed a teacher training program and serves as a high school educator in Berlin, teaching English and Theatre. His teaching philosophy focuses on fostering empathetic dynamics in the classroom and helping students find their voice, with a keen awareness of addressing power dynamics within the school environment.

Philipp Rostは、HBK BraunschweigとTUBraunschweigで英語と演劇の学士号、UdK Berlinで演劇教育の修士号を取得する。UdK BerlinとHU Berlinで演劇と英語に関する教育学修士号も取得し、Schaubühne Berlinの演劇教育学部での教授経験を含む、演劇教育の分野で豊富な経験を有する。教員養成プログラムを修了後、現在はベルリンの高校で英語と演劇を教える教育者として活躍している。教育方針として、学校環境下の権力的なダイナミクスへの意識を持ちながら、教室内での共感的なダイナミクスを築き、生徒・学生が自身の意見を表明する力を引き出すことに重点を置いている。

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# Review of *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design* (Dat Bao, 2018)

Bao, D. *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design*. Multilingual Matters, 2018. 256 pp. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783099702>

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This practice-based book review examines Dat Bao's (2018) edited collection of articles titled *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design*. Comprising 13 articles, the volume features contributions from prominent figures in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials development, such as Alan Maley and Brian Tomlinson, alongside fresh insights from emerging practitioners. This collection of articles aims to highlight innovative approaches to improving ELT course materials through the implementation of creative pedagogies, specific resources, and the active involvement of educators and learners in materials development as a response to concerns related to current practices in coursebook design.

この実践的書評は、Dat Bao's (2018) 編集による「Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design」の論評を目的とする。この書籍は13の章で構成され、Alan MaleyやBrian Tomlinsonといった英語教育 (ELT) の教材開発における著名な専門家による寄稿や、新進気鋭の実践者からの新しい見識が収められている。この論文集の目的は、創造的な教授法やリソース、教材開発における教育者と学習者の積極的な関与を通じて、現在の教科書デザインに関連する課題に対応し、ELTの教材改善を図る革新的なアプローチを示すことにある。

### Keywords

creative materials development, innovative coursebook design, creative pedagogies, teacher and learner involvement in material development

創造的な教材開発、革新的な教科書デザイン、創造的な教授法、教材開発における教育者と学習者の関与

### Introduction

As a teacher of German as a Foreign Language and co-author of a textbook for high school students of German at the intermediate low (ACTFL) / B1 (CEFR) level, I am deeply committed to employing creative pedagogies and innovative teaching methodologies. My foremost goal is to optimize the effectiveness of these learning/teaching materials to support students in acquiring proficiency in the German language, rather than mere rote learning. According to Language Testing International, a licensee of the American Council on the Teaching of Language (ACTFL), language proficiency entails the ability to effectively use a language for real-world purposes and to communicate across all modes of communication: speaking, writing, listening, and reading (LTI, n.d.). This implies that language acquisition transcends gaining declarative knowledge, such as vocabulary, grammar rules, and cultural nuances. Instead, it involves imparting procedural knowledge, instructing students on how to use the language in context by engaging students in real-world activities and exercises that reinforce these concepts and skills.

My keen interest in innovative teaching approaches led me to explore *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design* and



write this review. In this process, I learned that existing concerns within the ELT community regarding the limitations in current coursebook design - the lack of creativity, personalization and learner involvement - are not unlike the ones raised within the German language teaching community here in the United States. Curious to learn more about the innovative approaches to the material development discussed in responses to these limitations, I delved into Bao's collection of articles with the intention of applying their findings to enhance my own coursebook design process and teaching. Throughout my review, I will draw upon my personal experiences as a German language teacher and coursebook developer to offer insights and reflections on the topics presented in the book.

Attending school in Germany in the 1990s meant that I was able to "learn" multiple languages, including English, French, and Italian. However, I did not truly acquire any of them. The emphasis was on teaching factual knowledge over practical application in real-world contexts. As a result, I am still able to recall many verb conjugations and grammar rules, yet when asked to speak in French I find myself at a loss. This led me to opting against the traditional way of teaching languages through explicit instruction of grammar, memorization of vocabulary, and dissemination of cultural facts, when I chose to become a language teacher.

During my initial years in the profession, many of the teaching resources at my disposal were largely outdated in content and failed to align with contemporary research, theories, or best practices in second language acquisition (SLA). Consequently, I found myself compelled to create my own curriculum centered around the communicative approach and acquisition driven instruction (ADI), an approach that focuses on the implicit development of proficiency. I dedicated myself to exploring and applying creative pedagogies and innovative teaching methods rooted in performance-based approaches, such as role-playing and improvisation.

Additionally, I focused my energies on creating dynamic, interactive learning environments where students are immersed in real-world contexts and exposed to authentic materials in hopes to paint a realistic and current image of the German-speaking world. My students actively participated in numerous collaborative initiatives organized by the Goethe-Institut, including projects like *Das Bild der Anderen* (Goethe Institute, n.d.) or the German-American Virtual Exchange (GAVE) (Smith, 2020) in conjunction with our partner school in Nagold, Baden-Württemberg, Germany. Through these enriching experiences, my students have been immersed in authentic German language use, connecting both learners of German and native speakers through cultural exchanges. These projects provide invaluable opportunities for students to learn German in a natural, immersive environment, fostering not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural understanding and appreciation. Integrating language learning with an understanding of the cultures associated with the target language equips learners with the valuable intercultural awareness and communication skills necessary to promote meaningful cross-cultural interactions. In this type of learning environment, students have the opportunity to unconsciously internalize language patterns through exposure, practice, and interaction, leading to an implicit understanding of the language and its cultures.

When I was asked in late 2019 to co-author the InterKulturell® Intermediate textbook for high school students learning German at the intermediate low (ACTFL) / B1 (CEFR) level, I had no hesitation in accepting the offer. However, I quickly became aware of the inherent limitations of writing a textbook which led me to my "puzzles": How can I ensure that my materials engage learners in meaningful ways, allowing them to interact dynamically and personally with the target language? How do I create activities that inspire creativity and encourage students to use the language in real-world contexts, while simultaneously

responding to diverse learning environments, cultural contexts, and individual student needs?

With this context in mind, I was intrigued by the opportunity to explore Dat Bao's (2018) collection of articles in *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design* to explore the extent to which ELT materials development in various parts of the world diverge or cohere with both our practices and our challenges in L2 curriculum design here in the USA. I was also curious to learn more about the authors' understanding of what creativity and innovation might look like in the context of materials development and what the authors suggest could be done to "go beyond" the current trends to involve the learners in material design. In this review, I approach Bao's compilation of articles from two perspectives. First, I adopt a conventional book review structure by providing an overview of the book. Then, I follow with a critical analysis of its content, focusing on each of its three sections. Throughout the review, I assess both the relevance of the book's insights to the readership of this journal and their connection to my personal experiences as a coursebook developer and teacher, approaching the review as both a general academic critique and as a reflection on its practical application to my own work.

## **Overview of the Book**

The collection of articles is thoughtfully organized around three areas of debate in materials development. The first section, *Improving ELT Materials Through Creative Pedagogies*, focuses on theoretical frameworks and innovative perspectives on the traditional approach to ELT materials development. This is followed by *Improving ELT Materials Through Specific Resources*, which highlights practical examples and case studies of how creative materials can be applied in the classroom to foster engagement, critical thinking, and student-centered learning. The book concludes with *Improving ELT Materials Through Teacher and Learner Involvement*, which places emphasis on the active participation of teachers and learners in materials writing while further exploring ways to personalize the learning experience. Instead of summarizing the questions and solutions presented in each article individually, this review focuses on the shared insights regarding current trends and issues in coursebook design as highlighted by the authors.

In the preface, Bao urges the reader to engage in reflection regarding contemporary materials development. Bao highlights the significance of grounding such reflection in "empirical research and pedagogical conditions for creative learning" (xii), with the ultimate goal of "expanding current practices in coursebook design" (xi). This call to action finds support in the collective voice of both esteemed and emerging practitioner researchers in the field of ELT materials development included in this collection of articles. These authors emphasize the pressing need for ELT course materials to embrace innovative approaches and perspectives that go beyond the common practices.

## **Part 1: Improving ELT Materials Through Creative Pedagogies**

In the opening article, *Making Typical Coursebook Activities More Beneficial for the Learner*, Brian Tomlinson demonstrates that classroom exercises--closed questions, controlled conversations, True/False, matching exercises, and sentence completion--"typically feature[d] in L2 coursebooks have changed very little in the [last] 50 years" (p. 21). While these activity types are "relatively easy to write, easy to use, can be readily employed as classroom tests and provide easy practice in doing typical examination-type tasks," he

argues that they “have very little value in facilitating language acquisition or in helping learners develop communicative competence” (p. 36). Moreover, these activities lack room for creativity and learners’ personalized participation. In my own experience as a textbook author, I have often encountered similar arguments in favor of such tasks from both publishers and teachers. Publishers frequently argue that these types of activities must be included in textbooks because teachers expect them. They are straightforward to grade, as there is a clear right or wrong answer, and they do not require a significant amount of classroom time. However, while I understand the practical benefits of these activities—especially for busy teachers managing large classes—I share Tomlinson’s concerns about their limited value for language development. In my work, I have seen how relying too heavily on these tasks can diminish opportunities for creativity and meaningful language use, leading to a more passive learning experience. To strike a balance, I have worked to incorporate more open-ended, creative tasks in the textbooks I co-authored, aiming to provide teachers with flexibility while still offering practical, easy-to-grade activities for certain contexts.

In chapter 3, *Creative Materials: An Oxymoron?*, Alan Maley discusses the limitations of creativity in coursebook materials. He notes, “By definition, the materials are put together by one group of people (authors, publishers, ministries, teachers) for use by another group of people (learners, teachers, etc.). This presupposes that those who make the materials already know what will be suitable for those unknown people who will use them” (p. 35). This raises questions about what creative materials are, as Maley asks “(D)o we mean that the creativity is somehow inherent in the ingenious way the materials have been devised? Or do we mean that the materials somehow produce a creative reaction or response from learners?” (p. 35).

While it is clear that textbook authors cannot account for every classroom context or fully anticipate the diverse assumptions and backgrounds of the teachers and learners engaging with their materials, I believe there are fundamental principles of creativity and learner involvement that should guide our design process. I strive to create materials that encourage active participation, enabling learners to express their own ideas rather than simply responding to predetermined prompts. I also prioritize adaptability, ensuring that the materials can be easily modified to meet the diverse needs and preferences of learners. Since the InterKulturell® Intermediate textbook is designed for classes with multiple levels, we offer many activities as “Level Ups,” called *Einen Schritt weiter* (One more step), making tasks more complex for advanced students. Additionally, we provide suggestions in the teacher notes accompanying each activity explaining how to differentiate or expand the tasks (see the example page from Unit 1 My Life, My Home in Figure 1).

Finally, I emphasize collaboration by designing tasks that promote interaction and dialogue among students, fostering a sense of community. For example, in the InterKulturell® Intermediate textbook, I created the *Unsere Globale Gemeinschaft* (Our Global Community) project-based learning tasks which are aimed at promoting student engagement with the German language and the cultures of the German-speaking world through research, discussion, and presentation activities. In one of these hands-on projects, students design birdhouses inspired by their research on architectural elements used in buildings from German-speaking countries.

### 18.1 Einen Werbespot analysieren

As they watch this commercial, students may wonder at first what is being advertised. A helpful approach is to have students describe what they see in the video to determine what product or service is being promoted (**Handlung der Szene, Personen: Geschlecht, Alter, Aussehen** etc., **Dekor: Räume, Landschaft** etc.). You may also present this video without sound as a movie talk in which you describe what you see.

Next, have students analyze the commercial using the AIDA principle. Ask additional guiding questions such as: **Wer soll das Land besuchen? Warum? Wie wird das Land „verkauft“? Welche Emotionen werden angesprochen? Passt der Inhalt des Werbespots zum Ziel?**

**Resource(s)**  
Video

**ACTFL Standard(s)**  
Communication: Interpretive  
Cultures: Products

**Answers**  
Answers will vary.

### 18.2A/B Einen Werbespot kreieren

Tell students to refer back to the AIDA-Principle as a starting point for discussing how to effectively advertise the product they have selected. Once they jotted down their responses to these questions, distribute the storyboard graphic organizer to help them organize their ideas and outline the sequences of scenes of their commercial.

For **18.2B**, remind students that every group member should understand the script and their role in filming the commercial. Once the commercial is recorded, have students edit it using readily available apps. While student groups present their finished products, the rest of the class should take notes on how well the various parts of the AIDA principle were followed.

**Resource(s)**  
Storyboard graphic organizer

**ACTFL Standard(s)**  
Communication: Presentational

**Answers**  
Answers will vary.

## Kapitel 1 | Mein Leben, meine Heimat

### 18 Werbespots

Die Industrie- und Handelskammer hat einen Wettbewerb ausgeschrieben und du möchtest mitmachen. Dafür musst du einen kreativen Werbespot produzieren. Der Werbespot soll ein Produkt aus deiner Region auf eine originelle und ästhetische Art und Weise bewerben.

#### 18.1 Einen Werbespot analysieren 🎥

In diesem Video wird Werbung für das Land Liechtenstein gemacht. Ziel ist es, Menschen zu motivieren, Liechtenstein zu besuchen. Seht euch das Video an und schreibt, was ihr seht. Analysiert es dann nach dem AIDA-Prinzip und schreibt Notizen.

Attention (Aufmerksamkeit): Wie wird die Zielgruppe angesprochen?	Interest (Interesse): Wie wird Interesse für das Produkt geweckt?	Desire (Begehren): Wie entsteht beim Zuschauer der Wunsch, das Produkt kaufen zu wollen?	Action (Handlung): Wie sorgt der Werbespot dafür, dass das Produkt wirklich gekauft wird?

#### 18.2A Einen Werbespot kreieren 🎨

Kreiert in Gruppenarbeit einen 10-30 Sekunden langen Werbespot für ein lokales oder regionales Produkt. Nutzt ein Storyboard zur Skizzierung der Szenen. Präsentiert eure Werbespot-Idee eurer Klasse.

#### 18.2B Einen Werbespot kreieren - Ein Schritt weiter! 🎥

Erstellt in Gruppenarbeit einen 10-30 Sekunden langen Werbespot für ein lokales oder regionales Produkt. Nutzt ein Storyboard zur Skizzierung der Szenen und nehmt den Werbespot dann auf. Präsentiert eurer Klasse den fertigen Werbespot.



Schloss Vaduz, Liechtenstein

Scaffold

To help groups with **18.2A** and **18.2B**, provide these pointers:

- The best commercials are funny, memorable, unique, or have an interesting character and tell a story.
- Use bookending: same statement at start and end of commercial
- Slogans use rhymes or repetition
- Logos can have letters, a word, or a drawing, or these can be combined
- Many commercials dedicate the last five seconds to a still image of the product, logo, or company with accompanying commentary

Differentiate

Alternatively for **18.2A**, create a poster board to advertise a product. Draw attention and interest to the product by making it unique so people want to buy it.

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Figure 1. Example Page With Accompanying Teacher Notes

**Unsere globale Gemeinschaft**  
In each *Unsere globale Gemeinschaft* section, students will be asked to investigate products and practices to understand cultural perspectives and interact with others in and from another culture.

The activities of each *Unsere globale Gemeinschaft* meet many of the goals of Project-Based Learning, including a focus on product and process, alignment to academic standards and success skills, collaboration with other students, real-world context and application of learning, and interaction with a German-speaking public beyond the classroom.

**43.1 Architektonische Merkmale analysieren**  
Have students identify and document the architectural elements, geometric forms, materials used, and cultural or historical influences of the buildings they find interesting. Then, have them consider how these features can be creatively incorporated into their birdhouse design.

**Resource(s)**  
Portfolio

**ACTFL Standard(s)**  
Communication: Interpretive  
Communication: Interpersonal  
Connections: Acquiring Information  
Communities: Lifelong Learning

**Answers**  
Answers will vary.

Kapitel 7 | Kunst macht sichtbar

### Unsere globale Gemeinschaft

**43 DACH-inspirierte Vogelhäuser**  
Ein deutsches Sprach- und Kulturinstitut hat einen Wettbewerb für eine Kunstinstallation ausgeschrieben. Diese Installation soll Vogelhäuser zeigen, die die Architektur und Kultur eines der deutschsprachigen Länder repräsentieren. Eure Deutschklasse hat sich entschieden, daran teilzunehmen und das beste Vogelhausdesign einzureichen.

**43.1 Architektonische Merkmale analysieren**  
Schaut euch die Bilder in Partnerarbeit an und untersucht die architektonischen Merkmale der Gebäude, die euch am meisten ansprechen. Sucht dann im Internet nach weiteren Informationen zu den Gebäuden oder nach anderen architektonischen Beispielen, die für euer Vogelhaus interessant sein könnten. Macht euch Notizen zu diesen Fragen:

- Welche architektonischen Elemente (z. B. Fensterformen, Verzierungen (ornamentation), Dachstile) fallen dir bei diesen Gebäuden auf?
- Welche geometrischen Formen dominieren das Gebäude?
- Welche Materialien wurden verwendet?








**So weit bin ich interkulturell**  
Investigate: I can use German to investigate examples of architectural styles in German-speaking countries.

498

Unsere globale Gemeinschaft

**43.2 Ideen für ein Vogelhausdesign entwickeln**  
a. Teilt die Ergebnisse eurer Recherche und eure Ideen mit einem anderen Paar. Gebt einander Rat, um die Vogelhäuser zu verbessern.  
b. Zeichnet in Partnerarbeit ein Modell eures Vogelhauses und baut es dann nach.

**43.3 Das Vogelhausdesign präsentieren**  
a. Bereite eine Präsentation für euer Vogelhausdesign vor. Zeigt die Besonderheiten eures Designs und eure kreativen Ideen.  
b. Ladet Deutschsprechende aus der Gemeinde zur Schule ein und präsentiert eure Vogelhäuser. Alternativ könnt ihr eine Online-Präsentation organisieren. Die Besucher\*innen stimmen ab, welches Design und welche Präsentation ihnen am besten gefällt.

**So weit bin ich interkulturell**  
Interact: I can interact in German to share my design based on an architectural style I have researched.

**44 Interkulturelle Vergleiche**  
Reflect on the architectural style you chose for the art installation in 43. Why did you select this style, and how does it represent German-speaking countries to you? Which architectural styles do you find most representative of German-speaking countries? Why do these styles seem particularly "German" to you? What architectural features or characteristics in your region are considered cultural symbols? How do these symbols compare to those found in buildings from German-speaking countries? Answer the questions in the discussion forum.



Kapitel 7 | Unsere globale Gemeinschaft 499

**43.2 Ideen für ein Vogelhausdesign entwickeln**  
To help students plan and visualize their design projects accurately, have them use graph paper and sketch to scale. Page students to provide construction feedback after each presentation. Afterwards, give students ample time for refining sketches based on this feedback.

Consider collaborating with teachers in other departments, such as Art and Technical Education (Woods, Welding, 3-D Printing), to have students build their birdhouses. Alternatively, students can build birdhouses using construction paper, Legos, blocks, AI-generated images, or sketches.

**ACTFL Standard(s)**  
Communication: Interpersonal  
Connections: Other Disciplines

**Answers**  
Answers will vary.

**43.3 Das Vogelhausdesign präsentieren**  
Contact your local German cultural organizations, universities, or community centers to find native speakers willing to participate. Consider using this project to promote German around campus by displaying the bird houses in a public space, such as the school library.

**Resource(s)**  
Portfolio

**ACTFL Standard(s)**  
Communication: Presentational  
Communities: Lifelong Learning  
Communities: School and Global

**Answers**  
Answers will vary.

**44 Interkulturelle Vergleiche**  
The *Interkulturelle Vergleiche* questions encourage students to reflect on language and culture and make simple comparisons between the target culture and their own. To minimize the use of English during class, have students reflect and respond in the discussion forum online.

**Resource(s)**  
Discussion forum, *Meine Kulturnotizen*

**ACTFL Standard(s)**  
Comparisons: Cultural

**Answers**  
Answers will vary.

Figure 2. Example Collaborative Project with Accompanying Teacher Notes

In our textbook design, my co-authors and I have actively sought to create a diverse range of open-ended materials that cater to various learning styles, preferences, and interests. Many of these materials have been or will be tested in the classroom before inclusion in the textbook, allowing for continuous adaptation and enhancement to ensure that learners have choices and that teachers retain the flexibility to decide which activities to include or exclude. To further support or challenge learners, we are also developing differentiated activities for the online workbook.

According to the different authors in Part 1, creativity is difficult to define. Noting “creativity is often defined as freedom from control” (p. 5), Bao juxtaposes this definition with Tan Bee Tin’s statement that creativity can be promoted by decreasing freedom, as “the constraints in creative tasks can provide opportunities for learners to act and think creatively and independently” (p. 96). Tan Bee Tin’s argument here is that too much freedom hinders learners from exploring new avenues. They may fall back on previously acquired language patterns and vocabulary, if they feel lost in the ambiguity and complexity of the assignment that requires them to create something new. In cognitive psychology this is known as “cognitive fixation tendency” (p. 101). Tin gives an example of an exploratory study on task constraints where the same pair of students were assigned two tasks with different levels of freedom. Task 1, a highly constrained activity, instructed the students to write a 4-line poem with the first letter of the word “time”: Write an acrostic on “TIME.” This encouraged the students to explore and transform their language more than Task 2, which gave the following instruction: “Write a simile on “Hope is like parking spaces”: Give two reasons.- which let them have more freedom with the task. In Task 1, the formal constraint of starting each line with a specific letter pushed students to engage with new language and meanings. In contrast, Task 2 allowed the students to rely on familiar ideas and language, resulting in

less linguistic exploration. The freedom in Task 2, combined with already well-established background knowledge, led to cognitive fixation for the learners and limited their creativity.

Thus, the question arises: How should authors design language learning tasks that invite learners to use the target language in creative ways, stretching them beyond communicating about known topics to generate language that combines “existing familiar ideas in an unfamiliar, unusual way” (p. 100)? Tin suggests the following features when designing tasks to facilitate linguistic autonomy and creativity within the language learner:

- focus on the unknown/new meaning rather than on known meaning;
- focus on partially defined goals rather than on well defined goals;
- disciplined and imaginative use of constraints rather than freedom to broaden possibilities. (p. 103)

The emphasis on “partially defined goals” highlights the challenge of striking a balance between providing enough structure to guide learners while also leaving room for them to engage in the creative process, as the task unfolds in the classroom. In practice, Tin recommends implementing a two-phase approach that promotes creative and language exploration: (a) an idea generating phase, and (b) an idea exploration phase. In the initial stage, students are encouraged to brainstorm ideas without focusing too much on linguistic accuracy, encouraging students to draw on their imagination and previous knowledge. In the second phase, students use this pool of ideas and to develop them further with the goal of expressing their ideas more precisely within the constraints of the task.

The authors of the chapters included in the first part of *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development* make several suggestions about what can be done to improve ELT materials through innovative efforts and creative pedagogies. One of the easiest approaches proposed here, in my opinion, is the rethinking of typical coursebook activities. As mentioned earlier, these activities often lack value in facilitating language acquisition and communicative competence. These activities should be redesigned to provide rich, meaningful input, engage learners cognitively and personally, and offer authentic opportunities for language use and communication. Tomlinson argues that this can easily be done by “make[ing] alterations to how we use them, both when developing new materials and when adapting existing materials...The most obvious way is to open them up so that they involve the learners” (Tomlinson, p. 26). For example, closed questions like Did you like the movie? can easily be transformed into open-ended questions such as What aspects of the movie did you find most interesting, and why? so that learners are invited to think more deeply about a topic and connect their answers to their personal experiences and own lives. When material developers incorporate open-ended activities, such as idea generation, strategic planning, and the production of something new into their materials, they provide opportunities for students to unleash their creativity and critical thinking skills while completing the assignment. This approach allows students to synthesize their knowledge and come up with more elaborate and creative responses, thereby tapping into their full potential.

## **Part 2: Improving ELT Materials Through Specific Resources**

The second section of the book highlights several approaches to enhancing ELT materials using specific resources, such as process drama, literature, ICT integration, and online materials and tools, to foster creativity.

In Hae-ok Park’s article *ELT Materials Using Process Drama*, process drama is highlighted as a method that actively involves both students and their teacher in the “co-creat[ion] of [role play in] an imaginary context” (Park, p. 110). Unlike traditional performances where

students have memorized their lines ahead of time, participants in process drama improvise their dialogue within a structured context in the moment. For instance, many textbooks designed for the world language classroom include a chapter on clothing. Typically, students learn the names of various clothing items and related adjectives (colors, patterns, sizes, etc.). Students use these adjectives to describe what they or their peers wear, focusing on using the correct adjective ending. When they engage in dialogue or role playing, students are often instructed to ask for and give opinions about clothing, or simulate a shopping experience where they practice language skills like asking for prices, sizes, or availability. Teachers could make this more creative by inviting students to participate in a process drama centered around the theme of finding the perfect prom outfit. In this example, students prepare for prom by assuming various roles, such as themselves, their prom date, their parents, or the store clerk. Based on their characters' preferences and budgets, they all need to find an outfit that matches with their prom date, yet also meets with their parents' approval. During the role play, they "shop" for outfits, interacting with one another to ask questions, provide suggestions, and negotiate choices in the target language. The activity culminates in a reflection session where students discuss the challenges they faced and the language skills they developed. To extend the activity, students can participate in a mini-fashion show, showcasing their chosen outfits while explaining their selections, or write a diary entry from their character's perspective about the prom experience.

Over the years, I have had great success using performance-based and drama-based activities as well as improvisation in my classrooms. I strongly believe that they are one of the most effective pedagogical tools available to language instructors. I usually start with easy and short performance-based activities, such as "Reverse Charades" (Figure 3) where the class has to act out the displayed word and the person in front of the class has to guess the word.

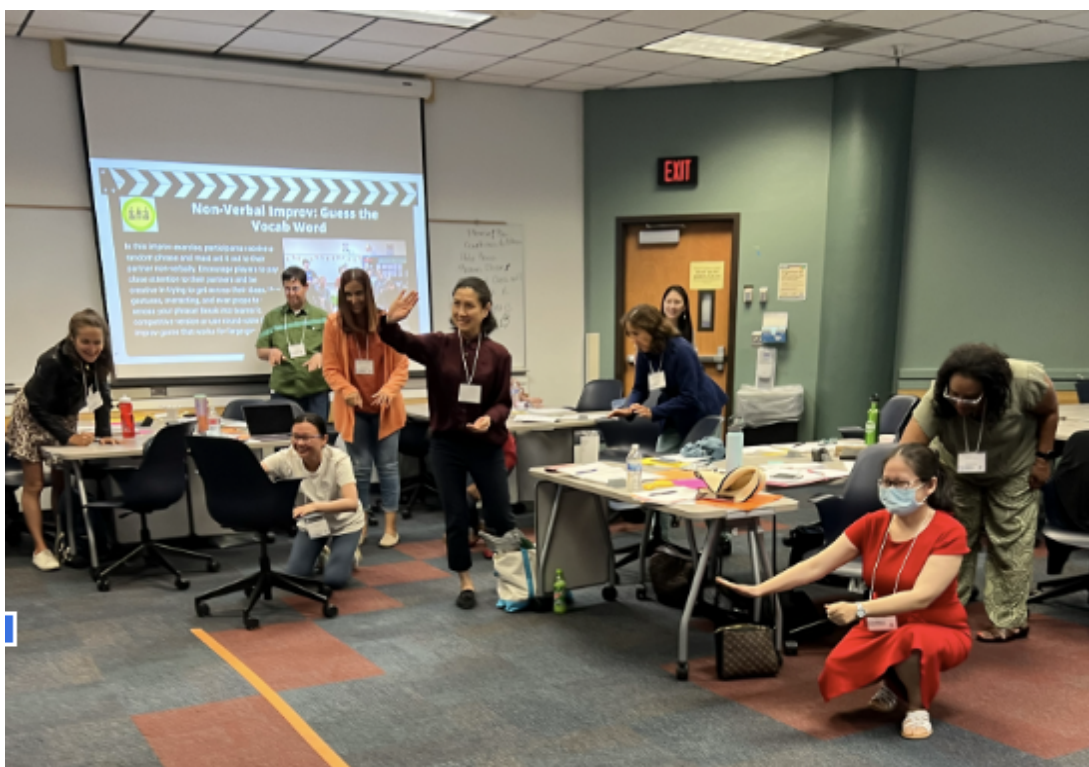


Figure 3. Reverse Charades

Another activity is “Yes, and then...,” in which two students take turns describing their daily routine using the past tense. One student starts by saying, “This morning, we woke up, and...,” and their partner adds to the story, “Yes, this morning we woke up and we turned off our alarm.” In advanced classes, I make use of Francis Debyser and Jean-Marc Caré’s method called *La Simulation Globale*. Here, students are immersed in real-life, interactive, and simulated situations that require them to communicate in the target language. Students enrolled in the third or fourth year work on 10 minute-long theater adaptations of literary works, such as *Max und Moritz* or *Emil und die Detektive* (Figure 4) which are then performed at local theater competitions.



**Figure 4.** 10-minute Adaptations of Literary Works

In his article, “Living in the Materials World: Why Literature Has a Place Here,” Paul Hullah voices concerns about the diminishing presence of literary texts in ELL curricula. He emphasizes that properly selected texts, where learners “must know 98-99% of the words” (p. 128), can effectively engage and motivate disinterested English L2 learners. Poetry, in particular, he states, is an inspiring teaching resource that should be preserved. According to Hullah, interpreting poetry enables learners to personalize their language learning experience, encouraging them to find value in their personal interpretation of language and to overcome their expectation that all assignments must have correct or incorrect answers (p. 127). Here, Hullah also introduces a structured approach consisting of eight activities (pre-reading, word check, working with the text: cloze activity, listening/reading aloud, comprehension activity, response, personal/emotional response, discussion/debate/essay/presentation, and review/conclusion). This approach demonstrates how poems or pop song lyrics can successfully be integrated into language learning contexts.

Another way to encourage learners to act creatively with the target language according to Dat Bao and Xiaofang Shang, as highlighted in their article ICT Integration in Second Language Materials: Challenges and Insights is through the integration of Information



and Communication Technology (ICT). The limited theories and implementations of ICT in language learning poses a challenge. The “perceptions and attitudes” of teachers and learners “towards the use of technology” are often poor, leading them to prefer traditional “face-to-face interactions” (p. 141). Many educators face significant barriers due to a lack of knowledge and the expectation to develop ICT skills independently. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, many educators were forced to adapt to new technologies and digital platforms on the fly with little to no training and under impossible deadlines. Additionally, the genesis of generative AI presents further challenges, especially for educators with limited digital literacy or access to resources, leaving them unsure how to incorporate these tools into their teaching effectively.

Coursebooks can play a significant role in overcoming these problems by helping teachers to come up with “creative technological ideas” and by guiding them toward vetted “online resources” (p. 143). I believe that collaboration between teachers and material developers increases the chances that attempts to integrate ICT into the curriculum are successful. In the context of the InterKulturell® series, we encourage teachers to incorporate various web tools and applications aligned with recommended activities, such as using an interactive bulletin board to facilitate discussions through short videos or a design platform for making digital posters or flyers. Teacher guidance is provided in the margin of the teacher edition of the textbook, detailing how they might effectively integrate the suggested tool or app into their own classroom environments.

### **Part 3: Improving ELT Materials Through Teacher and Learner Involvement**

The contributors in this section place emphasis on the active participation of teachers and learners in materials writing, while also exploring ways to personalize the learning experience.

In the article *Localising the Genre-Based Approach: Lessons for Materials Development in Thailand*, for instance, Rajeevnath Ramnath emphasizes the challenges that English Language Teaching (ELT) materials face in addressing genuine language acquisition needs in Thailand. Ramnath critiques the fact that many ELT materials are designed to meet specific pedagogical “expectations” (p. 181), which in the Thai context often leads teachers to prioritize preparing students for entrance examinations or employment opportunities over focusing on language development. This “teach to the test” mentality detracts from a more holistic approach to language learning, which should center on language use and development itself rather than exam performance (p. 182).

Ramnath draws on Alan Maley’s influential work, *Inputs, Processes and Outcomes in Materials Development: Extending the Range* (Maley, 2003), which highlights the narrow focus of many teaching materials. Maley notes that traditional ELT materials often exclude more engaging and culturally rich texts such as folktales, poems, and advertisements, favoring instead dry, expository texts or heavily adapted literary content (p. 182). Such materials can limit students’ engagement with language and hinder their ability to explore different communicative purposes and textual genres.

In response, Ramnath adapted their own teaching approach, particularly in the *Theory and Practice of Reading and Writing* course within an MA ELT program, to a genre-based approach to teach English. He encouraged students to explore authentic texts and write across genres—such as fictional narratives, recounts, and argumentative texts—helping them move beyond seeing writing as purely a linguistic product. In doing so, students not

only engage more meaningfully with the language but also develop a deeper understanding of how language functions in different genres and contexts.

In my opinion, the most significant outcome of this course was the students' decision to use their texts to develop materials in their Materials Development class. Despite their initial struggles with "creating original activities for a group of unknown students" (p. 188) and moving beyond the typical activities found in traditional textbooks, such as multiple choice questions and literal comprehension exercises, this experience helped boost their confidence as both language learners and future educators. As Ramnath concludes, the reason for this is that "if teachers develop materials, they are likely to be better motivated to teach those materials" (p. 189).

Drawing parallels to my own experience in developing materials with college students for an extracurricular German club at a charter school in the southwestern United States, I observed similar challenges. The students, despite their experience in creative language use, often lacked the pedagogical background to design effective materials. They required more guidance than expected, as they struggled to translate their own learning experiences into functional teaching materials. This gap between theory and practice mirrors Ramnath's observation that students, even when exposed to a broader range of genres, may still face difficulties in applying their knowledge to actual materials development. However, once the materials were successfully designed and used during the German club meetings, the students' ownership and pride in their work could clearly be seen.

Echoing Ramnath, there is also an expectation here in the United States that textbooks include certain exercises, activities, and tasks that support teachers in preparing students for specific tests. While this is generally true, I would argue that this is not to the same extent as seen in the English textbooks used in Thailand. In our case, as authors of the InterKulturell® series, we definitely aim to prepare students for passing the Advanced Placement German Language and Culture Exam (College Board, n.d.), which is often taken after four years of studying German at high school in the USA. Such practical aims have their place in the world of language acquisition, as they have obvious academic and professional benefits. While assessments that seek to rank students or prove their professional competence will never be perfect, it would be counterproductive to ignore them given that achieving some kind of professionally recognized competency is often the primary reason students pursue studying a language in the first place. What these articles argue, and I agree with, is that true language competency, which includes academic and professional competency, is best achieved with a mixed approach that empowers students to build stronger cognitive bridges through the use of more dynamic forms of learning.

Another article in this section of the book that caught my attention as a textbook author was Bangladeshi EFL Teachers' Views on the *English for Today* Textbook by Mohammad Moninoor Roshid, Md Zulfeqar Haider, and Hosne Ara Begum. In this article, the authors evaluate *English for Today*, the primary textbook used in Bangladeshi government-approved secondary schools. The evaluation process involves various criteria, including linguistic, sociocultural, pedagogical, technical, and general aspects. Surveys conducted with ELT teachers revealed positive perceptions of the textbook's focus on grammar rules and student-centered activities, but also highlighted shortcomings, such as insufficient vocabulary recycling and a lack of organized vocabulary lists. Furthermore, the authors found that inexperienced teachers had a "more positive perception" (p. 231) of the content than experienced teachers, as "the mean perception of the experienced teachers [were] generally found to be higher than those of the beginner in all selected areas except two, [...] presentation of vocabulary and indication of pedagogical approaches" (p. 230).

I believe the difference in perception could stem from several factors. Experienced teachers generally have more extensive classroom experience, which allows them to critically evaluate and adapt teaching materials more effectively. Additionally, their deeper understanding of pedagogical and methodological approaches may lead them to appreciate less obviously apparent aspects of a textbook, such as its structure, content, or curricular goals. Inexperienced teachers, on the other hand, might be more focussed on immediate practical application of the textbook, such as the ease of implementing the materials into their daily lesson plans or how content might be adapted to fit the diverse learning needs of their students. The two areas where their perceptions align--presentation of vocabulary and indication of pedagogical approaches--suggest that both beginner and veteran teachers recognize limitations in these aspects. Vocabulary presentation is a clear, tangible element that all teachers can observe and assess, and the indication of pedagogical approaches might be either underdeveloped or too implicit for all teachers to navigate confidently, regardless of their experience level.

Despite these challenges, the study commended the textbook's physical design, the way it caters to diverse learning styles, and its potential to foster creative and critical thinking. Roshid et al. emphasize that textbooks play a significant role in language teaching and learning, serving as the second most important factor in foreign language education after teachers. Textbooks provide structure, language content, pre-made tasks, and cost-effective learning resources. However, they also come with limitations, such as potential gender biases, lack of cultural and linguistic diversity, and limited encouragement for student creativity. These issues often arise from the long shelf life of textbooks, which are difficult and costly to replace. Older textbooks tend to be overly prescriptive, making them less adaptable to social and cultural changes that influence student learning.

As Roshid et al. point out, "developing an appropriate English textbook [or any language textbook] is a challenging task [...]. It requires time, energy, and expertise, and special consideration" (p. 232). Even when all contributors are experts in the field, some content, such as cultural facts, can become outdated by the time the book is published. This underscores the importance of continuous evaluation and improvement of teaching materials, as seen with *English for Today*, which provides "a number of avenues to exploit creativity [and] promote critical thinking" (p. 228).

## Conclusion

In reflecting on the "puzzles" central to my practice—engaging learners meaningfully and fostering their creativity in dynamic, real-world contexts—this exploration of ELT materials development has revealed valuable insights. Incorporating approaches like process drama, literature, ICT integration, and genre-based tasks underscores the importance of active, student-centered engagement. These methodologies allow students to interact with the target language in ways that are personally relevant and culturally meaningful, transforming passive learning into an immersive experience.

Drawing from my own experiences in incorporating drama and improvisation, as well as collaborative materials development, the challenge of balancing creative engagement with practical constraints remains a key focus. Just as my students have thrived through activities like role-playing and theater performances, so too must materials be designed to reflect the diverse cultural and linguistic realities learners face. By integrating technology and interactive tasks, we can offer more personalized and adaptive resources that cater to various learning environments and needs.

Ultimately, this dialogue between creativity and structure reminds us that the most effective materials are those that invite learners to take ownership of their language use. Whether through process drama, ICT integration, or literature, the goal is to create spaces where students not only use the language but also see its relevance in their lives. In doing so, we respond to the diverse cultural and educational contexts in which we teach, ensuring that our materials remain dynamic, responsive, and engaging.

In conclusion, this exploration of ELT materials development highlights the crucial interplay between creativity and structure in designing effective language learning resources. This dialogue is particularly relevant in my practice as a German language educator and textbook co-author, where I constantly navigate the challenge of engaging students meaningfully while accommodating diverse learning environments. The insights from Dat Bao's compilation, *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development*, reveal a pressing need for innovative approaches that empower both educators and learners. By incorporating methodologies such as process drama, ICT integration, and genre-based tasks, we can transform conventional paradigms and offer culturally relevant language experiences that resonate with students on a personal level.

As we strive to design materials that foster authentic interaction with the target language, the goal remains to create dynamic and responsive resources that invite learners to take ownership of their language use. This requires a careful balance of creativity and practicality, where flexibility and adaptability are prioritized. Ultimately, our commitment to fostering learner agency and engagement is essential to addressing the ongoing puzzles in materials development. Moving forward, it is imperative that we integrate these principles into our teaching practices and coursebook development, ensuring that creativity remains at the forefront as we respond to the diverse cultural and educational contexts in which we operate. In doing so, we not only enrich our students' language learning experiences but also contribute to a more vibrant and innovative landscape in language education.

## Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Stacey Vye and Katherine Thornton of the Learner Development Journal Review Network and Andy Barfield from the Journal Steering Group. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.)*

## Author Bio

Originally from Pforzheim, Germany, Melanie Mello has lived in the U.S. since 2005. She is an accomplished educator specializing in German language instruction with over 16 years of teaching experience at the elementary through the collegiate levels. Melanie has been recognized for her outstanding contributions to language education, including being named one of the five finalists for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' Teacher of the Year Award in 2020 and honored as the Distinguished Alumna of the College of Humanities & Fine Arts (CSU, Chico) in 2023. Currently, she is teaching German as a Faculty Associate for the School of International Letters and Cultures at Arizona State University and co-authoring the intermediate-level book in the *Interkulturell* series (Wayside Publishing). As a German Educational Multiplier within the Goethe-Institut's Teacher Training Program, she actively promotes the advancement of German language education in the USA.

Melanie Melloはドイツのプフォルツハイム出身で、2005年からアメリカに在住している。ドイツ語教育の専門家として、小学校から大学レベルまで16年以上の指導経験を持つ優れた教育者である。2020年にはアメリカ外国語教

育評議会の年間優秀教師賞の最終候補者5名のうちの1人に選ばれ、2023年にはカリフォルニア州立大学チコ校人文・美術学部の優秀卒業生として表彰された。現在、アリゾナ州立大学の国際言語文化学部の准教授としてドイツ語を教えながら、中級者向け教科書のInterkulturellシリーズの共著者としても活動している。また、ゲーテ・インスティテュート教員研修プログラムのドイツ語教育推進担当として、アメリカにおけるドイツ語教育の発展に尽力している。

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## Review of *Exploratory Practice for Continuing Professional Development* (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019)

*Exploratory Practice for Continuing Professional Development: An Innovative Approach for Language Teachers*. Assia Slimani-Rolls & Richard Kiely. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. xiv, 213 pp.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69763-5>

Reviewed by **Erzsébet Ágnes Békés**, volunteer teacher-research mentor, Ecuador  
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This book review on how Exploratory Practice can be employed for Continuing Professional Development is strongly tied to the reviewer's own experience of exploring the opportunities that book review writing by teacher-researchers and teacher-research mentors can create for their professional learning and advancement. In this review, first, a detailed account of the Language Teacher Research project featured in Slimani-Rolls and Kiely's volume is provided. This account focuses on six case studies that put learner development at the heart of the project. Drawing on the work carried out by these classroom practitioners who, with the help of the two editors, ventured into publication, the review identifies three key elements - the principles of EP, research design, and personal encouragement and confidence building - which the reviewer then relates to her own experiences and practices with mentoring book review writing as a process of co-designing authentic learning materials in a "virtual classroom." In the second part of this practice-related review the reviewer provides a concise report on how book review writing can be mentored in such a way that the review writer's mentees are supported continually in their writing and publishing efforts. The process is treated as a novel way of facilitating the creation of learner-generated materials and supporting the Continuous Professional Development of participants in the learning communities that evolve organically during the writing of book reviews.

この書評では、教員研究者や教員リサーチ・メンターによる書評執筆が継続的な専門能力開発にどのように貢献できるか、著者自身の経験をもとに探究する。はじめに、言語教員研究プロジェクトに関するSlimani-RollsとKiely'sの章を紹介する。この章は、学習者の成長を主軸にした6つのケーススタディに焦点を当てている。編集者の支援を受けながら出版を目指したこれらの教育実践者の取り組みを、書評では3つの要素—探索的実践の原則、研究デザイン、個人的な奨励と自信の構築—に分類し、著者自身の書評執筆指導の経験と「バーチャル・クラスルーム」での参加型学習教材デザインの過程に関連付ける。実践的書評の後半では、書評執筆のメンタリングがどのように行われ、メンターが執筆・出版活動において継続的な支援を受けられるかについて言及する。このプロセスは、学習者参加型の教材作成を促進し、書評執筆を通じて自然発生的に形成される学習コミュニティ内のメンバーが継続的専門能力開発できるよう支援する新しい手法である。

### Keywords

Exploratory Practice, Continuing Professional Development, mentoring teacher-research, book review writing, mentoring for publication

探究的実践、継続的専門能力開発、教員研究のメンタリング、書評、出版のためのメンタリング

### Introduction

I became specifically interested in Exploratory Practice (EP) when I was asked to write a review about the volume published on the work of the Exploratory Practice Group in Rio de Janeiro (Békés, 2021b). I was totally carried away by the exuberant writing in *Why seek to understand classroom life?: Experiences of the Exploratory Practice Group*, and how its members systematically searched for a better understanding of life in the classroom (Exploratory Practice Group, 2021). I was familiar with the idea that action research can contribute to teachers' professional development and autonomy (Békés, 2021a; Dikilitaş & Griffiths, 2017), so being invited to contribute to LDJ8 and write a review on Slimani-Rolls

and Kiely's Exploratory Practice for Continuing Professional Development (2019) offered an opportunity to further deepen my knowledge related to another branch of practitioner research. The invitation has also created a chance for me to describe and reflect on my recent practice of mentoring teacher-researchers in their publishing efforts, an activity which I have been pursuing through facilitating my mentees' book review writing since 2021. I perceive book review writing as an innovative approach to developing language learning materials as the writing process itself serves the purposes of creating a learning community and I consider such mentoring of teachers as a pedagogic activity for learner development - including my own improvement as a book review writer. The authentic materials generated in this way are related to existing ELT-specific materials (books), and are meant for a real audience. This allows my teacher-researcher mentees to move beyond the bounds of the classroom into the "real world" of publishing.

Slimani-Rolls and Kiely's book (2019), which describes how their Language Teacher Research (LTR) project was born and carried out, is notable for being the first to look at how *long-term* implementation of EP can support teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The LTR project was accomplished over two years between 2014 and 2016, and then extended for another year to mentor the participating teachers to write up the six case studies included. The aim of the LTR project was to enable the participants "to engage with practitioner research in order to understand better their professional context" (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019, p. 79). The long-term time frame proved beneficial because several of the six participating teachers needed many months before they were able to fully appreciate the principles of EP, start applying them in their classrooms and identify an issue or puzzle that appeared to be worth exploring "using normal classroom activities or Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs), as investigative tools" (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019, p. 79). PEPAs, which can be defined as "classroom activities that integrate teaching practices and research purposes especially in collecting data" (Dikilitaş & Griffiths, 2017, p. 290), are eminently useful in teacher research because they combine language learning with the exploratory dimension.

## How is the book structured and what is my related practice?

So, let us now look at the volume, which consists of two parts: Part 1 including Chapters 1–3 and Part 2 containing Chapters 4–11. The Introduction to Part 1, which describes the connection between EP and CPD, is followed by a more detailed look at how teachers teach and learn in a language education setting (Chapter 1). Next is how and why EP can provide a principled framework for CPD (Chapter 2) and, finally, this part is rounded off by discussing how EP can be pursued in modern foreign languages in a globalised world (Chapter 3).

The Introduction to Part 2 starts by describing the CPD initiative, which was set up within an EP framework. This is followed by presenting the LTR project itself (Chapter 4). The subsequent Chapters (5–10) constitute the heart of the book, since these are the accounts of the six participating teachers and reflect the changes in their practice and perspectives. Chapter 11 brings the strands of the project together and presents the issues that have emerged for the research leads with special focus on supporting the writing up of the teachers' experience.

The foreword by Dick Allwright is a short but essential summary of how we should perceive educational practitioner research. We need to appreciate that what sets educational research apart from other types of practitioner research is that our learners are also practitioners, in other words, practitioners of learning. This implies that rather than looking at the end product of an investigation, we should be focussing on the process of exploring, whose aim is not so

much to obtain knowledge, but to move towards “understandings” (vii). The most important takeaway for me is Allwright’s apt closing remark: “... research is too good to be left to the professional researchers” (xi). To me, the message is that classroom research is not only a highly satisfying experience for practitioners, but it is also an important tool for reflection, as a result of which teacher-researchers can improve their practice and enhance the learning outcomes of their students.

The core principles of EP are explained in full in Chapter 1. Out of the seven principles, the first two put understanding the quality of life in the classroom at the heart of language learners’ and teachers’ experience. Principles 3, 4 and 5 “focus on participation, and characterise classrooms as complex spaces where identity and agency grow, and collegiality and mutuality guide decisions and actions” (p. 13). Principle 6 stresses the need for continuity, while Principle 7 underlines that EP in the classroom needs to be integrated fully into “existing curricular practices” (p. 13) to minimise the burden and maximise sustainability for classroom participants.

Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of various CPD models and highlights how practitioner research communities can be built and sustained so that they can offer opportunities for teacher learning. Teachers have expert knowledge of their classrooms, and this enables them to “develop understandings which have the potential to transform classroom life” (Slimani Rolls & Kiely, 2019, p. 38). As highlighted above, the idea of PEPAs is key here, because these allow integrating research into the practices of teaching without research becoming “parasitic and time-wasting” (vi).

In the course of the project, PEPAs turned out to be instrumental both in the teachers’ and the learners’ development because activities such as group discussions, brainstorming sessions, and learner feedback did not only provide useful data but also offered an opportunity for learners to become more involved and act as “co-researchers.” Moreover, the carefully thought-out PEPAs also led to meaningful communication in class prompting language to be used as an instrument for the exchange of ideas rather than a goal in itself. For example, Rawson (Chapter 5) asked her students to read a blog on the pros and cons of using only French in the classroom or both French and English. The students were then invited to provide their own viewpoints during a class discussion. In this manner, the teacher-researcher was able “to turn research insights into pedagogic texts, and to turn pedagogy into research” (p. 97).

Next, Chapter 3 looks at how EP may be pursued in a globalised world, where English has such predominance. The authors emphasise that whatever language is being taught and learnt, “the ulterior aim [...] is to give the learner the emotional drive to overcome their fear to interact with the other members of the classroom community” (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, p. 65). My teacher-researcher mentees, who often don’t have any previous experience in book review writing (and only sporadic experience in writing academically in an additional language), need to overcome a different kind of fear, that is, being published “for real” and then be judged by members of the academic ELT community.

Opening Part 2, Chapter 4 (Teachers and Researchers: Working Towards a Teacher Learning Community) starts with the detailed description of the LTR project, and introduces the research leads and the six language teachers who volunteered to participate in the project. What stood out for me is the way practitioner research was scaffolded by the research leads from the very early stages of the project. They set up discussions around studies based on EP, made use of an already existing Peer Observation of Teaching system, and held group meetings twice a semester to discuss how the participating teachers were



advancing on their EP journey. The authors also organised individual mentoring sessions that were made available to all the participating teachers.

## How does the mentoring approach of the book relate to my own practice?

The mentoring/coaching side of the LTR project was particularly interesting to me because it involved guidance on three aspects that I could relate to: the principles of EP, research design, and “providing personal encouragement and confidence building” (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, p. 84). In my own mentoring practice, I aim at setting up a similar facilitating and scaffolding process for our *ad hoc* “learning community” that comes together for the writing of a review. It involves clarifying the guiding principles and conventions of a specific academic genre, it offers help with the “design” by referring to previous reviews as examples or models, and entails a fair amount of emotional support while the mentees are sailing in uncharted waters.

In my mentoring role as sponsor (Malderez, 2023), I usually initiate the commissioning phase, that is, offer the submission of a book review to the lead editor (e.g., *ELT Research*) or the reviews editor of a journal (e.g., *ELT Journal*). I then announce the assignment in our teacher-research mentoring community (<https://mentrnet.net/>) and look for volunteers. When they surface, I send them the links to book reviews published in the targeted journal and we have joint sessions (if there are several co-authors) or one-to-one sessions (if there is only one author). For multi-authored pieces, co-authors function as peer coaches for each other, and we often have several rounds of revision before the manuscript is submitted. At this stage, I take on the role of expert coach (Halai, 2006), namely, that of a more experienced teacher educator and book review writer, while I also make an effort to ensure that the authors’ own voice shines through. I encourage the review writers to rely on their own classroom experience and express their opinions based on what works in their own contexts (Chumbi & Maksakova, 2023). Altogether, in due course, we develop authentic pieces of text that can be perceived as co-designed learning materials.

My own experience of mentoring for publication has given me a special perspective regarding *Exploratory Practice for Continuing Professional Development*. Reading the six practitioner research case studies (Chapters 5–10), I could particularly relate to the authors’ self-doubts. They were concerned whether what they had found out could be worthy of wider interest and if the results were generalisable at all. I can “hear” the encouragement and “see” the signs of patient and careful scaffolding as well as detect the moments of *eureka*. In other words, the realisation that exploring classroom puzzles does not only contribute to a better *understanding* of classroom life, it also leads to an increased amount of meaningful communication in the target language. It can, ultimately, even resolve some of the issues that were raised in the initial stages of the participants’ classroom research projects.

The case studies in the volume explore recurrent issues that are familiar to most language teachers. An experienced French for business teacher, Michelle Rawson, chose to explore the use of mother tongue (English) in her language classroom (Chapter 5). Using EP helped her and her students to understand the complexities of using L1 and the potential benefits of its well-considered application. Maria Esther Lecumberri has been teaching Spanish for more than two decades. In recent years, she has been increasingly puzzled by how extensively her students were using their mobiles for non-classroom activities. She wondered to what extent it might distract them from engaging with their

tasks at hand (Chapter 6). A joint exploration brought about a positive change in the classroom atmosphere including a transformation of the teacher's approach, with the students becoming less inclined to be distracted by mobile use.

Anna Costantino, an experienced teacher of Italian as a foreign language, has long been puzzled by why her students seemed to be more interested in their grades than her "clear, accessible and thorough enough" feedback (p. 121). Exploring her students' views, which led her to realise the time pressures they were constantly under, Anna introduced PEPAs for error analysis and, in the process, was able to refocus on the social life of the classroom (Chapter 7).

Chris Banister's case study in the context of a Business English programme (Chapter 8) is a great example of how *meaningful* learner reflection, feedback, and evaluation can be elicited by using innovative PEPAs, which can then create the conditions for a renewed sense of teacher self-efficacy.

John Houghton's account focuses on his learnings related to the teaching of speaking skills (Chapter 9). One is the realisation that there may not be a direct relationship between teaching and learning, and the other is that when students act as co-researchers and explore their own perceptions of their speaking skills, the resulting carefully designed and goal-oriented tasks can, in fact, lead to improved communication.

After 17 years of teaching, as a first-time researcher, Marianna Goral felt ready to explore some of her teaching methods and the way her students worked (Chapter 10). For her EP research project, Marianna created a learning environment in which her students were invited to choose and give presentations on current business topics, and generate both all-class and small group discussions following which the "topic experts" became "discussion board administrators." The opportunity for course content creation and being taught in a participatory manner turned out to be much appreciated elements by Marianna's "learner practitioners."

The six teachers describe their specific contexts and the puzzles they have identified as well as how the latter were shared with their learners. Language learning materials were developed innovatively both by the participants and their learners. For example, Anna Costantino designed semi-structured discussions and posed open-ended questions to her students so that their voices would emerge more richly. Among other data gathering sources, Chris Banister designed a two-part classroom activity using excerpts from research papers and inviting students to share their thoughts by answering research questions related to their own experiences of giving feedback. John Houghton aimed at developing report writing skills using data that his students had gathered and analysed, while Marianna Goral exploited with great flair the fact that her Business English module for exchange students involved producing student-generated materials.

The reflections of the authors' case studies contain insights that they gained through conducting "a microanalysis of the classroom with all its complex variables" (Lecumberri, p. 115). The process led to discovering blind spots, namely, aspects that as teachers or mentors we might not have been aware of, including "contradictory beliefs and assumptions" (Costantino, p. 131). All the case studies present the innovative use of PEPAs, such as classroom discussions, individual interviews, open response questionnaires, journals, surveys, regular feedback from learners, and student-created materials, just to mention a few.

The fact that dissemination was also mentioned in some of the case studies (e.g., Banister) resonated with me deeply as I perceive book review writing as a powerful and authentic tool not only for CPD as such, but for the dissemination of teacher-researchers' learnings as well. This, in my opinion, arises from three sources. Firstly, I pay special attention to choosing books

for reviewing that provide an opportunity for the review writers to engage deeply with texts related to practitioner research. These are ones that they may choose to read anyway, but perhaps not as deeply as they do when writing a review. Secondly, when reading the reviews, busy teachers may be alerted to titles that could be termed as “essential reading” for CPD that employs classroom research. Thirdly, whenever possible, I make it a point to invite reviews on books that are open access and are, therefore, freely downloadable. In my own context (a national teacher education university in one of the countries of the Global South), book review articles may not directly lead to promotion and external recognition such as Senior Lectureships and becoming Fellows of the Higher Education Academy for Chris Banister and Marianna Goral, but the “points” gained do count when my colleagues apply for tenure or go through their annual appraisals. So, by my mentees succeeding in getting published, the quality of life in our “virtual classrooms” is enhanced as we create the conditions for continuous improvement (in Japanese, “*kaizen*”) while we work through the ever-improving versions of our book reviews.

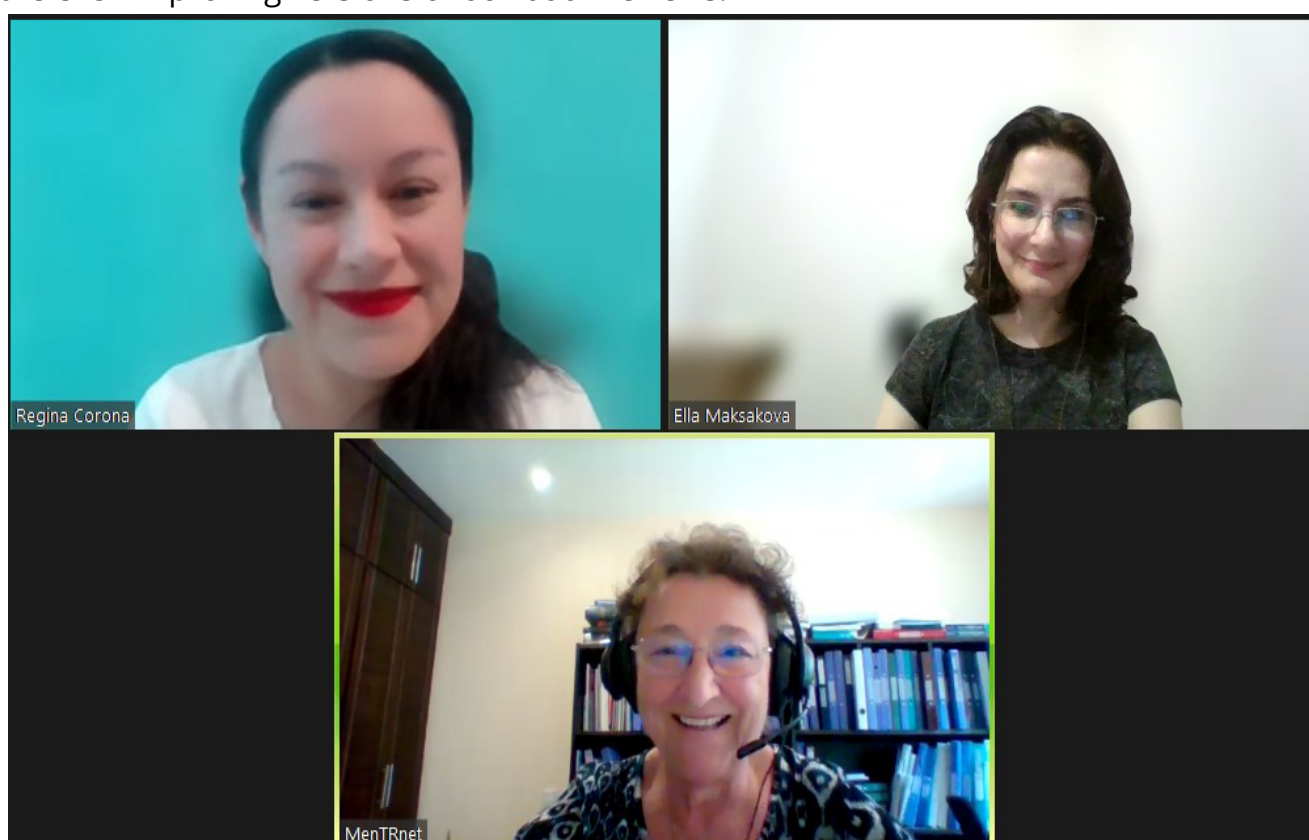


Figure 1. Zoom Book Review Writing Discussion With Ella Maksakova and Regina Corona

## How does exploration through writing deepen understanding and reflection?

The closing chapter (Chapter 11) had a special appeal to me, because I tend to believe that, as teacher-research mentors, we need to “walk the talk” and explore our own mentoring practice. In the present case, the puzzle that the research leads identified was as follows: “Why have the teachers sustained their engagement with EP in the face of the challenges that they have encountered?” (p. 185). Some of the factors that the teachers themselves highlighted are to do with the fact that this project was different from other CPD initiatives “by not focussing on finding solutions to problems, and not on promoting new methods

or techniques, but rather on a different approach to the classroom” (p. 186). Sustained support and guidance from the research leads was essential, but so was the readiness of the teacher-researchers to remain on task and share the outcomes of their investigations both internally at their institutions, and externally at national or international events.

I was keenly interested in how the teachers embraced the idea of writing the book, a thought that only emerged in the final stages of the project. I fully agree with Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2019) when they state: “We believe that the writing process and dialogic feedback, which ensued between the teachers and the editors, enhanced their critical level of thought further along the reflective continuum” (p. 187). With due modifications, this is true for book review writing as well. Reviewing a book related to one’s professional practice, and then summarising and evaluating it, requires deeper involvement than just reading it. The process necessitates critical thinking and accommodation to the conventions of a specific academic genre, which can prepare teacher-researchers to familiarise themselves with good practices in the field and help them start their own journey in publishing.

## How does book review writing support CPD?

Book review writing, as a specific genre that requires writing *academically* according to the targeted journal’s in-house style and conventions, has become a passion for me over the years. Over time, I learnt how to make unsolicited offers to editors on books that were related to my field of practitioner research and language teacher identity. “A book review needs to be as good as the book reviewed, or better” was my mantra, and there came a time when I felt I was able to guide others in the process. I can now safely say that book review writing has become a way of Continuing Professional Development for me both as a reader of professional literature and a writer.

As a teacher-research mentor, I have come to the conclusion that book review writing has numerous advantages, especially as it can serve as an intermediary stage for teacher-researchers between not writing at all and writing full-length academic articles. To name just a few:

- low risk of rejection (since pre-arranged and commissioned)
- editorial support *gratis* (often peer-reviewer support as well)
- shorter piece to write on an already existing text (achievable goal)
- faster publication turnaround than original articles (on occasion only 2–3 months)
- intensive reading on a topic that is of professional interest to you
- improvement of your academic reading and writing skills
- complimentary review / inspection copies provided by publishers
- stepping out into the “real world” of publishing

In my context of mentoring teacher research at tertiary level, I have often seen the “publish or perish” principle at work: for an extreme example under COVID-19, see Békés, 2022. So nudging my mentee colleagues to venture out into publication by starting with book reviews whose writing I can scaffold and facilitate, has proved to be a successful strategy (Banegas et al., 2020; Renandya, 2014). Whenever possible, I urge collaborative book review writing because it builds a “co-peer review” element into the system (Chumbi & Morales, 2021) and, on occasion, leads to transnational networking and collaboration (Chumbi & Maksakova, 2023).

## How does my mentoring experience relate to the book reviewed?

Dissemination, whether by a book chapter or an article, is a key motivating factor for teacher-researchers and can contribute to sustainability (Dikilitaş & Griffiths, 2017). Writing a book chapter on one's own research can be a daunting task but can also lead to a huge sense of achievement. That said, most of my teacher-researcher mentees would find writing a full-length EP report an almost impossible task, especially if we look at the highest standards of education research (Yates, 2004) extending to criteria, such as "original contribution," or "national benefit." However, Hanks (2017) argues that there is what she calls "good enough research" that may not meet all the criteria but is still able "to contribute to understandings in the field, good enough to build upon, good enough to inspire others" (p. 36). In the same vein, I believe that there is "good enough publication" (e.g., a book review) that can create an appetite for writing and can result in a sense of satisfaction when a teacher-researcher accomplishes such a taxing task supported by carefully scaffolded mentoring.

There are many facets of successful teacher-research mentoring. In my own "good practice," I aim at carefully designing each and every stage of these mini-projects. The book reviewed here was the result of a three-year long process, which necessitated careful planning, meticulous setting up, the combination of academic research, mentoring, and editorial input alongside the research leads' own reflection on the project. This is why I found Chapter 11 such a satisfying read. The book editors enumerate issues that I have experienced, such as time constraints or the participants' understanding of research, which I relate to my mentees' understanding of what a high-quality book review should read like. The headings created for the case studies and the guidance on word count very much resemble the process we follow when outlining the sections of a review, the length of which might oscillate between 350 and 2,000 words. Another concept, collegiality, repeatedly evolves amongst us as well, despite the different time zones and the geographical distance between co-authors from Mexico and Uzbekistan or Egypt and Sri Lanka. My mentees often take the lead, just as the participants of the LTR project did, when they talk to each other "behind my back" and come up with much improved drafts. And this applies to me as well. Over the years, my identity as a "publication nudger" has become stronger and my own book review writing skills have improved as a result of our collaborative writing efforts (Békés, 2024).

In sum, there can be several ways to facilitate CPD; the book reviewed does it by creating a learning community of EP and disseminating the results of the project by placing the case studies at the very heart of the volume. I find that book review writing can be employed as another means for CPD resulting in enhanced confidence in an area that language teachers might find challenging: writing academically.

Finally, what is my philosophy as a teacher-research mentor? In a nutshell, I agree with Angi Malderez, who says: "I define teaching as supporting learning" (Salas, 2018, p. 114). By supporting the book review writing skills of my mentees, I accompany them on a journey that will, hopefully, lead to the writing up of their own research with greater ease and confidence than at the time when we all started out.

## Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Huw Davies, Daniel Hooper, and Colin Rundle of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.*)

## Author Bio

Erzsébet Ágnes Békés is a retired Hungarian teacher educator and volunteer teacher-research mentor currently residing in Ecuador. She is a member of MenTRnet (<https://mentrnet.net/>), an international community of mentors of classroom research. In recent years, her main interest has been supporting practitioner research and facilitating the dissemination of her mentees' findings by encouraging the write-up of fully-fledged articles for reputable ELT journals and scaffolding the writing of book reviews as a means of Continuing Professional Development.

Erzsébet Ágnes Békésは現在エクアドルに在住しているハンガリー出身の教員養成に長年従事していた教育専門家であり、教員リサーチ・メンターである。彼女は教室における研究のメンターで構成される国際的なコミュニティ「MenTRnet」のメンバーである。近年では、実践者の研究支援に主な関心を寄せており、継続的な専門能力開発の一環として、メンティーが調査結果をELTジャーナルに投稿できるよう奨励し、書評執筆のサポートも行う。

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# Dialogic Commentary About Grassroots, Innovative, and Creative Approaches to Language Learning Materials Development Through Inclusive Practitioner-Research

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with Anna Costantino, Assia Slimani-Rolls, and Nour El Houda Bouacha

**Anna, Assia, and Houda:** Thank you so much, Brian and Hitomi, for agreeing to do the commentary for LDJ8. We know you are incredibly busy and we really appreciate the fact that you have taken time to share your thoughts about LDJ8 with us.

Before passing the baton over to you, we would like to briefly highlight key features of each contribution in LDJ8, so that you and readers of this commentary can hold this body of work in view as you respond to issues that we have raised in the Introduction.

Here's a quick snapshot of the exploratory inquiries and practice-related reviews that make up LDJ8, ordered by key themes that we see interconnecting them.

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In *“Designing Social Media Tasks in a University CLIL Course: An Action Research Inquiry,”* Amanda Kira investigates the integration of multimodal tasks into an EFL CLIL course at a university in Japan. Concerned about the authenticity of her students' presentations, Amanda designed and implemented projects that encouraged the creative and communicative production of social media posts (Kira, 2024).

In *“Reshaping the Secondary ESL Classroom: Using Exploratory Practice to Promote Student Participation at an All-Girls' School in Japan,”* Annie Minami explores Teacher-Initiated Exploratory Practice (TEP) to enhance the engagement of the students she teaches. Annie aimed to boost their confidence and participation in speaking activities through translanguaging, flipped classrooms, and student-led initiatives. Her inquiry offers practical insights into fostering a more inclusive and learner-centred classroom environment (Minami, 2024).

A focus on developing materials for communicative use is similarly evident in Melanie Mello's practice-related review, *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design* (Dat Bao, 2018). Melanie draws on her extensive experience as a German language teacher, highlighting how using process drama, ICT, and literature has influenced the development of cutting-edge published materials (Mello, 2024).

In reviewing *Exploratory Practice for Continuing Professional Development* (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019), Erzsébet Békés looks into parallels between materials development and her role as a review-writing mentor. She views the mentoring process as a form of materials



development, where reviews are considered learning materials and mentorship serves as a means to develop communicative mastery in the genre of review writing (Békés, 2024).

Collaborative and critical learner development is a key theme in the work of *"Visions of a Game"* by Palmyra Baroni Nunes, Maria Isabel Azevedo Cunha, & Inés Kayon de Miller, who, with their students, take their textbook as a starting point to explore various areas of Rio de Janeiro. While examining a map, the students realize that Guaratiba—the neighborhood where they live and where their school is located—is missing. This leads them to pose the thought-provoking *puzzle*: "Why aren't we on the map?" In their quest to answer this question, the students critically reflect on the possible reasons behind Guaratiba's exclusion, including the prejudice they perceive toward their part of the city. As part of this exploration, they create *exploratory posters* showcasing the area's flora and fauna, which they document during a field trip. Their 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" (Nunes et al., 2024, p. 62).

Aiming to move beyond restrictive monolingual practices, in *"Think Outside the German Box: Plurilingual Awareness Strategies for the English Language Classroom in Berlin,"* Philipp Rost, a novice teacher, reflects on the dynamics of his secondary school classroom during his practicum. He reports his observations to his mentor and supervisor, Zeynep Mine Derince, which leads them into a collaboratively autoethnographic exploration of how and why plurilingual strategies can foster more inclusive, engaging, and culturally sensitive English language classrooms in multilingual Berlin (Derince & Rost, 2024).

This brings us to the final contribution *"The Sound Behind the Mask: Translanguaging Performance Poetry for Learner Development,"* in which Yaya Yao engages her student, Mohan, with arts-based materials such as poems and drawings to explore creative translanguaging processes. This inquiry helps him reflect deeply on his language use over time and find original transformative ways to express his multilingual identity (Yao, 2024).

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Brian and Hitomi, keeping this snapshot in view, may we invite you to respond to some of the issues that this work raises for you and that we highlighted in the Introduction?

**Brian Tomlinson and Hitomi Masuhara:** Thank you, Anna, Assia, and Houda. As long-time advocates of practitioner research and as practitioner researchers ourselves, we are delighted to see that LDJ8 has given such prominence to practitioner research and to a collaborative Community of Practices approach, and in particular to their potential for contributing positively to the development of materials for language learning and of practitioner growth.

## The Value of Practitioner Research (PR)

As editors, you quite rightly stress the value of PR as a means of empowering the professional growth of its participants in terms of increased awareness, confidence, self-esteem and capability and also as a means of increasing the likelihood of materials facilitating the development of communicative ability. Interestingly you also stress the value of PR as a means of raising teacher awareness of and engagement with "their specific contexts of practice" (Costantino et al., 2024, p. 3). This is something which academic researchers rarely have the opportunity to develop.

You also draw attention to the value of PR in helping its participants to identify aspects of their conduct “marring” their practice and “the methodologies “they” see fit to enable them to stimulate their students and make better sense of their practice” (Costantino et al., 2024, p. 4). We also think it is vital for practitioners to make use of their research to reflect on their own practice and to revise and develop it accordingly.

PR can also, as you say, inform academic research by stressing the importance of inclusivity and the need for materials to be relevant to the local context of learning and meaningful to the learners using them.

## The Participants in Practitioner Research

We definitely agree with you that practitioner research should be inclusive in the sense that it is designed, carried out, reported, evaluated and applied by all the agents of language learning and not just by academics remote from the contextual realities of the learning process. In relation to materials development, we would include as practitioner researchers not only teachers and learners but also materials developers, publishers, examiners, administrators, and even parents in such countries as China, Singapore, and South Korea. The more such agents are included in practitioner research projects the better, provided they operate as a cohesive and collaborative team aware of the practical realities of language teaching and learning in the context of study as well as the current thinking on “best practice” in the design and use of language learning materials.

We were especially pleased that you and the authors stress the inclusion of learners in practitioner research. We have found that learners can be usefully involved in three ways. They can be given research tasks which involve them in searching for and investigating language in communicative use - for example, students searching for samples of the imperative in use in Singapore, photographing them and then in class working out the communicative functions of the imperatives they have found or in “*Visions of a Game*” by Palmyra Baroni Nunes, Maria Isabel Azevedo Cunha, and Inés Kayon de Miller, who, with their students, take their textbook as a starting point to explore various areas of Rio de Janeiro (Baroni Nunes et al., 2024). They can be informed of the rationale, aims, and procedures of the research their teacher is conducting with them and can even be given interim reports on the progress of the project. And they can even be instigators, conductors, and reporters, as in an activity in which Brian gave university freshers in Japan to do which involved them investigating the use of “some” and “any” in authentic materials and then comparing what they discovered to what their coursebooks say.

## The Interaction Between Theory and Practice

You quite rightly point out the danger of practice being overshadowed by theory when you say, “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” (Costantino et al., 2024, p. 4). However, we believe that the gap between theory and practice can be reduced not only by integration but also by connecting practice to theory as well as theory to practice (see, for example, Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2021: *SLA Applied: Connecting Theory and Practice*).

Practitioner research can be different from academic research as you imply throughout your Introduction. It does not set out to prove anything but to solve something. It does not need hypotheses, comparison groups, the isolation of variables, or statistical data to

validate it. It just needs a puzzle to solve or an aspect to improve and it aims at demonstrating the likelihood of an approach, an intervention or an adaptation leading to an eventual improvement in the communicative ability of the target learners. It is indicative research not scientific research, and it can be reported informally by writing a narrative of the procedures followed and the consequences of them. However, this does not mean that it cannot be informed (rather than instructed) by theoretical research and by the academic literature which is becoming increasingly accessible and relevant to teaching and learning.

## Gaps in the Literature Versus Solving Puzzles

You stress that the prime aim of PR is not to fill gaps in the literature but for the practitioner researchers to solve puzzles in their context of study. You say that the contributors to LDJ8 “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” (Costantino et al., 2024, p. 4). We completely agree and would go further and suggest that readers of LDJ8 should note down, as they read, aspects of the writers’ practice which have marred their own learners’ progress plus other aspects of their own practice which have had a marring effect. They could then focus on one aspect of their practice which is puzzling them and then go to the relevant literature by using recommended reading, asking colleagues and mentors, consulting their community of practice, or googling. There they need to select the literature which is potentially informative and stimulating regarding the puzzle they have identified in their context of learning. Then they could decide on a methodology which might help to solve the puzzle, introduce it to their learners and then follow it for long enough to decide in consultation with their learners whether it is likely to have a beneficial impact on their ability to communicate in the L2. That way they will avoid the danger of being swamped by the academic literature. Another way of avoiding this swamping is (as you suggest) to only go to the literature when their pedagogical procedures have been drafted or even when their methodology has been trialled.

## The Evaluation of Practitioner Research

How can we appreciate the process and product of Practitioner Research? Be it Academic Research or Practitioner Research, clear articulation of criteria helps to standardise and systematise our potentially subjective judgement during a research project evaluation.

You also have wisely made use of the LDJ guidelines that have been developed to scaffold the development of writing about Practitioner Research (see <https://ldjournal.ld-sig.org/guidelines-for-authors/> and <https://ldjournal.ld-sig.org/guidelines-for-reviewers/>). These guidelines emphasise reviewer criteria such as plausibility, transferability, trustworthiness, and authenticity for a particular research context in classrooms. These criteria are designed to address the more holistic, context specific nature of Practitioner Research i.e., a puzzle-solving empirical inquiry.

What we appreciate most is the fact that LDJ guidelines offer alternative evaluation criteria to those recommended by traditional research (e.g., validity, reliability, generalisability, replicability). Such traditional research criteria originated in the Behaviorism of the 60’s (e.g., the Positivist Paradigm which pursues objectivity and dismisses subjective interpretations and observations). In the Positivist Paradigm, elements of a complex phenomenon are dissected and the selected variable in focus is analysed with or without the use of statistics on the assumptions that rigorous scrutiny of a part and accumulated studies will reveal some universal truth of the whole phenomenon. Such an approach seems to be still

influential in applied linguistics research and in education research, but there seems to be a growing dissatisfaction with the traditional paradigm which seems to be failing to capture complex and dynamic phenomena (e.g., what happens in classrooms). It is reassuring to see that research methods and approaches have been evolving, and researchers are devising multi-method approaches to describe, capture, and tease out the complex and dynamic nature of learning. Motivation, for example, may manifest as classroom participations regardless of the context. Say, an engaging text may spark off intellectual and emotional impact among the learners so much so that turn-taking in groups could show an increase in turn initiation and competition, as well as longer units of utterance. Or project work may lead to longer and voluntarily engaged hours in teams outside the classroom. Is it not the case that such outcomes can be measured and recorded as an operationalised measure of motivation? These measurements can be compared across different contexts in discussion of motivation.

As for the approach of Practitioner Research Collaboration, we appreciate the fact that you wanted to establish a “Community of Learning” environment in which all the participants aim to develop awareness, expertise, and confidence through collaborative exploration. Such an approach that encourages reflectivity in classroom practice, research, and in publication seems to be more educational, supportive, and enjoyable so much so that it is likely to spark off sustained engagement by practitioners.

Community of learning could become a place in which Practitioner Researchers can achieve a critical appreciation of research methods and approaches in order to solve a puzzle. Such exploration of research methods and innovative approaches may further enhance the plausibility, transferability, trustworthiness, and authenticity of Practitioner Research and perhaps influence Academic Researchers who may wish to make use of them in their research. Different research communities can stimulate each other and share innovation.

## The Sharing of Practitioner Research

We completely agree with your recommendation to teachers to share “puzzle elucidations that are helpful to them and that, at the same time, offer researchers insight into practitioners’ work” (Costantino et al., 2024, p. 4). This can be done with colleagues, at staff meetings, at face-to-face or virtual meetings of communities of practice, in blogs or in publications which focus on articles reporting practitioner research and application (e.g., *Learner Development Journal* (LDJ); the Materials Development Association’s journal *Folio* – [www.matsda.org](http://www.matsda.org)). It can also be done through presentations at international conferences which are increasingly including presentations by practitioner researchers (e.g., JALT, IATEFL, RELC, TESOL) and at conferences dedicated to the sharing of practitioner research, such as events run by different Special Interest Groups (SIGs), the annual conference run by the Beijing University of Foreign Studies on materials development research, and the annual conference of the Materials Development Association (MATSDA).

What we would recommend is the sharing of practitioner research not to prescribe or to urge replication but to inspire other practitioners to conduct and share research themselves. In our experience asking other practitioners to give feedback on a group’s practitioner research can not only improve that research but stimulate further research by the other practitioners who have been involved through their feedback. This multiplication can build up a body of work of great value to pre- and in-service teachers, providing insights into the realities of language teaching and learning. These insights could also help academic

researchers to ensure that their research is accessible and valuable to teachers and that the two communities work more closely together.

## Conclusion

This is the sort of stimulating publication which we have been advocating for years. It is not aimed at impressing the academic community and winning research points, but at sharing the solutions which have been found to puzzling situations in the hope that they will inform and inspire. It is very rare that we have been so much in agreement with the aims, content, and informed enthusiasm of the editors and contributors of an educational publication. Congratulations to you, all the contributors, and the whole of the LDJ8 group, on the pioneering work you are doing and on the stimulating way you are reporting it.

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## Author Bios

**Professor Brian Tomlinson** has worked as a language teacher, teacher trainer, curriculum developer, film extra, football coach, and university academic in Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, UK, Vanuatu, and Zambia, as well as giving invited presentations in over 70 countries. He is Founder and President of MATSDA (the international Materials Development Association), an Honorary Visiting Professor at the University of Liverpool, and a TESOL Professor at Anaheim University. With over 100 publications on materials development, language awareness, teacher development, and second language acquisition, Brian recently published *Materials Development for Language Teaching* (3rd edition) (Bloomsbury, 2023). He has also co-authored with Hitomi Masuhara *The Complete Guide to the Theory and Practice of Materials Development for Language Learning* (Wiley, 2018) and *SLA Applied: Connecting Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). Brian is currently working on *Materials Development for L2 Communicative Ability* with Hitomi Masuhara and *Applied Linguistics and Materials Development* (2nd edition) with Freda Mishan. Both of these books will be published by Bloomsbury in 2025.

Brian Tomlinsonは、インドネシア、イタリア、日本、ナイジェリア、オマーン、シンガポール、イギリス、バヌアツ、ザンビアなどで言語教師、教員指導者、カリキュラム開発者、映画のエキストラ、サッカーコーチ、大学教員として活動し、また、70か国以上で招待講演を行っている。MATSDA (国際的な教材開発学会) の創設者であり会長を務め、リバプール大学の名誉客員教授、アナハイム大学のTESOL教授でもある。教材開発、言語意識、教師教育、第二言語習得に関する100以上の著作を持つ。最近では、2023年にBloomsbury社より『Materials Development for Language Teaching (第3版)』を出版した。また、Hitomi Masuhara氏と共に2018年にWiley社より『The Complete Guide to the Theory and Practice of Materials Development for Language Learning』や、2021年にCambridge University Press社より『SLA Applied: Connecting Theory and Practice』を刊行した。現在、Hitomi Masuhara氏と『Materials Development for L2 Communicative Ability』、Freda Mishan氏と『Applied Linguistics and Materials Development (第2版)』の執筆に取り組んでおり、これらの書籍は2025年にBloomsbury社から出版予定である。

**Dr Hitomi Masuhara** is an Honorary Research Fellow after her recent retirement from playing the roles of Director and a Lecturer of Applied Linguistics and TESOL in the Department of English in the University of Liverpool. Her various awards featured excellence in her research, innovation, and leadership at institutional and national level. She has given invited conference plenary/keynote presentations and workshops in collaboration with Ministries of Education in over 40 countries. She is also a founding member and Secretary of the Materials Development Association ([www.matsda.org](http://www.matsda.org)), whose mission is to integrate theory, research, and practice through collaboration between researchers, users (learners, teachers, administrators), and producers (materials developers, publishers). Her major research interests include the listening and reading processes in the brain; second language acquisition; syllabus design; teacher, curriculum, and materials development. Her recent publications include, co-authored with Brian Tomlinson, *SLA Applied: Connecting Theory and Practice* (2021, Cambridge University Press) and *The Complete Guide to the Theory and Practice of Materials Development for Language Learning* (2018, Wiley Blackwell), as well as chapters in *The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching* (Bloomsbury, 2023) and *Developing Materials for Language Teaching* (Bloomsbury, 2023).

増原仁美は、リバプール大学英文学学科応用言語学・TESOL部門の学科長および講師の職を勤めた後、名誉研究員として活動している。数々の賞を受賞しており、大学や国家レベルでの研究、革新、リーダーシップにおいて優れた業績を挙げている。これまでに40カ国以上で教育省と協力し、招待講演や基調講演、ワークショップを行ってきた。また、研究者、利用者(学習者、教師、管理者)、制作者(教材開発者、出版社)と連携し、理論・研究・実践を統合することを目的とする教材開発協会([www.matsda.org](http://www.matsda.org))の創設メンバーであり、事務局長も務めている。主な研究関心は、脳における聴解・読解プロセス、第二言語習得、シラバス設計、そして教師、カリキュラム、教材のディ

ベロップメントなど多岐にわたる。最近の出版物には、Brian Tomlinson氏との共著『SLA Applied: Connecting Theory and Practice』(2021年、ケンブリッジ大学出版)、『The Complete Guide to the Theory and Practice of Materials Development for Language Learning』(2018年、Wiley Blackwell)がある。また、『The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching』(2023年)および『Developing Materials for Language Teaching』(2023年、Bloomsbury)においても章を執筆している。

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