The language learning lives of English for Academic Purposes learners: From puzzlement to understanding and beyond in inclusive practitioner research

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2016

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School of Environment, Education and Development
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Abstract

This thesis considers the different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing generated through the processes and products of practitioner research from an Aristotelian relational perspective. I adopt the term ‘gnoseology’, which encompasses many different knowledge types, rather than the narrower, yet more commonly used term ‘epistemology’, and detail the development of a gnoseology framework. I use this framework to examine the understandings generated by a group of international postgraduate learners on a 10-week, intensive English for Academic Purposes course at a private UK institution as they explore the things that puzzle them about their language learning lives. Their explorations are grounded in the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP), a form of practitioner research that proposes learners themselves be viewed as ‘key developing practitioners’ alongside the teacher. The principles of EP also inform both my research methodology and my approach to classroom pedagogy for the purposes of this study, and the data used is generated naturalistically through the daily activity of the classroom.

The thesis offers an account of both the processes and products of the learners’ explorations, highlighting some of the potential benefits and tensions that surface as learners engage in exploring their language learning puzzles. It discusses the possibilities of viewing learners as ‘key developing practitioners’ for the learners themselves, teachers and the academy. Using my gnoseology framework I explore the emergent and developing understandings of the learners that arise through this work as they develop their praxis. I conclude that in contrast to the traditional separation of knowledge types into scientific (episteme), craft (techne) and practical wisdom (phronesis), my data shows these different forms and ways of knowing are multifaceted, interrelated and often operate simultaneously. I suggest that my gnoseology framework is the principle contribution of this thesis as it provides a potentially new way of examining and understanding the nature of, and relationships between, the different forms and ways of knowing produced through practitioner research. I also relate these developing and emerging learner understandings to the principled framework of EP, offering suggestions for its development, with particular regard to issues of relevance, learner expectations, and the processes of puzzling and puzzlement. This critique of EP is also a key contribution of this thesis.
Declaration

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Every techne and every inquiry, and similarly every praxis or choice is thought to aim at some good.

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then shall I know, even as also I am known.

I Corinthians 13:12
Prologue

This thesis has its genesis in both practice (my own classroom practice) and theory (during my MA studies). While studying for my Masters, I encountered practitioner research for the first time and initially embraced the concepts of Action Research (Burns, 2011; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Edge, 2001; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Nunan, 1989), embarking on a series of cycles aimed at ‘solving’ my learners’ frustrations with their independent learning tasks (Dawson, 2012). While not a success story, I experienced an increasing tension: disillusionment and frustration with my attempts, alongside a growing professional excitement in the possibilities practitioner research offered me to make a difference in my own teaching and in the lives of my students.

During this time of uncertainty, I was introduced to another form of practitioner research, Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2003, 2005a; Allwright & Hanks, 2009), which perhaps uniquely includes the learners as co-practitioners: explorers of their own puzzles, questions and doubts about what happens in the language classroom and in their language learning. Exploratory Practice (EP) has been described as an indefinitely sustainable way for classroom language teachers and learners, while getting on with their learning and teaching, to develop their own understandings of life in the language classroom.

(Allwright, 2005a: 361)

It is based on seven principles (1.1.2) that emphasise quality of life over efficiency of work, understanding over problem-solving, collegiality over individuality, and sustainability over burn-out (Dawson, 2016: 10). To achieve this, learners and teachers work together using everyday pedagogic activities to understand their classroom lives.

As I implemented the principles in my own classrooms, I became fascinated by the response of the learners, the genuine engagement and interest it aroused in them, and the consequent insights their puzzles and the work they did on them gave me as a teacher. All of this culminated in a dissertation (Dawson, 2012) that explored both my own and other teachers’ experiences of using Exploratory Practice (EP) as part of their professional development (see also Dawson, 2016).
However, it was the questions as well as the latent possibilities triggered by my MA work that were the driving force behind my initial doctoral proposal and which have been constant companions throughout the doctoral process. My dissertation pondered questions such as: how far could I push the learners themselves as practitioners of learning, and how transformative could that be for them? Could they develop their own praxis? What did it mean for them to have both the right to develop as language learners and also the responsibility to be the best learners they could be (adapted from Johnson, 2006: 250)? It also raised other questions for me: questions about the principles of Exploratory Practice; questions about the nature of and relationships between research, theory, knowledge and practice in learner research; questions about how (if at all) the understandings learners produced might contribute to our knowledge base of teaching and learning.

Exploratory Practice is a relatively unknown form of practitioner research and although there is a growing body of literature, particularly reports published in the journal ‘Language Teaching Research’, there are very few that focus specifically on learner enquiries as opposed to teacher ones, and even fewer that are set within an EAP context in the UK. An exception is the recently published work of Judith Hanks (Hanks, 2015a, 2015b) and her doctoral thesis (Hanks, 2013), which are based on two case studies of EAP learners and their teachers as they implement the principles of EP in a higher education institution in the UK. Hanks examines the relationship between principles and practices through the interviews that she undertakes with both teachers and learners, and although her assessment of the study is of two ‘success stories’, she wisely calls for more studies to be undertaken in different EAP contexts and institutions to see if EP is both viable and desirable (Hanks, 2013: 253). One other exception is the MA dissertation written by Ana Salvi (Salvi, 2012), who sought to integrate a pedagogy for autonomy with the EP principles on a five-week pre-sessional EAP class in a UK HE institution. Her work is perhaps most similar to this current thesis in that Ana was both the teacher and researcher of the class she studied, and the focus was very much on the learners and their puzzles. Again, this was a ‘success’ story and one that has been very influential in my own journey with EP. There is an obvious need for more studies in short-term, high-stakes EAP classes to test the ‘successes’ of these two studies and continue to look more closely at the EP principles and how they might contribute to the development of learners as practitioners of learning.
This thesis seeks to do just that. Taking as its focus one EAP class, on a 10-week, full-time English for University Studies course, on which I myself was one of the teachers, it attempts to explore what happens when learners are given the time and space to explore their own language-learning puzzles in such a high-stakes setting. It focuses on both the processes and the understandings that emerge from this undertaking as both teacher and learners negotiate and navigate the sometimes stormy waters of inclusive practitioner research. In doing so it seeks to contribute to our understandings of how engaging in inquiry contributes to the growth of learners as ‘key developing practitioners’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 2), and consequently our understanding of language teaching and learning. It also aims to enrich our understanding of the nature of knowledge produced through learner practitioner research.

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part I consists of three chapters. The first clears the ground by outlining the theoretical and practical parameters or foundations of this thesis, clarifying terms and definitions, uncovering assumptions and establishing the research questions. Chapter 2 focuses on the cornerstone of this thesis, Exploratory Practice, and in particular how the principles, as conceptualised through an Aristotelian approach to knowledge (gnoseology), provide a conceptual framework for analysing the data and answering the research questions. Chapter 3 outlines the context of the study, and the practical outworking of EP as research methodology and classroom pedagogy in terms of research design and data collection. This is followed by a description of my analytical processes culminating in the development of my gnoseology framework.

Part II is the story of ‘what happened’: a chronological account in five chapters re-created from the learners’ own reflections and work, my journal, class wiki entries and lesson plans. It is interspersed with my own interpretative comments and reflections, and is in and of itself an answer to my first research question. There is also a sixth chapter, which examines the learners’ retrospective thoughts on the process through an analysis of follow-up conversations conducted in the months following the data collection period. Part III takes a much closer look at the theoretical ‘gnoseology framework’ I developed through engaging with the data and the literature to examine the different types of understandings generated through learner-research. By looking for evidence of each element of the framework in the data, it seeks to answer my second research question and explore the explanatory power of the framework for understanding ‘understanding’ in practitioner research. This framework is the main contribution of this thesis to new knowledge as it offers a potentially powerful way of comprehending the
multifaceted and interrelated understandings that arise through, in, and for practice in this sort of work. My final chapter, while serving as a conclusion, also answers my third research question related to what the academy can learn about teaching and learning, and about teachers and learners from this study.
Part I

This first part locates the study within the practitioner research literature, focussing primarily on Exploratory Practice (EP), its principles and practices. It sets out the research questions and lays out the theoretical underpinnings of my gnoseology framework by examining how the philosophy of Aristotle might enhance and complement our understanding of the EP principles. It then describes the context of the study, outlines how the research methodology and pedagogy as conceived within an EP framework worked together, and chronicles the data collected throughout. It finishes by detailing the data analysis processes.
Chapter 1  Clearing the ground and laying the foundations

I stated in the prologue that the main impetus for this thesis came from a growing curiosity about the possibilities for all concerned of learners becoming researchers of their own language-learning lives. It raised questions about what it might mean for them to be considered practitioners of learning and how and where this might ‘fit’ with perhaps more conventional views of research and knowledge production. I also stated that the means (both methodological and pedagogical) through which I have chosen to explore these questions is Exploratory Practice, a form of inclusive (teachers and learners) practitioner research. The purpose of this first chapter is to introduce Exploratory Practice by locating it within the practitioner research movement and to present some of the key themes that are developed throughout this thesis. I then explore what it might mean for learners to be seen as ‘key developing practitioners’, before examining the understandings I myself bring to this project. I then trace the development of my research questions defining and explaining some of the terms I have used.

1.1  Situating Exploratory Practice within a practitioner research framework

Exploratory Practice (EP) is one form of practitioner research. Practitioner research is an umbrella term to describe a diverse array of research done by practitioners such as Lesson Study (Fernandez, 2002; Lewis, Perry, Friedkin, & Roth, 2012), Action Research (Burns, 2005; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011), Teacher Research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Freeman, 1998; Nunan, 1997; Stenhouse, 1975), Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2005a; Allwright & Hanks, 2009), and Reflective Practice or Reflective Inquiry (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985b; Farrell, 2007; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Schön, 1983), and is generally concerned with practitioners systematically and intentionally inquiring into their own practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990: 2). Some of these (Lesson Study, Teacher Research and EP) are exclusively concerned with education (for an exception see contribution by Fay and Dawson in Hanks, forthcoming), whereas Action Research (AR) and Reflective Practice (RP) can be found in many disciplines.

However, the different types of practitioner research are not as readily distinguishable from each other as their nomenclature might suggest. Neither is the above list exhaustive, and an in-depth look at each is beyond the scope of this chapter. My aim here then is to briefly examine the two approaches that have been most closely associated with EP (Hanks, forthcoming),
Reflective Practice (RP) and Action Research (AR), seeking to discover their similarities as well as their distinguishing features, with particular attention to their shared and common roots.

1.1.1 Reflective Practice and Action Research: similarities and differences

Both RP and AR have been associated with life-long learning (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Friedman, & Pine, 2009; Finlay, 2008) and professional development (Atay, 2008; Banegas, Pavese, Velázquez, & Vélez, 2013; Cain & Milovic, 2010; Edge, 2011; Schön, 1983), and are particularly prevalent in health care (Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003; Kinsella, 2010) and education (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliott, 2009; Farrell, 2007, 2015). There are multiple manifestations and definitions of RP (Lyons, 2010: 20), and AR (Burns, 2005: 58). Reflection itself, which is a key element of both RP and AR, is also a contested term and ‘can mean all things to all people’ (Smyth, 1992: 285). For some, it is a form of ‘self-indulgent navel-gazing’ (Finlay, 2008: 2), for others it has become almost synonymous with the idea of a learning journal (Boud, 2001; Moon, 2006; Thorpe, 2004) and yet others have attempted to systematise it, classifying different types and levels (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kember, 2010).

Many of our current conceptualisations of RP stem from the work of Donald Schön (1983, 1987, 1991) who attempted to counteract what he saw as a crisis in the professions and the prevalence of technical rationalism with the reclaiming of professional development by practitioners through reflective practice. He rejected the direct problem-solving stance of technicism, opting instead for one of problem-setting (Schön, 1983: 16, 39-40): the problematising of messy situations as a necessary condition for deciding which, of the many complex, dynamic and interrelated problems that constitute the ‘mess’, to address. He thus described the reflective process as follows:

> As [inquirers] frame the problem of the situation, they determine the features to which they will attend, the order they will attempt to impose on the situation, the directions in which they will try to change it. In this process, they identify both the ends to be sought and the means to be employed.

(Schön, 1983: 165)

This definition suggests that RP is an intentional and systematic process with change directed towards a specific end or goal. Schön drew heavily on the work of educational philosopher John Dewey, and in particular his ideas around reflective thinking, which Dewey describes as originating from ‘a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty’ which is followed by
an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity'.

(Dewey, 1933: 12)

According to Dewey, reflective thinking involves critically examining your ideas and testing them against evidence (Dewey, 1933: 11, 16). Many have built on both Dewey and Schön’s ideas, developing various models and ways of doing reflective practice (see for example Black & Plowright, 2010; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985a; Ellison, 2008). In fact, Lyons (2010) identifies three current strands in reflective inquiry, each corresponding to the work of Dewey, Schön or Freire, where reflective practice is characterised as ‘thinking’, ‘knowing’ and ‘critical consciousness’ respectively.

One recent framework for reflective inquiry in language education, which builds on Dewey’s phases of reflective thought (Lyons, 2010: 12; Rogers, 2002: 851) and Schön’s thinking, is that of Farrell (2015). He identifies five phases: identify an issue or problem; refine the problem; explore all possibilities through different lenses; begin to solve the problem; test and monitor hypotheses through action. This framework has remarkable similarities with the well-known AR spiral of steps originally credited to Kurt Lewin¹ (the father of modern AR) (Carr, 2006), and later developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988: 11): plan, act, observe, and reflect. These steps are not necessarily followed sequentially, and the reality is often a lot messier, with Burns (1999: 35-43) speaking of a series of ‘interrelated experiences’.

Thus there are various manifestations of RP, and this is equally true of AR. Burns (2005: 58) for example, distinguishes between technical, practical and critical approaches. The technical approach focuses on the means-end through a problem-solving, deductive perspective, while the practical is concerned with identifying the best or wisest course of action from multiple interpretations in any given situation (Kemmis, 1985: 142). The critical approach is participatory, emancipatory, concerned with social justice, and in its perhaps most radical formulation, concerned with liberating ‘the human body, mind and spirit in its search for a better, freer world’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 2). RP also has those who favour a critical approach (Savaya & Gardner, 2012; Thompson & Pascal, 2012), which is often linked to AR (Kemmis, 1985; Liston & Zeichner, 1990). AR is mostly understood as a collaborative and participatory endeavour (Burns, 1999: 30), whereas RP can range from the more introspective, ‘solitary self-dialogue’ (Finlay,

¹ Lewin also met and corresponded with Dewey, again suggesting common roots (Adelman, 1993: 11)
2008: 7) to the more collaborative call to engage in dialogue with others to help make informed decisions (Farrell, 2015; Ghaye, 2000).

Like RP, AR can trace its philosophical underpinnings to the writings of John Dewey, his theory of inquiry (or reflective thinking as stated above) and his argument against the separation of theory and practice (Burns, 2005: 57; Hammersley, 2004: 171). Dewey traced the dichotomous relationship between theory and practice to the Greek philosophers, particularly Aristotle (Dewey, 1916: 306-307). I take a deeper look at this argument in 2.4.1, but suffice it to say for now that both AR and RP are attempts to bridge the traditional divisions between theory, knowledge and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Edge & Richards, 1998; Edge, 2001; Schön, 1983; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; Zeichner, 1995). AR, RP and practitioner research in general thus raise questions about the nature of knowledge and theory; about ‘what constitutes a theory, who constructs a theory, and whose theory counts as theory’ (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 18) and consequently about the nature of research since they are grounded in the belief that practitioners, not just professional researchers, can be knowledge generators (Borg, 2010; Campbell, 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Huberman, 1996; Johnson & Golombek, 2002).

In summary, despite the differences, I have alluded to many similarities between some strands of RP and AR as both attempt to improve and change a ‘messy’ situation through systematic and intentional inquiry. Deciding what to improve and change comes from problematising the situation. They operate along a continuum of collaboration and participation and are carried out in a localised, situated and contextualised ambit (Burns 1999: 30). They also raise questions about the nature of knowledge, theory and research.

1.1.2 Exploratory Practice

Exploratory Practice, like both AR and RP, is localised and situated, participatory and collaborative, and has both reflective and action-based elements. It has been associated with professional development (Allwright & Lenzuen, 1997; Dawson, 2012) though not directly with lifelong learning. Its starting point for inquiry is also in perplexity (Dewey, 1933: 12), curiosity or puzzlement. However, rather than being based on a series of steps or phases (like AR and some strands of RP), it is based on a set of organic, context-free global principles which are worked out locally (Allwright, 2003: 115). These local understandings then feed back into the development
of the global principles. This process has resulted in various versions of the principles, but the most recent iteration, and the one principally used in this thesis is:

The ‘what’ issues
1. Focus on quality of life as the fundamental issue.
2. Work to understand it, before thinking about solving problems.

The ‘who’ issues
3. Involve everybody as practitioners developing their own understandings.
4. Work to bring people together in a common enterprise.
5. Work cooperatively for mutual development.

The ‘how’ issues
6. Make it a continuous enterprise.
7. Minimise the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice.

(Allwright and Hanks, 2009: 260, emphases original)

I examine these principles in more depth in Chapter 2 (2.2 and 2.3) as I problematise them in relation to an Aristotelian perspective on knowledge (gnosis). My aim here is to offer a more general overview within the broader context of practitioner research.

While there are similarities between EP, RP and AR, not least of which is a (mostly) shared root in the philosophy of Dewey, there are also some striking differences. In contrast to measurable change or improvement common to both AR (Burns, 2005: 60) and much RP (Akbari, 2007), the priority and overarching principle in EP is that of primarily seeking enhanced quality of life.

Quality of life (QoL) is a rather ethereal and difficult concept to grasp, and one that is unique to EP. I take a much closer look at this concept below (2.2), but I believe it is important to highlight that although QoL is never mentioned as an intentional aim of either AR or RP, many practitioner research studies report on things like: increased engagement of both practitioners and others (Bland & Atweh, 2007); increased motivation, self-esteem and confidence (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004); increased trust and respect between collaborators (Lind, 2007). They are reported as a by-product of the research rather than its aim. EP, however, makes this link explicit: QoL is prioritised and enhanced (or maintained) by working for understanding (Principle 2). The premise is that if we endeavour to understand our classrooms and our teaching and learning lives, our QoL as individuals and a collective will flourish.

Working to understand QoL begins with the process of puzzling and puzzlement, a curiosity-driven search to understand those things that puzzle us about our classroom lives; ‘an education of “I wonder”, instead of merely, “I do”’ (Freire, 1973/1990: 36). This is also resonant of the
starting point for reflective thinking in the writings of Dewey cited above. The term ‘puzzle’ has been adopted by EP as a more open-ended and generative alternative to ‘problem’, which more readily invites a solution (Hanks, 2013: 34). However, the term puzzle is not unique to EP. Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993: 34-35), in examining the possible starting points for AR, say that much AR arises from the ‘experience of discrepancies’ and cite Dadds (1985), who uses the term ‘puzzle’ to mean an unclear situation, neither positive or negative, but one which the teacher wishes to understand more fully. Burns (2005: 58) states that catalysts for AR might come from a problem, puzzle or question. In RP, Farrell (2012: 14), although he continues to use the term ‘problem’, suggests that like Dewey, a problem is not ‘an error or a mistake but rather a puzzling, curious, inviting, and engaging issue for a teacher to investigate’. Perhaps the key differentiation, rather than the term itself, is the end goal of the inquiry: AR has a clear emphasis on improvement and change (Burns, 2007; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1957; Noffke & Somekh, 2005) whereas in EP the end goal is concerned with quality of life.

So what is EP’s relationship to improvement and change? In the earlier literature, Allwright (2003: 127) makes a direct contrast between working for understanding and working for change, although he proceeds by clarifying that it is immediate and thoughtless change he objects to (p. 129), rather than change per se. Later writings however, acknowledge that ‘EP’s attitude to change is complex’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 259). There is no doubt that inquiry changes the people who do it (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2007; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001) and EP studies report changes in behaviour, thinking, beliefs and attitudes that occur when working for understanding (Dawson, 2012; Hanks, 2013). We might even say that change is desirable; we are, after all, hoping to see growth, development and transformation in our learners, not for them to remain static, or worse, stunted while in our classes.

I believe EP’s relationship to improvement, although never stated as such, is also potentially complex. While it is opposed to an all-consuming focus on measurable improvement (in terms of exam scores, progression rates and so on) (Allwright, 2005a), the idea of improvement seems necessarily implicit in the first principle. If the primary focus is on quality of life, this implies a desire to make that quality of life as good as it can possibly be. That might mean maintaining things as they are, but it might equally mean making things better, and the way to achieve this is through working for understanding. The overwhelming conclusion when reading EP reports from around the world is that classroom life, understandings between teachers and students and so on have improved (for example: Chuk, 2004; Hanks, 2015b; Zhang, 2004). This uneasy
relationship between EP, change and improvement is developed and challenged throughout this thesis.

Although EP, like many strands of practitioner research, seeks to be collaborative, it is perhaps unique in including the learners as co-practitioners (rather than co-researchers) alongside the teachers. They are encouraged to set the agenda by exploring their own learning ‘puzzles’. The involvement of learners in practitioner research is not new: many reports of AR include the perspectives and the voices of learners (Cossar-Burgess & Eberstein, 2013; Humphreys & Wyatt, 2013), sometimes as co-researchers alongside the teacher (Cowie, 2001), and yet it is invariably the teacher who sets the agenda and it is their problem that is to be solved and practice that is to be improved (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Jing, 2005). Even within mainstream education, where there is an emphasis on pupil voice or pupil consultation (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004), this seems generally limited to consulting pupils on school issues or training them in research methods so that they can become co-investigators in the school’s research project (see for example, Leitch et al., 2007; Soohoo, 1993, and as an exception that focuses on the pupils’ questions, see Frost, 2007).

So on what basis might we want to consider learners as co-practitioners? Allwright and Hanks (2009: 2) base their rationale on the obvious, but not always acknowledged fact, that ‘only learners can do their own learning’. They propose therefore that it might be prudent to view learners as ‘key developing practitioners’ in their own right, considering a learner’s practice and development (in terms of their language learning) as parallel to that of a teacher. In the following section I wish to explore this notion of ‘key developing practitioners’ more fully, firstly by looking at the implications and benefits cited in the literature of practitioner research for teachers, the academy and society, before drawing possible parallels for learner development.

1.2 Learners as ‘key developing practitioners’

I am basing my exploration loosely around a framework proposed by Zeichner and Noffke (2001: 307), which identifies three motivational purposes for engaging in practitioner research: personal, professional and political. The personal dimension centres on an increased understanding of the teacher’s practice, their learners, the nature of teaching and learning and so on. The professional includes the potential for professional development and a higher status for the teaching profession, while the political is a critical approach with a particular emphasis
on issues of power (p. 310). To this framework, I am adding the academic: the potential of practitioner research to add to our knowledge base of teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

Practitioner research is one means by which teachers can reclaim their professional development and ‘function as transformative intellectuals’ (Johnson, 2006: 248). This transformative view of professional development stands in contrast to a transmissive approach (Burns, 2007: 997), which often consists of top-down training delivered by experts (Richards & Farrell, 2005: 3). Johnson (2006) suggests that to become transformative intellectuals, teachers need to develop the intellectual tools of inquiry: an ability to question their own and others’ assumptions, problematise their own practices, and question the wider social and political context in which their practices are located. Applying these intellectual tools to every aspect of their professional lives will, she suggests, enable them to transform their professional lives and contexts.

In the literature, this transformation is spoken of in both personal and professional terms. The personal includes increased confidence, self-esteem, motivation, autonomy and empowerment (Banegas et al., 2013; Burns, 2007; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Zeichner, 2003). The professional speaks of validating teachers as professionals (Atay, 2008); helping them achieve beneficial life-long learning and mutual understanding (Cain & Milovic, 2010); creating a culture of inquiry and enhancing teachers’ ability to problematise situations in their practice and beyond the immediate research focus (Burns, 2007; Zeichner, 2003).

Within the EP literature personal and professional benefits cited include heightened engagement in learning, and making research meaningful for both teacher and learners (Dawson, 2012); greater understanding of the learners in the class, and the issues, questions, puzzles they are dealing with (Salvi, 2012: 41); opening a space for teachers and learners to share their assumptions and beliefs about language learning (Rowland, 2011: 265); increasing the motivation of teachers and learners, and repositioning teachers from ‘knower’ to ‘co-researcher’ (Hanks, 2015b: 629); developing mutual understanding between teacher and learners (Zhang, 2004: 344).
Practitioner research (in its various forms) thus creates opportunities and space for teachers to not only make sense of their practices but also to make sense of theory within their practice (Johnson, 2006: 241). This is part of becoming ‘transformative intellectuals’, or as Edge (2001: 6) suggests, ‘the thinking teacher is no longer perceived as someone who applies theories, but as someone who theorises practice’. This is at the core of practitioner research and contained in the notion of praxis, ‘the fusion of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ as mindful, committed activity’ (Edge, 2011: 17; 2.3.5).

Related to the idea of a professional who theorises their practice is the notion that teachers and not just academic researchers can be knowledge generators. The concept of teachers as knowledge generators can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century, and in particular the writings of educational philosophers such as John Dewey (1933, 1938) who proposed a democratic and inquiry-based approach to knowledge creation. However, despite the history of modern day practitioner research beginning with Lewin in the 1940s (Adelman, 1993) and the reframing of the nature of teaching as research by Stenhouse and Elliot in the 1970s (Carr, 2006: 423), the contribution of practitioner research to the academy is perhaps still contested ground (Burns, 2005; Wyatt, Burns, & Hanks, 2016). Yet advocates of practitioner research contend that not only does it have something to contribute, but without it our understandings are impoverished:

What is missing from the knowledge base for teaching therefore, are the voices of the teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask, … and the interpretative frames teachers use to understand and improve their classroom practices. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990: 2).

Zeichner and Noffke (2001: 309) take this one step further by suggesting that rather than purely extending our knowledge base through practitioner research, one purpose should be to challenge those existing forms of knowledge. This is a critical stance to both practitioner research and knowledge generation, which also challenges the contexts in which practitioner research is undertaken.

The radical goal cited above (1.1.1) of liberating ‘the human body, mind and spirit in its search for a better, freer world’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 2), might seem beyond the intention of most classroom-based practitioner research. Yet as Edge (2001: 4) indicates, there is a relationship between the empowerment of an individual teacher through engaging in AR and the
greater goal of creating a more just society in which we all live as empowered citizens. This view is extended by Noffke (2009: 7), who argues that both the personal and the professional domain are encompassed within the political. Thus while the individual teacher might not claim to be engaged in a political process while researching their classroom, there is no denying that we are to a degree all political as well as social beings whether we acknowledge it or not, and thus our work is also by implication, political. But what about the learner?

1.2.1 Lifelong learning in a globalised society

If we are to consider learners alongside teachers as ‘practitioners of teaching and learning’, then we need to clarify what we mean by ‘practitioner’, because labels ‘describ[e] and shap[e] our perceptions of the world’ (T. Stewart, 2006: 424). Learners are obviously different from teachers: they do not undertake professional training in order to be able to learn, and nor do they receive a salary in recompense for their endeavours. In the traditional sense, being a learner is neither a socially designated role, nor an occupation (as teacher or student for example), but rather an incidental, temporal activity, which is more pedagogic in nature (Widdowson, 1987: 83). However, a learner could be defined as a practitioner in terms of ‘a person who regularly [as opposed to sporadically] does a particular activity, especially one that requires skill’ (Oxford Dictionary, def. 2). Language learning usually takes place within a delimited time frame (length of course, school year and so on) and is traditionally conceived in terms of the language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking (Hedge, 2000; Rivers, 1981).

However, perhaps there is a sense in which not only are the professions in crisis (Schön, 1983), but also learning, and consequently learners. The move towards a globalised knowledge economy impacts on the nature of education, particularly at HE level (Barnacle, 2005; Levy, Sissons, & Holloway, 2011). On the one hand, there is an increased need for certification to prove that one has acquired certain knowledge, and on the other a recognition that it is the skills, rather than the knowledge acquired, that are of prime importance and that will increase people’s potential to succeed in the global economy (Levy et al., 2011: 11). Hence the learner who wishes to succeed in this globalised economy is ‘characterized as curious, motivated, reflective, analytical, persistent, flexible, and independent’ (Lord, Prince, Stefanou, Stolk, & Chen, 2012). In fact, one could say that being a learner in today’s world is a highly complex activity, one in which many skills, competencies, attitudes and characteristics need to be developed. In this sense, learning is no longer a purely incidental, temporary activity directed towards any one goal at any particular time. Rather it is a complex and multifaceted process that
is seen as an integral part of life itself. Perhaps when we consider learning in this light, it might seem more feasible to consider learners too as practitioners: as those who practice lifelong learning, a highly prized and necessary ability for a globalised knowledge society (Aspin, Chapman, Evans, & Bagnall, 2012; Brine, 2006; Field, 2006).

Johnson (2006: 250) calls teachers to reclaim their professional development recognising that ‘they have not only a right to direct their own professional development but also a responsibility to develop professionally throughout their careers’. By extending this idea to learners, we can claim for the learner both the right and the responsibility to grow and develop in understanding of what it means to be a language learner in the classroom, in society and in an increasingly globalised world: of becoming transformative intellectuals (p. 248) or perhaps more generically and usefully, transformative individuals in their own right.

This idea of transformation is a central notion in Appadurai’s (2006) radical and unconventional call for research to be considered as a right; as ‘an essential capacity for democratic citizenship’ (p.176). He broadens the traditional outcomes of research stating that:

> Research, in this sense, is not only the production of original ideas and new knowledge (as it is normally defined in academia and other knowledge-based institutions). It is also something simpler and deeper. It is the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one’s current knowledge, in relation to some task, goal or aspiration.

(Appadurai, 2006: 176)

Research gives learners ‘the capacity to aspire’; ‘the social and cultural capacity to plan, hope, desire, and achieve socially valuable goals’ (p. 176.). It is personally and socially transformative, and for me resonates with Freire’s concept of ‘conscientização’ (conscientisation), which raises awareness, finds connections, and is ultimately about engaging ‘in relations with the world’ rather than merely being in it (Freire, 1973/1990: 43). This is what Freire conceptualises as a problem-posing education where teachers and learners together become ‘beings of the praxis’ (Freire, 1970/1996: 106) through both reflection and action. I see implicit in both Freire and Appadurai’s thinking the idea that like teachers, learners can be producers and not just consumers of knowledge. However, within the ambit of practitioner research the debate around the dichotomous nature of theory and practice, and the legitimacy of ‘teachers’ ways of knowing and coming to know’ (Johnson, 2006: 241) rumbles on. If the jury is still out to some extent in terms of the status of teachers as knowledge generators (see for example Campbell, 2013), then how much more controversial is a claiming of this status for learners? Johnson (2006: 241)
argues that rather than perpetuating the theory/practice dichotomy debate, we should focus on creating opportunities and space for teachers to make sense of theory and theorise within their own practice. I would also claim this space for learners as curious, inquiring, autonomous and agentic persons to make sense of their own learning lives within the complex and globalised world referred to above.

The expediency of embracing the contribution of the learners in this way is not confined to extending our knowledge base, but also has the potential to strengthen what Ortega (2005: 427) terms the moral imperative of research; the ability to defend the purpose and value of our research, and ask the difficult questions about who really benefits from it (see also Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015: 2). The ethical lens (value commitments) we choose to operate within, which Ortega (2005: 438-9) argues is as important as choosing our theoretical framework, methodologies and so on, will determine the extent to which our research is socially responsible and relevant; research that serves the communities we are involved in and yet also increases our knowledge of second language learning and teaching. This is research that is mutually beneficial for all concerned, that potentially puts quality of life at the top of the agenda (EP Principles 5 and 1).

1.2.2 Summary

Inquiry may be understood therefore as an integral part of transformative, life-long learning with personal, social and political implications. For language learners this will involve developing not just their language skills and abilities, but also their capacity to problematise their own learning and contexts, and develop reflective, critical and analytical abilities that will enable them not only to adapt to our rapidly changing world, but also to live wisely within it; to become ‘beings of the praxis’.

However, it is one thing to claim that learners have the right and responsibility to become the best learners that they can be, to suggest that they might become transformative individuals and ‘beings of the praxis’, and propose that the process of practitioner research might facilitate this. It is another for the learners themselves to grasp the potential of such an endeavour. So what is in it for them? Is practitioner research a new approach to (language) learning itself, or is it a necessity given the recognised complexity of both the classroom as a social space and the idiosyncrasy of the individual learner (1.3)? Is it something that will help them to navigate the complex social, cultural and political context of learning a language in today’s world or an
indulgence that takes time and energy away from the real task of learning? In a sense, these questions are at the heart of including learners as ‘key developing practitioners’ in EP, and are ones that are implicitly embedded in my research questions (1.4).

Perhaps then at this point, it would be judicious to clarify my own relationship with EP and the resulting ontological, epistemological and ethical assumptions that have been shaped by thirty years or so of language teaching experience in a variety of contexts, through the more recent implementation of the EP principles in my practice, and through my explorations of the literature; a luxury that doctoral study has afforded me.

1.3 Exploratory Practice and I

The assumptions I bring relate to both the nature of classroom life and the nature of knowledge, research and ethics.

Alongside the seven principles (1.1.2), EP also makes five propositions about learners, the first two of which relate directly to my first ontological assumption about the nature of classroom life:

- Proposition 1: Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways.
- Proposition 2: Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supported environment.

(Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 7)

Learners (and teachers) are both idiosyncratic and social beings who bring their own preferred ways of learning and teaching to the classroom. These preferred ways are the product of their past experiences, the accumulation of their present ones, and are mediated by their hopes and aspirations (Norton, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2011). In this sense they are also a product of the intrinsic relationship between their beliefs, emotions and identities, not only in terms of what they bring to the classroom, but also how they are constructed and negotiated in the interactions and actions within the classroom (Barcelos, 2015).

My second ontological assumption, which is related to but different from the first, is that the language classroom is not a simple context in which there is a linear cause and effect
relationship between teaching and learning (Tudor, 2003; Tseng & Ivanić, 2006). Instead it is a complex, dynamic, social and adaptive context (Gao, 2013; Mercer, 2012) in which learning emerges as a ‘process of transformation, growth and reorganization’ (van Lier, 2011: 388), and where the pedagogic and social processes are inextricably linked (Senior, 2006: 281). This emergent view of learning interprets development as a recursive process rather than a linear trajectory (Davis & Sumara, 2010: 859) and teaching as ‘a sort of emergent choreography’ (Davis & Sumara, 2006: 100). The classroom and what happens within it is therefore not fixed but because of its ability to adapt also generates a form of ‘dynamic stability’ (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008: 43).

This complexity or ecological view of teaching and learning rejects a reductionist view of classrooms, allowing for even such things as the time of class, the size and layout of the room and the temperature in the room to be accounted for (Burns & Knox, 2011). It links to my first assumption in that it allows us to see classrooms as ‘convergences that reach backwards and forwards temporally, discursively, socially, cognitively, and culturally’ (Burns & Knox, 2011). There are also epistemological implications as the classroom is seen as a space for knowledge-producing networks: neither teacher nor learner-centred, but rather decentralised, recognising that the collective intelligence is greater than the individual (Davis & Sumara, 2010: 858, 2006: 88-89). Again, this resonates with Freire’s call for an integration of the traditional roles of teacher and learner ‘so that both are simultaneously teacher and students’ (Freire, 1970/1996: 53), emphasis original).

While EP does not overtly subscribe to a complex systems approach to understanding classroom life, it does nonetheless recognise the dynamic, fluid and complex nature of the classroom (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 147). Its focus on including everyone (teachers and learners) in the work for understanding, describes to some extent a knowledge-producing network.

But what is knowledge? Our approach to research (methods, paradigms, aims and so on) (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Burns, 2005), is influenced by our understanding of the nature of knowledge (modes, sources, forms, validation, contributions and so on) (Borg, 2010: 405; D. Carr, 1995b; Habermas as cited in Pearson & Smith, 1985: 74) and vice versa. My own view is that knowledge is not necessarily fixed and unchanging but can be produced through experience, reflection, interaction, reason, intuition and practice (D. Carr, 1995b: 144; Guillemin, 2004: 274) both individually and collectively. These ideas are central to this thesis and I develop
and extend them within an Aristotelian framework of knowledge, beginning in Chapter 2. For now, I offer the following as a summary statement of my Aristotelian approach to knowledge: all knowledge is relational, has its source in experience, has as its end goal (either explicitly or implicitly) *eudaimonia* (quality of life or well-being), and is neither ethically nor politically neutral (Eikeland, 2007, 2008). This view also suggests that claims to knowledge generation and production are not the sole prerogative of the researcher, but also of the participants as prime beneficiaries and co-producers in the research process. For me these ideas are inextricably linked and in many ways synonymous with the ethical issues inherent in inclusive practitioner research (Ponte, 2007: 144).

If knowledge is multifaceted and dynamic, then the outcomes of research are correspondingly multifaceted and dynamic. They are also potentially transformative for all who engage in it (1.3.4). The nature of research itself then is a process through which these different types of knowledge can be generated. In this project, I see two different levels of research and knowledge production at play. The primary purpose of the thesis itself is to make a ‘new contribution to knowledge’ (Polkinghorne, 1997: 4), knowledge being defined here as that which meets the criteria of accepted academic standards and adds to the discipline’s knowledge base. The second however, is the knowledge produced by the individuals and collective, the participants (learners and teacher) in this project, and the potential of this process for them to aspire (Appadurai, 2006), to be transformed (Johnson, 2006), to become ‘beings of the praxis’ (Freire, 1970/1996: 106), and to live in a state of well-being (*eudaimonia*), as fulfilled, successful, flourishing human beings (2.1, 2.2).

I suggested above that an Aristotelian view of knowledge is inherently ethical, with the goal that of well-being and I have referred to Ortega’s call (1.2.1) for research that is socially responsible. I believe that EP’s inclusion of learners as ‘key developing practitioners’ goes some way to answering this ethical call for all who participate in the research to benefit from the process and to have the opportunity to produce and disseminate their understandings and findings.

Having set out some of my assumptions and approaches, I now examine the development of my research questions.
1.4 Developing the research questions

Despite the many published accounts of EP work being undertaken throughout the world from Israel (Perpignan, 2003) to China (Zheng, 2012), the majority focus on the teachers’ puzzles rather than those of the learners. EP work seems most developed in Brazil, particularly within compulsory education, but while learner stories appear in Allwright and Hanks (2009), there is no specific (published) study related to the learners in that context. In the prologue, I cited two recent studies (Hanks, 2013; Salvi, 2012) foregrounding the learners in an EAP context in the UK, and suggested the need for more studies that do the same. To my knowledge, there is no study yet that focuses so specifically on the nature of understanding, nor a systematic analysis of the understandings that are produced through EP. By intentionally focussing on the learners as protagonists and agents in their own explorations, and by developing a framework to analyse the understandings they develop, I hope to contribute to this growing body of literature. These two concepts are central to my research questions, and it is to these that I now turn.

1.4.1 The original proposal

My original three questions were:

1. How do my learners develop collaboratively as practitioners of learning?
2. What contribution can their understandings make to our knowledge base of how language learners come to know what they know?
3. How does Exploratory Practice, as a form of practitioner research, facilitate the development of this knowledge?

My reasoning behind these questions was as follows: the first brings the focus directly on the learners as practitioners of learning in their own right, and is related to the generation, analysis and interpretation of naturalistic classroom practice data to tell the story of the learners’ own development. This in turn would enable discussion and evaluation of how the understandings they generated might contribute to our theoretical understandings of how learners come to know what they know, and the nature of the knowledge they produce. As I was intending to use the EP principles as both my principal research methodology and my pedagogical approach, the third question reflected my intention to evaluate the contribution that EP can make in the development of knowledge that is useful to the academy.
As I began the actual PhD process, I began to examine my original questions in the light of new understandings about research and new insights I was gaining through my reading. RQ 1 raised various questions: What was development and how could it be measured and/or explained? What was I actually going to be looking for in my data? I was also concerned about my use of the word ‘collaboratively’ in relation to development and why I was focusing on collaborative development to the seeming exclusion of individual development. The focus on knowledge was still important as it reflected my interest in questions about the nature of knowledge itself, the sort of knowledge that might be generated through this sort of work and how that might contribute to our general understanding of teaching and learning in the language classroom.

I also began to meditate on the place of EP in the research questions themselves. I had not changed my desire to use EP as either my pedagogy or my central research methodology, but was this really about EP, its principles and practices, or about the learners? It was the learners themselves that I was interested in and although my commitment to using EP was unwavering, I wondered if it needed to take a central role in my research questions. Was I going to look at how the principles and practices of EP worked out in an EAP setting (in a similar way to Hanks, 2013) or was my focus different? The outcome was that I decided to push EP into the background in terms of my main focus, removing it completely from my research questions.

1.4.2 The next generation

The research questions in my end of year one proposal were as follows:

1. What happens in the language classroom when English for Academic Purposes learners are given the time and space to do learner-research?

2. What developing understandings (individual and collaborative) emerge as they engage in learner-research?

3. How may these insights inform our knowledge base of how learners (and teacher) construct and make meaning of their own learning (and teaching) lives?

These questions reflected the outcome of my exploratory reading and thinking alongside the reasons given above. The first question was still exploratory but by using the term learner-research, I believed I was circumventing my concerns about development, and creating a heuristic device to examine what happened when the learners inquired into their own learning lives within the classroom context. This hyphenated term was adapted from that of ‘teacher-
research’ employed by Donald Freeman in his book entitled ‘Doing teacher-research’ (1998). Implicated in this term are both roles and activities that have traditionally been seen as distinct: teachers teach and researchers research. By bringing these roles and activities together through the hyphen, and extending the concept to the learners through the term ‘learner-research’, I intended to open an alternative space to explore the potential of learners engaging in a relatively infrequent activity: researching their own learning lives. Through hyphenating these two words, we create a ‘person-process ... [where] the doer and the doing combine to mutually redefine one another’ (Freeman, 1998: 5). I saw the hyphen acting as a portal, opening a third space where commonalities, differences and possibilities could be explored. The process of research itself was defined as systematic (i.e. planned rather than spontaneous) inquiry (in the Deweyian sense of thinking with a purpose that originates in perplexity or puzzlement) that seeks to understand and then disseminate (tell others) what has been discovered.

I also reinstated, albeit implicitly through the use of the word collaboratively in RQ 2, the teacher alongside the learners. I recognised that as teacher throughout the course, the process would not only have an impact on me, but also this impact would be reflected in my reflexive understandings (Edge, 2011) generated through my interactions with and response to the learners in the classroom. This reflexivity would need to extend through the data analysis and writing of the thesis and this endeavour would produce both collaborative and individual understandings.

These research questions stayed with me throughout the data generation process, the initial analysis, and into my attempts to write the thesis. Despite having the RQs displayed before me at all times, it was not until I reached a point where I had written many words on paper, had spoken at conferences about my research and even written a book chapter based on it (Dawson, forthcoming), but had zero words that I could confidently say formed part of my thesis, that I returned to an interrogation of my research questions and attempted to reconcile them with what I had written. What followed was a process of puzzlement, and this was a key part of my own developing understandings about what I was trying to do and why I had reached an impasse in my writing. Key puzzles revolved around the place of EP in the questions, my use of the term learner-research rather than learner-researcher, and what I meant by ‘collaborative’.
1.4.3 Final iteration

I decided to reinstate EP in the RQs, although I refrained from giving it its own question, instead including it in the first question. I also, on reflection, decided to maintain ‘learner-research’. Rather than the union of two separate identities ‘learner’ and ‘researcher’, I was keen to see how the activity of doing research might challenge, change and/or enhance the learner’s beliefs, identity, practices, understanding and attitudes to language learning. This is rooted in a perspective of the learner as a ‘key developing practitioner’ and embedded in the idea of developing understandings in RQs 2 and 3.

I also made small changes to RQ2. I added the adjective ‘collective’ to describe the understandings I was interested in. Individual relates to the idiosyncrasy of each learner (1.3), and the idea that although working together (collaboratively) towards a mutual goal, each one is likely to come out with their own story, their own understandings from the process (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 151). Collective brings together the individual and collaborative (small group) understandings under a broader umbrella: this reflects the concept of ‘knowledge-producing networks’ (1.3) and is coherent with my understanding of knowledge as expounded in 2.3. I made the teacher’s role and activity in the process more explicit by using ‘we’ and moving from the narrower heuristic device of ‘learner-research’ to the more inclusive term of practitioner research.

The final iteration then is:

1. What happens in the language classroom when English for Academic Purposes learners are given the time and space to do learner-research through Exploratory Practice?
2. What developing understandings (individual, collaborative and collective) emerge as we engage in practitioner research?
3. How may these insights inform our knowledge base of how learners (and teacher) construct and make meaning of their own learning (and teaching) lives?

The first RQ is exploratory, seeking to explore and describe what occurs in that hyphenated space as the learners inquire into the issues that puzzle them about their language learning lives within the classroom context, recognising that very few studies have been executed from this perspective. It maintains the reasoning behind the use of the term learner-research and the definition of research described above (1.4.2). RQ2 examines the different types of learner and
teacher knowledge that might be generated throughout this process within the framework explained in Chapter 2. The final RQ looks at how these unique learner and teacher perspectives might add to our understanding of teaching and learning in the language classroom, by the different ‘knowledges’ that are produced through foregrounding the voices of the learners themselves, the questions learners ask, and the interpretative frames they use to understand their own learning lives (adapted from Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990: 2) as they become practitioners of learning alongside the teacher.

1.5 Ethical considerations

I referred above (1.2.1) to the moral imperative of research and the importance of the ethical lens within which we carry out our research particularly with regards to who our research is for and who benefits from it (Ortega, 2005: 427). By working within an EP framework, where the principles (in particular Principles 3-4) are concerned with bringing people together and ensuring that everybody benefits and develops through the work for understanding, I believed that I was working in a socially responsible way. However, I was not just a practitioner researcher in this instance, but also an academic researcher and that had implications for my ethical approach.

From an academic point of view, it needed to comply with the formal university ethical procedures, which included obtaining informed consent from all the participants (Appendix 1). As both teacher and academic researcher, I also needed to develop and maintain responsible and trustworthy relationships with all involved (Gorman, 2007): the learners; my co-teachers and colleagues; the institution. I needed to be accountable to the whole community for both the processes and product of the research (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007: 206). As the learners would also be doing research, they too needed to be aware of some of the ethical implications of researching and representing the views and actions of others. Ethics thus formed part of our early class discussions (3.2).

From a practice perspective, there is a sense in which as practice and ethics intersect, ‘research ethics become everyday ethics’ (Mockler, 2014: 152). Mockler identifies five ‘critical ethical dimensions’ (p.153) relating to ‘inquiry as stance’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2007: 35). These include the idea that informed consent goes beyond the signing of forms to a transparency of purpose, plan, learning goals and benefits for learners throughout the whole process (Mockler, 2014: 153). Striving to do no harm necessitates
a commitment to model behaviour and interactions that embody democratic and socially just values.  

(Mockler, 2014: 154).

There is also the need to understand the power dynamics at work in the classroom and how that power (and here I would include that of both teacher and learners) might become an obstacle to learning. A further ethical consideration, and one which relates to my discussions of today’s learner above (1.2), is the need for practitioner research to be transformative in both intent and action.

These were the dimensions within which I attempted to operate throughout this project.

1.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have attempted to give an overview of Exploratory Practice, showing where it sits within the practitioner research literature. I have explored the phrase ‘key developing practitioners’ in relation to learners, seeking parallels with a view of teachers as practitioner researchers. These parallels include the possible benefits and implications that taking such a perspective might bring for them personally, their role in a globalised knowledge economy, and the academy. I then sought to reveal some of the assumptions I bring to this process in particular in relation to my understandings of the nature of the classroom, teaching and learning, knowledge generation, research and ethics. I traced the development of my RQs, the rationale behind them and the sort of knowledge I am hoping to contribute through them. I ended by taking a brief look at the ethical considerations of a project such as this.

The next chapter takes a more theoretical look at the principles of EP, examining the outworking of both principles and practices within the EP literature.
As stated in the prologue, the EP principles form the cornerstone of this thesis, providing both the methodology and pedagogy through which it has been executed. I gave a brief introduction to them in 1.1.2, setting them within the broader context of practitioner research and in particular Reflective Practice and Action Research. In this chapter, I seek to build on this by not only surveying the theorisation and practical outworking of these principles in the EP literature, but also to offer my own developing understandings and theorisations of what they might mean, particularly in relation to my RQs and the contributions that I hope to make.

The principles are not meant to operate in isolation, but together in harmony. For the purposes of the present discussion though, I deal with them separately. The first two (related to quality of life and understanding) are perhaps the most elusive to pinpoint and define, and I dedicate the majority of the available space to them. I then deal more briefly with the remaining principles, grouping Principles 3-5 under the banner of collegiality and 6 and 7 under sustainability.

### 2.1 Quality of life in its broadest sense

The first principle of EP is ‘focus on quality of life as the fundamental issue’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 260, emphasis original).

Quality of life (QoL) is a rather nebulous term, although Fayers and Machin (2007: 4) claim it is a term understood intuitively by people in the West as something good and desirable. In fact, despite its common usage (Google returns over a million results), it is used by different disciplines to mean different things, and there seems to be little consensus about what it means and how it might best be measured (Eckersley, 2013; Fayers & Machin, 2007; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).

Although the term quality of life did not come into common usage until the twentieth century, the concept can be traced back to two different approaches to the idea of ‘happiness’ in Greek philosophy. The first is that of hedonism, which stems from Aristippus of Cyrene (4th century BC) and the Cyrenic school of thought who believed that happiness is the product of pleasure. Only those things which afford pleasurable feelings or consequences are intrinsically good (Delle
The second perspective is found in Aristotle’s (384-322BC) Nichomachean Ethics (Diener & Suh, 1997; Fayers & Machin, 2007; Nussbaum, 1993) and the notion of *eudaimonia*, which is most frequently translated as happiness, but can also be translated as well-being (Fayers & Machin, 2007: 6). While the modern meaning of the word ‘happiness’ refers to an emotional state, something that we are at any given time, Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* also refers to an activity, or something we do. Aristotle himself defines it as ‘living well and acting well’ (EN I, 4). One cannot be ‘happy’ (or enjoy a good QoL) in Aristotle’s philosophy unless one practises living well. Thus it is a process rather than a product which focuses on self-actualisation, human flourishing (another possible translation of *eudaimonia*), and the fulfilling of one’s potential (Ryff, Singer, & Dienberg Love, 2004: 1383). It is about *being* (the state of living well) and *doing* (the practice of living well).

This notion of *being* and *doing* is taken up by Nussbaum and Sen (1993) in their discussion of what QoL is and how it should be measured and assessed. They suggest that ‘we seem to need a kind of rich and complex description of what people are able to do and to be’ (p.2). Implicit in this is the sense that QoL is dynamic rather than static, and again emphasises the wisdom of focusing as much on the processes through which QoL is developed as to what constitutes it. What is more, not only will QoL mean different things to different people at different times in their life (Fayers & Machin, 2007: 6; Ryff et al. 2004: 1384) (see also EN I, 4), but it is also conceptualised in different ways by different cultures (Booysen, 2002: 120).

### 2.2 Quality of life in Exploratory Practice

#### 2.2.1 The background

When the ideas and principles around Exploratory Practice were in their initial formulations, the first two principles were:

1. Promoting understanding while
2. Promoting language teaching and learning

(Allwright & Lenzuen, 1997: 75)

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2 From here on I refer to the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle as EN followed by the book number (I) and chapter (4). I am using the translation by Crisp (2000).
The word ‘while’ embodies the need for any research activity to contribute to the main aim of the classroom rather than being seen as a parasitic and separate activity. Thus,

> Exploratory Practice is not a way of getting ‘research’ done, but a way of getting teaching (and learning) done in a way that is informed by an exploratory perspective intent on developing a rich understanding of what happens in the language classroom. (Allwright & Lenzuen, 1997: 75)

However, there was later a shift away from understanding as the primary aim, to a focus on quality of life, with understanding becoming the means by which and through which quality of life might be enhanced. QoL became the first principle (Allwright, 2003) and this has remained unchanged. But what exactly does it mean?

In attempting to answer this question, I begin by outlining what QoL is not, and perhaps here it is important to consider the backdrop against which these principles arose: the dissatisfaction with a focus on results and efficiency in classrooms, and a concern that practitioner research itself was focused on technical efficiency or problem-solving, with improvement being the main aim (Allwright, 2003; Lyra, Fish, & Braga, 2003). Allwright’s antidote to this was to shift from prioritising the improvement of teaching and learning to prioritising life issues, and working to understand that life, rather than narrowly focusing on the more technical issues of how to do things better (Allwright, 2005a). This is not to say that teaching and learning become unimportant. On the contrary, the desire is that

> working [to understand] life in the language classroom will provide a good foundation for helping teachers and learners make their time together both pleasant and productive. (Allwright, 2003: 114)

### 2.2.2 Life and work as being and doing

This idea of life and work is taken up by Gieve and Miller (2006) who offer what may be the most complete treatment to date of the nature of quality of life in the classroom. Their arguments are based on the assumption that it is impossible to separate our work lives and our personal lives; both are intimately related. The tensions often felt between finding a life-work balance can be addressed through a focus on QoL in the classroom as opposed to quality of work. This is not to imply that work is not a part of life, yet by focusing on QoL as the overarching issue rather than quality of work (above all when that quality is measured and
assessed by external standards) we invoke a process that ‘constitute[s] an inherent way of being in the classroom’ (Gieve & Miller, 2006: 23, emphasis original). This process revolves around teachers and learners working together to understand their joint experiences of life in the classroom. Implicit here is the notion of doing, of working out how to live well within the constraints and possibilities of the classroom.

This dual notion of being and doing is also highlighted by Wu (2006: 333), as he attempts a philosophical conceptualisation of EP combining both western and eastern philosophies. He describes QoL as ‘authenticity of being’, and understanding as ‘the unity of knowing and doing’. He terms the articulation of understanding ‘naming’ (Wu, 2004: 309), and while he makes explicit the idea of action only in his definition of understanding, I believe it is implicit in his notion of ‘authenticity of being’. By qualifying being with authenticity, he suggests more than merely existing, more than going through the motions, more than a compartmentalisation of the varied facets of our lives. Rather it implies an active, interested and holistic approach to life. As Hanks (2009: 34) suggests in her explanation of QoL, it is something that not only makes teaching and learning enjoyable but also ‘aims to ensure that the emotional, intellectual and social needs of the participants are addressed’: it is about the whole person; it is about life. Thus the first and second principles of EP are complexly intertwined and inseparable from each other, and this process of being and doing is evident in some of the accounts of using EP in various contexts around the world.

Zhang (2004: 334) tells of how a shift in focus from seeing the issues in her extensive reading classes in China as problems to be solved, to seeing them in ‘the larger context of the life and the lives they affected’, resulted in ‘a pleasant and harmonious atmosphere’ in which to cultivate foreign language competency (p. 344). She found that the ‘EP principles not only help the learners to understand one another, but also help teachers and learners develop a mutual understanding that was never achieved before’ (p. 344). She also perceived an increased enjoyment in their classes. This heightened engagement through prioritising quality of life in the classroom is also evident in other accounts of EP work (Chuk, 2004; Hanks, 2015a; Salvi, 2012).

This focus on interpersonal understanding also relates to one of the key benefits teachers report in their EP work: the increase of trust and mutual respect (Li, 2006; Miller, 2003; Slimani-Rolls, 2003; Zhang, 2004). In working together for understanding, relationships of trust and respect between both teachers and learners and between learners themselves are forged. In
encouraging learners to explore their own puzzles about classroom life and pursue their own understandings, there is also a sense in which the teacher takes a risk (Hanks, 2015b: 622), moving from being in control as the teacher, to handing that control to the students. This implies the need to trust the learners to take the work seriously, another of EP’s propositions about learners (Allwright & Hanks, 2009:2).

It is important to note that in the above examples, QoL as seen through the dual lens of being and doing is essentially a relational concept. It is concerned with understanding how we are (being) and how we act (doing) in relation to those around us. For a group of Brazilian teachers and learners who regularly practice EP in their different contexts, this has become so central that they call themselves ‘doing being’ practitioners because of the impossibility of separating what they do from who they are (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 227-228).

If QoL is enhanced through the work of understanding that EP encourages, and if it is a relational concept, then the way those relationships are manifested, developed, maintained and managed within the classroom setting is key. This is not always easy, nor is it necessarily within the power of the teacher to manage as Slimani-Rolls (2003) shows in her investigation of group work in French language classes at a UK university. Her data uncovers how life issues from outside the classroom (with a particular focus on interpersonal relationships between students) are brought into class and serve to either subvert or enhance the work that the teacher has planned, and the conducive work environment that he is attempting to create. She also suggests that individual learners, aware of personal conflict or unhelpful attitudes to group work ‘may deliberately seek to make the quality of life during group work bearable by putting social needs before their own pedagogic advancement’ (p. 230).

Perhaps this example raises the question of both what quality is and whose assessment of quality counts. As the work for understanding is intimately connected to the notion of QoL, then surely we must also ask what it means to understand that classroom experience and whose understandings count. Is it something that is observable and measurable from outside, or is it something more subjective, that can only be fully appreciated and ‘measured’ by those who are living the classroom experience? As Gieve and Miller (2006: 20-21) contend:

understanding the QoCRL[quality of classroom life] involves multifaceted, interpretative processes based on frameworks of expectations of what constitutes a good or poor
quality of classroom experience. Since these frameworks are necessarily socio-historically situated and interpersonally constructed in complex and idiosyncratic ways, understandings not only tend to vary among classroom participants, but are also bound to be different from the perspective of an external observer of the classroom situation.

In a multilingual EAP class, these frameworks of expectations are extremely complex. Because the courses are generally short, time-constrained and invariably involve high stakes, the need to work for understanding so that QoL might be enhanced becomes both more pertinent and urgent. Yet this does not necessarily mean that prioritising QoL by working to understand it means a smooth passage to ‘authenticity of being’. I believe the sometimes rocky road towards QoL is hinted at by Hanks (2013) in her doctoral thesis. She concludes that not only were QoL and understanding key, but that relevance also had a central part to play.

2.2.3 The issue of relevance

Hanks (2013: 225) proposes that rather than the present list format of EP principles (1.1.2), they should be represented as a web of interlocking ideas, with three ideals at the centre: protecting and/or enhancing QoL; working for understanding; and relevance. Her own doctoral study concludes that the perceived relevance to the participants of the EP work they were doing affected their ability and willingness to adopt it wholeheartedly. This in turn had an implicit effect on the work for understanding and QoL in the classroom, and she alludes to possible tensions if learners do not recognise or grasp the potential benefit of engaging in practitioner inquiry, of doing learner-research. However, the perceived relevance of EP to their own and their learners’ lives is what has attracted others to EP, for example Dar (2012), who wanted a way of doing research that was meaningful to both herself and her learners.

Relevance then seems to be something that is subjectively determined. However, Hammersley (2004: 169) citing Schütz (1970: 26) distinguishes between two different types of relevance in relation to practitioner research: ‘imposed relevance’ and ‘intrinsic relevance’. This distinction is based on the Greek root of the word ‘problem’ defined by Schütz as ‘that which is thrown before me’ and translated as an ‘imposed relevance’; a response to problems that arise from our experience and practice. Hammersley (2004:169) contrasts this with the Aristotelian notion of puzzlement which derives from the innate inquisitiveness that we have about the world in which we live and our relationship to it. Schütz terms this ‘intrinsic relevance’. It seems that EP would more closely align itself with the idea of ‘intrinsic relevance’, the fomenting of a curious
attitude of puzzlement towards life in the language classroom. However, I would suggest that if teacher or learner puzzles relate to an issue perceived as needing immediate attention, an ‘imposed relevance’, then tensions with EP’s curiosity-driven and open-ended approach might well arise.

Relevance then is not a straightforward concept, but it is one that I believe is crucial to the practice of the first two EP principles.

2.2.4 Summary

So far, I have conceptualised QoL in EP in Aristotelian terms as centrally concerned with being and doing, where QoL is as much about practising living well as the state of living well, and noted the relational nature of these two notions. I suggested that because of the inherent complexity of the classroom these may not always work together in harmony, can not necessarily be ‘measured’ in any meaningful way except by the participants themselves, and have intimated that relevance may have a part to play. I have linked the notion of doing with the second principle of EP, working for understanding, showing how these two principles are interdependent and cited Wu’s (2006) work which defines understanding as the ‘unity of knowing and doing’. It is thus to the second principle ‘work to understand it [QoL], before thinking about solving problems’ that I now turn, to take a deeper look at what it might mean to ‘understand’ in EP terms.

2.3 Understanding ‘understanding’

I began the section above on QoL by stating that it is a rather nebulous term that has been defined and interpreted in a variety of ways. The concept of understanding is perhaps equally complex and elusive, at least in academic terms (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 151). Just as we looked at what QoL is not in our attempt to understand it more fully (2.2), here I cite Allwright (2005a: 358) on what understanding is not:

We knew we could not expect to be able ever to solve the riddle of knowing exactly what we meant by understanding, but we knew we meant something more than knowledge (echoing the traditional discussions about the distinction between technical and practical knowledge going back to Aristotle).
I stated above (2.2.1) that understanding stands in contrast to improved techniques, efficiency and technical problem-solving, but here Allwright makes a direct contrast between understanding and knowledge, in particular the traditional distinctions derived from the philosophy of Aristotle. He cites two of these: technical knowledge (techne in Aristotle’s philosophy) and practical knowledge (or phronesis). Traditionally, there is a third, episteme, most frequently translated as theoretical or scientific knowledge, and from which our term epistemology derives. I believe it is this traditional tripartite compartmentalisation of Aristotle’s thinking about knowledge (Eikeland, 2007) to which Allwright is referring and which has been used by many in an attempt to transcend the theory-practice divide (D. Carr, 1995a; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Saugstad, 2005), particularly by proponents of AR (Carr, 2006; Kemmis, 2010b). Yet Wu’s definition of understanding cited above speaks of ‘doing’ alongside ‘knowing’, so I would like to revisit Aristotle’s thinking here to see if a more nuanced and less compartmentalised reading of his work can help shed light on what we might mean by understanding.

2.3.1 Aristotle’s gnoseology

Eikeland⁴ (2006, 2007, 2008) (see also Kristjánsson, 2005; Papastephanou, 2010) rejects the traditional, tripartite categorisation of forms of knowledge into episteme, techne and phronesis⁵, arguing that Aristotle’s view of knowledge is much more nuanced than is commonly expounded in modern thought, particularly between the seemingly diametrically opposed positivist and post-modernist views. The former is rooted in the idea that only knowledge produced through scientific research is ‘good’ and valid, while the latter takes the opposite stance claiming that all knowledge (experiential, traditional, practical, tacit, emotional etc.) is equally valid and ‘good’. Aristotle, he argues, does not subscribe to either view and proposes that when referring to Aristotle’s theory of knowledge, we should adopt the more comprehensive term gnoseology (from gnosis which means knowledge) rather than the more limited modern term epistemology (derived from episteme, which is just one type of gnosis⁶)

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¹ I acknowledge here that I am not a classical Greek scholar and am therefore dependent on others’ reading and understanding of Aristotle’s works to build these arguments, and I hope that I am true to their meanings and do their arguments justice.

⁴ I draw heavily on Eikeland’s work in my discussions here. While many scholars seem to build their view of Aristotle’s philosophy of knowledge through a reliance on the Nichomachean Ethics, Eikeland uses the whole corpus of Aristotelian writings.

⁵ Episteme, techne and phronesis, although referred to in much of the literature as knowledge forms, can also be referred to as intellectual virtues or excellences. Phronesis, however is both an intellectual and an ethical virtue (Eikeland, 2008: 59).

⁶ Another type of knowledge that comes under Aristotle’s gnoseology but which I do not discuss here is pathos: ‘being affected passively from the outside’ (Eikeland, 2007: 348).
(Eikeland, 2008: 80; EE7 VIII, 1). While recognising different types of knowledge, the unifying factor is that all knowledge is relational: there is always a knower and a known (be that an object or a person). Although the distance between knower and known will differ depending on the type of knowledge, if all knowledge is relational, then it stands that no knowledge is politically or ethically neutral, nor is it free from experiential or practical reference (Papastephanou, 2013). In this sense, knowledge can not be separated from ethics and all knowledge also has its roots in empeiria (practically acquired experience) (Eikeland, 2006: 15).

In the following three sections, I examine these three forms of knowledge, looking for links between them, attempting to move beyond the debate about which type of knowledge is good, valid, or even better, to show that all knowledge potentially contributes to our understandings of life and living, and ultimately our well-being or QoL (eudaimonia), and that perhaps it would be unwise of EP to reject certain ways of knowing and types of knowledge in its conceptualisation of understanding.

2.3.2 Episteme

As stated above (2.3), episteme is usually translated as theoretical or even scientific knowledge, and understood in terms of the modern idea of theory and a positivist view of science (Eisner, 2002; Fenstermacher, 1994); something which is opposed to practical, applied and vocational understandings (see for example Flyvbjerg, 2001). Eikeland (2006, 2007, 2008) argues that the common translation of episteme as science is too narrow and that in Aristotelian thinking, episteme has two dimensions, which he terms theoresis and theoria. Both theoresis and theoria are concerned with the study of things that are relatively stable and secure (as opposed to things that occur by chance or accidentally). Any change, movement or development occurs internally rather than through external influence or manipulation. Both also seek to discover what is generally true, and neither is directly action-orientated. However, what differentiates them is where they sit on the continuum between knower and known.

In theoresis, the relationship between knower and known is one of distance and separation (for example astronomy) and knowledge is built through deductive reasoning, a ‘moving down’ from models and theories to data, and it is this aspect of episteme that is commonly associated with

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7 From here on I use EE to refer to the Eudemian Ethics. I am using the translation by Rackham (1981).
scientific endeavours today. Theories can also be equated with ‘othering’, with the separation of knower and known (Eikeland, 2007: 352); it is this separation that permits objectivity, and much qualitative research employs this version of episteme.

Theoria, (translated by Eikeland as ‘insight’) sits, by contrast, at the opposite end of the continuum between knower and known (for example grammar, music, boxing). Here, the relationship is internalised and there is no physical distance between knower and known; between the person doing the activity and the activity itself. Theoria begins in practically acquired experience (empeiria), so although it also seeks to build theory, is not outside or separate from our practice (Papastephanou, 2013: 113). Theoria is a ‘moving up’ from experience, to articulated insight through dialogue (individual and collective). It is a search for understanding, for general principles, but is free from the need to plan for action or intervene in any way (Eikeland, 2006: 18).

Eikeland (2008: 308) uses the metaphor of the theatre to explain the difference between theories and theoria: theories is produced ‘off-stage’, by the spectator who is not involved in the action in any way; theoria alternates between performing ‘on-stage’ and reflecting ‘back-stage’, through a process of dialogue. This resonates with Schön’s assessment of Dewey’s theory of inquiry:

The inquirer does not stand outside the situation like a spectator; he is in it and in transaction with it.

(Schön, 1992: 122, emphases original)

Theoria through dialogue asks how we can individually and collectively become better at what we do, but not in an action-oriented, problem-solving way, but rather the development and insight that comes from performing ‘on-stage’ and reflecting ‘back-stage’: change that happens from within our practices rather than from outside manipulation.

Connected to this is the interesting thesis put forward by Greco (2014) that a better translation of episteme into English would be ‘understanding’. He justifies this thesis by pointing out, as Eikeland has, that understanding is relational. It consists of ‘knowledge of a system of dependence relations’ (p. 292) rather than isolated accounts of knowledge. It makes links between things, showing how they fit together, explaining the coherence between them and
has the explanatory power to account for the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of things (p. 293). He also states that it is the understanding of how to live well (p. 285). This is traditionally associated more with *phronesis* (2.3.5), and yet as Eikeland (2006: 9) points out, for Aristotle all inquiry should be concerned with how to live well (EE I, 3).

I stated above that the way to *theoria* was through dialogue, so what exactly is this?

### 2.3.3 Dialogue, deliberation and *praxis*

Dialogue is key to the ‘moving up’ from how things seem to be to understanding (*theoria*). Like QoL and knowledge, dialogue is relational, seeking to ensure that all develop and learn. It is action-based, stemming from our experience, and is a ‘cognitive, emotional and practical process’ (Eikeland, 2006: 41), which has the purpose of

> generating knowledge, understanding, and insight. It is transforming through defining and distinguishing similarities and differences in action, things observed, words used etc.’.

(Eikeland, 2006: 40-41)

It is a way of both articulating and making explicit our practices from the inside-out (Eikeland, 2007: 352); in Wu's (2004) terminology ‘naming’, a term also used by Freire (1970/1996: 69) to describe the essence of dialogue. Crucial for dialogue and thus the development of *theoria* however, is *skhole*, which gives space and leisure for dialogue away from the pressure to act (Eikeland, 2007: 352). I see clear links to EP, believing that to a certain extent it encompasses this view of understanding: there is a focus on understanding first and foremost before moving into action (Principle 2); understanding is seen as a goal for all to be working towards for mutual development (Principles 3-5); removing the pressure to act and find solutions possibly allows for deeper understandings to develop (Dawson, 2016: 11). *Skhole* is also implicit in my first RQ, where time and space is seen as a necessary prerequisite for the work of understanding.

I referred above to the metaphor of the theatre to understand the difference between *theoresis* and *theoria*. Eikeland (2008) uses another metaphor to distinguish between dialogue and deliberation: topographies. Dialogue is akin to ‘mapping the topography’, understanding

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8 Note that understanding the ‘how’ of something, such as ‘how do we deal with conflict in our group work?’ (an understanding-based approach) is different from working out ‘how to do’ something, such as ‘how can we deal with conflict in our group work?’ (a more interventionist, problem-based approach).
the personal, practical, cultural, social, relational, emotional, institutional, intellectual, economic and other kinds of interconnected landscapes, or ‘topographies’ that we live, ending in a practically based ‘topology’.

(Eikeland, 2008: 270)

Once we understand these interconnected landscapes, deliberation helps us to move around them. Unlike dialogue, deliberation is action-orientated, helping us to make wise and ethical choices about aims and purposes: where to go, how to get there and what to do within our practice landscapes. Deliberation is most closely associated with phronesis (2.3.5), and while dialogue sorts and defines, deliberation analyses and interprets, enabling us to understand a situation and act in the wisest and most just way possible (Eikeland, 2008: 140).

Praxis is ‘doing action’ where there is no formal difference between the beginning, the means and the end. Praxis has been described by Kemmis (2010a: 11) as ‘knowing doing’ which is the ‘sense of knowing what one is doing in the doing of it’ (emphasis original), and resonates with Wu’s (2006) conception of understanding as ‘the unity of knowing and doing’. Praxis knowledge also ‘regulates, or organises, the relationships between equals’ (Eikeland, 2007: 351), those who share a common practice. However, like the two dimensions of episteme, Eikeland (2007, 2008) refers to two aspects of praxis: praxis₁ and praxis₂. Praxis₁ could be described as the outworking of our tacit and unarticulated understandings, similar in a sense to Schön’s (1983: 49-50) ‘knowing-in-action’; those parts of our everyday practice that we perform intuitively, our habitual practice (habitus). Praxis₁ is also so to speak our training ground, where we move from novice to expert through rehearsal, exercise and practice (‘on-stage’), and is the starting point for dialogue (‘back-stage’) (Eikeland, 2008: 276, 2007: 348), as we question our practice, our beliefs, our assumptions, the areas of our practice that have not yet been subjected to inquiry. The insight that comes through dialogue expressed as theoria might then move back down into our praxis, as we enact our understandings, but theoria is not necessary for praxis₁. Praxis₂ is likewise ‘doing action’ but intimately associated with phronesis and is about the virtuoso performance of intellectual and ethical virtues (expanded in 2.3.5 below).

I believe the above account allows for the possibilities of including rather than excluding the

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10 Throughout this thesis I generally distinguish between these dimensions of praxis. Where I do not distinguish, I refer to the general meaning above of praxis as ‘doing action’.
idea of *episteme* in our notion of understanding. Its focus on understanding how and why things work (or do not work) as they do, seems to resonate with EP. One could argue however that *episteme* (in both its *theoriesis* and *theoria* dimensions), is about theorising the how and why of things that are relatively stable, and EP is neither overtly concerned with theory building, nor, one could argue with stability, (unless we understand stability as the sort of ‘dynamic stability’ of a complex system (1.3), rather than something that is fixed and unchanging). EP’s primary concern is the development of localised expressions of understanding, those which have utmost relevance for the people developing them in their own particular and unique situations (Allwright, 2003: 120), rather than what are termed ‘high-level generalisations’(Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 146). Understandings in EP ‘look downwards’ (Allwright, 2005a: 359) to what can be lived. Yet *theoria* stems from practice, is about articulating tacit understandings that are already to some extent lived because they are part of us, and also allows for ‘moving down’ again from those articulated understandings to *praxis*, the living out of what we have understood; the ‘on-stage’ performing.

There is also a sense in which as we examine the similarities and differences within the growing body of EP work situated in diverse historical, social, political, cultural and educational contexts across the globe, we are a community of practitioners building a mutual understanding of our EP practices. I believe that *episteme* therefore has its place in EP.

### 2.3.4 *Techne*

*Techne* is closely associated with our modern understanding of technical thinking (Carr, 2005; Kristjánsson, 2005), knowhow or craft knowledge (D. Carr, 1995a). The forms of action associated with *techne* are *poiesis*, a type of ‘making action’ (Kemmis, 2010a: 10), and *khresis* ‘using action’ (Eikeland, 2007: 352). These are both instrumental actions, means to an end, with the goal being a product or result. The focus is on what we can change, use and manipulate for our own ends (Eikeland, 2006: 23) and is very different from the ‘doing action’ of *praxis*. The guiding image of the finished product is very strong and *techne* directs the action to this end (Carr & Kemmis, 1986: 32). *Techne* calculates effects and imposes itself, rather than seeking to communicate with the mind of another through dialogue (Eikeland, 2008: 99). *Techne* asks ‘how might we intervene/improve things to achieve a specific end goal?’

It is this understanding of *techne* that informs the practice of teaching as a skill to be learnt, an apprenticeship with a master craftsman that primarily occurs during initial teacher training and
practice (Chick, 2015: 298). The teacher learns how to apply current educational theory to practice, which in TESOL has mostly consisted of the search for and transmission of the ‘best method’ (Prabhu, 1990). It may also refer to the idea of ‘the good language learner’ and the teaching of skills and strategies to achieve optimum learning (Griffiths, 2015; J. Rubin, 1975).

Because of its associations with an applied science or technicist approach to teaching and learning, techne, like episteme, has been dismissed as being concerned with efficiency and results; a product rather than a process. This might be true to some extent and it has certainly contributed to the search for new ways of understanding the relationship between practice and theory, one of which has been the adoption of Aristotle’s practical wisdom or phronesis (Carr, 1995; Carr & Kemmis, 1986), as discussed below. However, I believe it would also be unwise to reject this aspect of understanding outright. There is a practical action (albeit of the making and using rather than doing variety) that is part of techne and I wonder if this may link to the idea of relevance as discussed above (2.2.3) in regards to the end telos or the perceived purpose of working for understanding. Is it perceived as a means to an end (techne), an ‘imposed relevance’ that needs a solution, or as a more dialogic and open-ended search for insight (episteme) stimulated by an ‘intrinsic relevance’?

2.3.5 Phronesis

Phronesis has been described as practical wisdom (Carr, 1987; Eikeland, 2007; EN VI) or a disposition to act wisely; to do what is good in any situation (Kemmis, 2010a); how to act with justice, courage, honesty in this particular situation at this particular time, and it is through exercising phronesis that one achieves eudaimonia, or well-being and quality of life (Caduri, 2013: 40-41).

So phronesis, rather than telling us how to do something (techne), asks whether it is good or right to do something. Phronesis starts with principles or virtues, rather than experience, ‘moving down’ to practice. Virtue (or excellence) may be defined as ‘what makes any thing or activity work at its best’ (Eikeland, 2006: 20), and virtuosity is activity orientated more than attitude orientated (p.21). However, as Eikeland (2006: 26) points out, phronesis alone is not sufficient as it does not give us the means to develop this practical wisdom. Praxis₂, the form of action associated with phronesis, helps us to develop this wisdom. Praxis₂ and phronesis are mutually dependent. You cannot act in the best way (praxis₂) unless you understand what that
best way consists of (phronesis). Likewise, knowing the best way (phronesis) is not enough on its own, you also need to have a highly developed ability to act in the best way (praxis₂) at any given time. Praxis₂ asks ‘how can I/we do this in the best possible way right here and now’ (Eikeland, 2008: 271).

In phronesis and praxis₂, the emphasis is on things that are not generally stable and about which we might not share a common practice, but which are in our power to influence (EN III, 3), such as the areas of ethics, politics and social justice which need deliberation to know how to act wisely in each situation. Practice and ethics are inseparable (Caduri, 2013: 41), and are both an individual and collective responsibility (Eikeland, 2006: 35-36). Praxis should be developed by all and everyone has the responsibility to live phronetically (ethically).

It is perhaps easy to see why both phronesis knowledge and praxis action have been so widely adopted and used by educational philosophers and practitioner researchers in an attempt to distance themselves from modern, reductionist science and the troubled relationship between theory and practice in education. This has resulted in what Kristjánsson (2005) terms the phronesis-praxis perspective (PPP). The PPP is found primarily in the writings of action researchers and has been variously termed ‘praxis research’ (Sandberg, Broms, Grip, Steen, & Ullmark, 1992), ‘phronetic research’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001), and ‘praxis-related research’ (Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007). For Carr (1987), PPP is a key element in the development of his practical educational philosophy. However, these approaches have been critiqued as not holding to a true reading of Aristotle (in particular see Eikeland, 2006; Kristjánsson, 2005). For example, despite apparently adopting the notion of phronesis, Flyvbjerg (2001) has persisted in the separation of the knower and known with the creation of the ‘expert’ phronetic researcher (Eikeland, 2006: 14; Kemmis, 2010a: 15-16), which seems contrary to Aristotle’s understanding of phronesis as described above.

Above, I used Eikeland’s metaphor of topographies to highlight the distinction between dialogue and deliberation. Phronesis deliberates from virtues/principles/excellences, and praxis₂ is the perfected performance of these virtues (doing what is good in each situation) (Eikeland, 2008: 59-60). However, dialogue has a key role in enabling individuals and collectives to ‘acquire, develop and define ... the virtues in every field, both intellectual and ethical’ (Eikeland, 2008: 271). Praxis₁ also has its part to play as the ‘training ground’ for the development of these virtues. In this sense, a disconnect between phronesis and episteme seems unhelpful; there are
no easily drawn solid lines separating the different forms and ways of knowing. Instead there are fuzzy and porous boundaries.

In TESOL, praxis has also been related to the generation of theory by practitioners with Edge (2011: 17) defining it as ‘the fusion of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ as mindful, committed activity’. This definition seems to account for both epistemic and phronetic praxis, for both the possibility of theorising one’s practice (individually and collectively) and acting in accordance with those theorisations, as well as acting in an ethically informed way, committed to the virtues of justice, equality and so on that lead to eudaimonia.

If we take the view of praxis and phronesis described above, then the learners too have both the right and responsibility to develop the virtues necessary (through praxis) to live phronetically and move towards eudaimonia. As Freire (1970/1996: 106) suggests, they too are to become ‘beings of the praxis’ where praxis equates to transformation through reflection and action. I believe part of this is theorising (theoria) through dialogue the whys and hows of their own practice.

2.3.6 Summary

The tendency then has been to distance episteme and techne from phronesis giving the latter priority and rejecting the more scientific and positivist notions traditionally associated with episteme and the technicist notions associated with techne. This results in a diminished view of what knowledge is (Papastephanou, 2010: 589) and perhaps limits the possibilities of understanding in its fullest sense. The above reading of Aristotle shows that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and although distinct, they also overlap.

2.4 Understanding in Exploratory Practice

I began the section on understanding ‘understanding’ (2.3), by citing Allwright on what understanding is not. In the same article, he states that rather than focusing on ‘ways of knowing’ we need to think about the relationship between knowing and life: ‘what it means to the life of a person to “know” something’ (Allwright, 2005a: 354). I have shown above my conviction that all the different ways of knowing potentially have a contribution to the life of the whole person and the life of the community through the relational nature of all knowledge.

In examining how various accounts of EP from around the world illustrated what QoL meant to EP practitioners, I inevitably touched on notions of understanding. Now, however, I wish to take
a closer look at how the relational nature of knowledge as conceptualised in episteme, techne and phronesis might be present in the literature about EP.

Gunn (2010) describes the exploration of what she perceived as superficial, descriptive or non-existent reflections produced by her MATESOL student teachers on their lesson plans and practice classes. She explored her puzzle with the student teachers, through class discussions, email correspondence and one-to-one chats. Her discoveries unearthed a mismatch in expectations around what reflection involved, and a multitude of reasons why the students were not reflecting as she hoped, which went far beyond her own original assessment of the issue. The outcome of her explorations (through dialogue with her learners) was to reach a common understanding between students and teacher of the benefits of reflection and what reflection entailed. This seems a clear example of the theoria dimension of episteme resulting in praxis₁: an understanding of how everyone perceived reflection, why these differences existed, and how they could generally make their reflections better and more relevant. This understanding enabled her to tailor her own input to address the students’ understandings, doubts and concerns about reflection rather than her own: her developing praxis₂ as teacher helped her know how to act in this situation with these people at this particular time.

Other EP reports focusing on understanding the difference in expectations and beliefs between teacher and learners include: Kuschnir and Dos Santos Machado (2003), who explored their puzzles about translation and dictionary use in the classroom; Zhang’s (2004) work on extensive reading classes cited above (2.2.2); Rose (2007) on the relevance of different class activities to her learners; Dar (2012) on why her learners were not taking responsibility for their learning. This is working to build insight and understanding from what appears to be (praxis₁), through dialogue between all the practitioners (teachers and learners) involved in classroom practice and life, moving from more tacit, individual understandings to articulated collective understandings (theoria), resulting in enhanced QoL (eudaimonia).

Rowland (2011) takes a different approach by using journal articles based on research that conforms to theoreosis with his language learners in order for them to examine their own experiences, beliefs and practices in relation to theory. This resulted in an intersection between theoreosis and theoria; perhaps we could say ‘Theory’ and ‘theory’ as they made sense of their own learning lives through dialogue with each other and current research.
Perpignan (2003) in her doctoral study on written feedback within a context of writing for academic purposes in Israel, notes how her quest for a theory that could inspire guidelines for teacher effectiveness became a quest for an understanding of the conditions under which effectiveness could best be achieved.

(Perpignan, 2003:259)

Through a dialogic approach to feedback she discovers that learning is best promoted when there is an acknowledgement that both sides are making an effort to achieve understanding, rather than the product of any shared understandings that are reached in and of themselves. Key to this is

a dialogue in which not only is the language mutually understood, and not only are the channels kept open in both directions, but the individual is respected in all his or her idiosyncrasy, and there is special respect for the emotions involved in the receiving and giving of the feedback.

(Perpignan, 2003: 272)

This clearly illustrates both the relational and emotional aspects of working for understanding. It also illustrates the importance of dialogue in establishing the virtues, in this case ‘understanding the conditions’ which could then, through deliberation, be worked out in the best possible way for each individual in the feedback process (praxis).

The above examples mostly illustrate how teachers have explored their own puzzles about their classroom lives, but what about those examples where it is the learners’ puzzles that are being explored? There is clear evidence in the learner puzzles from Brazil discussed in Allwright and Hanks (2009) as well as some of the puzzles from recent doctoral and master’s work that much learner inquiry is focused on understanding the how and why of their puzzles (episteme): ‘why do people learn swear words more easily?’ led to an understanding of the way swear words were used as a social mechanism (Hanks 2013: 172); ‘why can’t I use the new vocabulary I’ve memorised effectively when I am chatting in English?’ resulted in the student concerned exploring several possible reasons why this might be the case including peer pressure, the strangeness of new words and a lack of confidence (Po-ying, 2007: 233); ‘why is it hard to have a good idea for our project?’ enabled the learners to understand that although there were possible solutions to help find a good idea, not one of them was perfect and it was more helpful to understand the underlying reasons rather than try and find solutions (Salvi, 2012: 28); puzzles
raised by learners in Brazil focus on understanding life issues that are relevant to them such as ‘why do we cheat?’ or ‘why do many teenagers get pregnant in spite of having so much information?’ show a deep critical consciousness of not just their own lives but the social norms and expectations that they are living within (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). These last examples are also clearly related to *praxis*; deliberating about available choices in each situation to choose the ones that might lead to well-being and human flourishing (*eudaimonia*).

Many other examples of learner puzzles however show a tendency towards a more technical, solution-orientated approach. Salvi’s (2012: 28) MA thesis on combining EP with a pedagogy for autonomy notes that all but one group of students explored possible solutions for their puzzle. This is particularly notable in A. Stewart with Croker and Hanks (2014), where the learner posters in the appendix are full of solutions and advice. Hanks (2013) in her doctoral work also notes that many groups seemed to stay within a problem-solution framework offering advice and suggestions to their peers. Perhaps these examples indicate a more *techne* approach to understanding by learners, focussing on the perceived strategies and skills needed to improve language performance.

This pull towards a problem-solution framework brings us to the caveat present in the second half of Principle 2 which states that ‘thinking about solving problems’ must always be subordinate to working to understand QoL. I now take a closer look at the implications of this by examining what exactly is meant by EP’s alternative to ‘problem’: ‘puzzle’.

### 2.4.1 The notion of ‘puzzles’, ‘puzzling’ and ‘puzzlement’ in EP

The concepts of puzzles, puzzling and puzzlement are central to EP and to the idea of working for understanding. Above (1.1.2), I discussed the distinction between the use of puzzle and problem in AR, RP and EP. Judith Hanks, in her 1998 MA dissertation, examines the difference between puzzles and problems (1998: 5-6) and grants that the countable noun ‘puzzle’ does have connotations of ‘solution’ as in crossword puzzle, and proposes the use of the verb form ‘puzzling about’ or ‘being puzzled’ to better explain and describe the processes of working for understanding. She concludes that the key difference is mainly one of attitude, where ‘being puzzled’ is associated with an attitude of curiosity, willingness to explore and open-mindedness, whereas problem is associated with emotions such as frustration and an unwillingness to explore further, looking instead for quick, ‘easy’ answers (Hanks, 1998: 29, 2013:6-7). ‘Solving
puzzles or problems’ is thus anathema to EP, something burdensome (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 151), which stymies the work for understanding. In her later work, Hanks (2013: 7) speaks of ‘moments of transition’ as teachers and learners move from a closed attitude that focuses on solutions to a more open-minded and curious approach, which opens the door to deeper understandings.

These ‘moments of transition’ highlight something that the EP literature is very clear on: the desire for solutions is very real and inherently attractive and there is often a subtle tension, sometimes made explicit, between the pull of seeking solutions and the EP mandate to work first and foremost for understanding (see for example, Dar, 2012; Johnson, 2002; Po-ying, 2007; Salvi, 2012), or where EP is used to a certain extent as the ‘solution’ to the expressed ‘problem’ of the teacher (Dawson, 2012; Zhang, 2004). EP’s preference for questions formulated with ‘why’ is one way of attempting to shift towards a more open-minded, questioning stance (as opposed to the more solution-oriented ‘how can I/we…’ often found in AR). Yet ‘why’ questions in themselves, as the above texts might testify, do not guarantee a solution-free search for understanding; they themselves need ‘unpicking’ to reveal deeper, more researchable questions (5.1; Hanks, forthcoming), and may also lead to quick and easy answers beginning ‘because…’, that shut down (albeit temporarily) future explorations and inquiries.

If we return to Hanks’ conclusion cited above that attitude is key to the process of puzzlement, then perhaps the formulation of questions is not as important as it might initially seem, and there are other question formations that also subvert the problem-solution framework. This possibility became particularly clear during discussions around the use of EP in a large AHRC funded research project11 in which EP was proposed as a possible means of navigating an operational and ethical dilemma (Hanks, with Fay & Dawson, forthcoming). Some of our discussions revolved around the possibility of understanding-orientated ‘how’ questions:

If, on one occasion, a How question better captures my curiosity about my practice, and on another, a Why question works better, why is that problematic?

(Personal correspondence with Richard Fay, September 2014, used with permission)

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11 Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State (AH/L006936/1 – www.researching-multilingually-at-borders.com)
Apparent here is an attitude of puzzling inquiry, and yet the questions asked diverged from the ‘normal’ EP recommended form. This resonates with the thesis put forward by Greco (2014) (2.3.2) above, who states that understanding is about discovering not just the why, but also the how of things. However, in the case of second language learners, perhaps it is wiser to insist on an initial puzzle formulation using ‘why’ to avoid a list of ‘how to’ questions often framed by learners as ‘how can I...’. The challenge then on implementing EP in the classroom is how to cultivate this curious, inquiring and exploratory mind-set rather than a problem-solving one (Hanks, 2013: 202), a challenge I discuss in detail in Part II of this thesis.

2.5 Drawing these ideas together

I have argued that QoL is a process rather than a product, dynamic rather than static, and one that may include tension and conflict. An Aristotelian view of QoL as concerned with being and doing, focuses on the need to ensure the flourishing of human life; how we might ‘live well’ as individuals within our social contexts, be that the classroom or wider society. This makes the pursuit of QoL something that goes beyond the notion of developing as practitioners to developing as human beings; being and doing as a dynamic process relevant to the whole of life.

I have also shown that integral to these notions of being and doing is the idea of working for understanding; ‘the unity of knowing and doing’. I have conceptualised understanding as being wider than phronesis (knowing how to act wisely and ethically in each situation), also including aspects of episteme (understanding the whys and hows of our practice and lives). Praxis is action for understanding and action for living well, and I would argue that both can be comprehended within EP’s first two principles. Perhaps less clear from the discussion above is how techne and the associated ‘making action’ of poeisis or ‘using action’ of khresis might be relevant, and yet once again, I would ask that we do not reject this aspect just yet.

I have stated that both understanding (in its different dimensions) and QoL are relational, stem from practical experience and encompass the emotional, intellectual, social, ethical and political aspects of life, and concern both the individual and the collective. They are also multifaceted, fluid and dynamic, bringing together being and doing, with knowing, in an ‘emergent choreography’ (Davis & Sumara, 2006: 100).
I now turn briefly to the next three principles, which I am grouping together under the banner of collegiality.

2.6 **Collegiality**

Principles 3-5 refer to inclusivity (involving everyone), mutual development and bringing people together:

- **Principle 3:** Involve *everybody* as practitioners developing their own understandings.
- **Principle 4:** Work to bring people *together* in a common enterprise.
- **Principle 5:** Work cooperatively for *mutual* development.

(Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 260, emphases original)

These principles were initially deemed important, in part to counteract the perceived rift between academic and teacher researchers that existed at that time (Allwright, 1993, 1999; see also Burns, 2005; Freeman, 1996). While it is perhaps not as pertinent to state this in terms of academics and teachers as it was twenty plus years ago, it still appears very relevant in terms of today’s learner in our globalised economy (1.2.1) and the importance and centrality of including learners in the work for understanding still seems to be both radical and innovative (Hanks, 2013: 39). Not only does the notion of inclusivity respond to Freire’s pedagogical call stated above (1.3) to integrate the traditional roles of teacher and student, but perhaps it also helps address issues of power in the classroom; it is in this sense ‘boundary-crossing’ (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009: 9). However, a note of caution. By inviting the learners to initiate the inquiry process by puzzling over the things that interest them, EP seeks to redistribute power in the classroom (Hanks, 2015b: 621). Yet it would be naïve to suggest that the teacher wields no power. EP is usually suggested (or perhaps even imposed) by the teacher, and perhaps it is helpful here to distinguish, as Freire does (cited in Bartlett, 2005: 348) between the idea of the teacher as authoritative and directive, and the teacher as authoritarian, who has no respect for the freedom of the student. The principles of collegiality, in conjunction with the other principles, seek to respect and even encourage this freedom.

The remit of these principles however goes beyond notions of inclusivity reflecting a view that both research, and language teaching and learning, are social practices (Allwright, 2005a: 360; see also Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Understandings are thus ‘collective as well as individual’ (Allwright, 2005a: 360), perhaps resonating with the age-old truism that ‘two heads are better
than one’, or as Aristotle would say ‘although able to think alone, even the wisest individual will be better able to think with the aid of others’ (Eikeland, 2008: 450, emphases original, EN X, 7). Here again, I see links with the statement cited above (1.3) by Davis and Sumara (2010: 858, 2006: 88-89), that the collective intelligence is greater than the individual. This idea is also taken up by Hanks (2009: 52), who refers not just to the product or rewards of the research process, but also to the growth and development that comes through working together in that process.

Here I see links with both eudaimonia and praxis. When discussing praxis above (2.3.3), I suggested that praxis knowledge is what regulates the relationship between equals, in the sense that collectively we seek insight and understanding of our shared practices, revealing assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of being and doing, subjecting them to dialogue and deliberation so that both ourselves and our practices grow and develop, and we act in a socially responsible and ethical way with each other in our different contexts. Likewise, if our individual and collective purpose is to enhance our QoL (eudaimonia) as practitioners, then our collegiality suggests not just a commitment to fulfilling the potential of each individual, but also a collective commitment to socially shared goals (Delle Fave, 2013: 5).

One of the keys to achieving this both in the EP and the practitioner research literature more generally is the notion of trust. Trust has long been cited as essential to the Action Research process (Altrichter et al., 1993; Hodgkinson, 1957), and is also an important construct in the notion of well-being (Delle Fave, 2013: 5; Ryff & Singer, 2013: 106). Within EP, trust is referred to in various contexts: the need to build trust in teacher-consultancy relationships (Miller, 2003); the need for teachers to trust learners to take their EP work seriously (Hanks, 2015b); the need for learners to trust their teachers (Li, 2006); and the need for learners to develop mutual trust in group work (Zhang, 2004).

These examples bring us to the notion of mutual development in Principle 5. While a compellingly ethical notion that all should be ‘manifestly working for each other’s development as well as their own’ (Allwright, 2003; 129), what does this look like in practice? Hanks (2013: 43) asks this question as well as others: Whose development is prioritised? How can we be sure that everyone develops equally? What happens to the person who is not interested in others’ (or even their own) development? What happens if conflict arises due to differing priorities? Her own data suggests that mutual development is not a necessarily easy or natural consequence of working together.
However, whatever the challenges, enhancing QoL through working for understanding in a collegial and inclusive way is not something that should concern us only occasionally, or when we are involved in a professional development activity, but should be relevant to us every day of our working lives. The need for a sustainable way of working is thus key and is embedded in the last two principles of EP.

2.7 Sustainability

The essence of sustainability is to make the work for understanding part of our everyday working lives:

Principle 6: Make it a continuous enterprise.
Principle 7: Minimise the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice.

(Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 260, emphases original)

As with some of the other principles, these ones grew from the practical experiences (empeiria) of Allwright; from his own praxis. He (Allwright, 2005a: 354) helpfully explains his developing awareness of how the practitioner research he was advocating (most notably in Allwright & Bailey, 1991), and the time and research skills it demanded of the teachers, was not commensurate with the insights and help that it gave them with the day-to-day classroom issues they faced. It did not necessarily produce quality research, but did often lead to burn-out; the flip side of QoL. This led him to argue that rather than a focus on quality of research (Allwright, 1997), it would be more productive to focus on the well-being of teachers. Rather than time and energy-intensive, one-off research projects, he argues that research should be embedded in the everyday practice of teachers and learners. This is similar to the idea of ‘inquiry as stance’ rather than ‘inquiry as project’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999); a ‘long-term and consistent positioning or way of seeing’ (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009: 28), a continuous process of seeking insight and understanding (theoria) in our daily lives so that we can both live well and practise living well (eudaimonia).

One way to achieve sustainability is to use what the EP literature terms PEPAs (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities) (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 157; Hanks, 2015b: 4). PEPAs are normal classroom activities that are employed to pursue understanding of those things that puzzle us, rather than traditional, often time-consuming research methods. The classroom
activity (and data collection tools) in this thesis employed PEPAs, and how these were designed and used to meet both the course and research objectives, is detailed in Chapter 3.

However, it is not only through PEPAs that sustainability is achieved. Lyra et al. (2003) refer to various elements that encouraged or hindered sustainability in their work in a voluntary teacher development context. This was not primarily classroom-based work, and so was already an additional workload for the teachers involved. Some wanted solutions and on finding that EP was understanding focused, left when their expectations were not realised (p.152). Others found it hard to deal with the ambiguity of both process and outcomes (p.152). However, for others a major reason for continuing with the work was the social nature of the EP group, their sense of belonging to a community, and the sharing of burdens (p.154); the very real collegial nature of the work was what made it sustainable for them. They also suggest that it is those teachers who internalise the ability to reflect, question and understand who are more likely to continue with the work.

Perhaps a caveat here before I finish this section. Sustainability implies not only that the work itself is manageable, productive and relevant, but also that there is a continual willingness and desire to work in this way. In the example above, those teachers who discovered a sense of belonging were motivated to continue with the EP work. This also appears true for some of the learners whose stories are told in Allwright and Hanks (2009): Mariana for example (pp. 165-166), who enjoyed being able to explore her questions in a non-judgemental atmosphere alongside the teachers, states she ‘intends to keep on practising EP questions for a long time’. Most EP studies in EAP contexts (Dar, 2012; Dawson, 2012; Hanks, 2013; Rowland, 2011; Salvi, 2012), refer to a relatively short course and therefore it is difficult to judge whether for the learners EP is seen as something sustainable, although there is evidence in Hanks’ data that for at least one learner the EP work extended beyond the original class (Hanks 2013: 171-172).

All of the above, underline again the importance of *episteme* (gaining insight and understanding through dialogue), the need for *skhole* (time and space to reflect and question), and the centrality of *phronesis* (in deliberating and choosing how to live well with others), in maintaining and enhancing QoL in a sustainable way.
2.8 Concluding remarks

This chapter has taken a theoretical look at the EP principles, primarily from an Aristotelian perspective on knowledge. Taking a broad view of knowledge, characterised as gnoseology, I have examined the EP principles attempting to show how this more nuanced view of knowledge might illuminate our understanding of them, in particular what it means to work to understand quality of life (Principles 1 and 2). I have shown the interrelatedness of the different knowledge forms and ways of knowing, and used them as a lens to examine the current EP literature, seeking connections between the principles and practices of EP and the varied knowledge types that comprise gnoseology. I have conceptualised QoL as being and doing, a dynamic and active process that is not just about living well, but also about learning to live well, and I have suggested that all of the different knowledge forms might contribute to that. I have proposed a view of understanding that stems from practical experience and might encompass theorising about our (individual and collective) practice to understand the whys and hows (episteme), the technical ‘know how’ to achieve a specific end-goal (techne), and the knowledge of how to act in any situation (phronesis). I then briefly examined the other EP principles showing that collegiality and bringing people together reflects the implicit relational notion in QoL, as well as being concerned with collective praxis, while the principle of sustainability ensures that QoL will remain at the top of the agenda.

Thus I have set the theoretical boundaries that frame this study: Exploratory Practice and gnoseology. The remainder of this thesis is dedicated to the outworking of both of these theoretical legs in the practical context of an EAP course and the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data generated there in order to answer my research questions. The next chapter begins that process by looking at how EP was used in such a context. It also details the development of my gnoseology framework, which derives from the ideas and concepts outlined above.
Chapter 3  Practical outworking of an Exploratory Practice framework

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first (3.1) provides the necessary background to understand the composition and immediate context of the class in this study, while the second (3.2) outlines how the doctoral research methodology and the classroom pedagogy as conceived within an EP framework worked together. The third (3.3) describes the data that was collected, and how it was processed and analysed.

3.1  The teaching and learning context

The study took place at a private language school in the North of England, UK, which forms part of a global corporation specialising in creating partnerships with universities. The organisation began in 2006 with two UK universities, and the Centre where this study is situated was added in 2008. At the time of the study, the organisation had grown to a total of 19 partnerships in the UK, USA and China, employing approximately 1800 staff, and teaching about 12,500 students from 115 countries (INTO, 2014).

The Centre in this study has developed partnerships with two universities in the city where it is located and offers students various pathway programmes guaranteeing progression to one of these two universities on successful completion of the course. It is also an accredited Delivery Centre for the NCUK (Northern Consortium of UK Universities), which again guarantees progression to one of 11 northern UK universities for those students on the NCUK pathway. Acceptance on one of these pathway programmes is dependent on previous academic qualifications and a suitable score in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), an internationally renowned test used to screen international students for English language skills (IELTS.org).

Thus the main purpose of this Centre is to prepare international students for study at a UK university. To achieve this, it offers a range of courses for both prospective undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students\(^{12}\), including A levels. For those students who do not have the IELTS score necessary to receive an offer for either the Foundation (UG) or Graduate Diploma

\(^{12}\) I use the terms both student and learner interchangeably in this thesis because I believe they were both: student in terms of their visa status (their occupation in the UK), and learner as described in 1.2.1.
(PG) courses, or for direct entry to university, it offers 10-week, full-time English for University Study (EUS) courses which aim to enhance students’ general English language level and introduce them to some of the academic skills necessary to succeed at a British university. The four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) are taught, as well as academic skills. The EUS courses consist of 20 hours per week of contact time (4 hours per day) and students are also expected to do 20 hours of independent study per week. Week 10 is exam week, with no classes, and therefore there is a total of 180 hours’ teaching time.

I was given EUS 9 to teach in the autumn term of 2014, and this is the class that I worked with for this study. This class had been earmarked for those postgraduate students who did not have the required IELTS score to begin on our Graduate Diploma programme: a pre-Masters programme designed to prepare students for a Master’s degree at a UK University. The choice of class was a mutual decision between myself and the Director of Studies for the Full-time English (FTE) courses, who knew of my previous work with EP in the Centre and felt that it would add a distinctive element to such a class.

3.1.1 EUS 9 and the Graduate Diploma

EUS 9 consisted of a group of postgraduate students hoping to progress on to Route B of the Graduate Diploma (Grad. Dip.) course. Grad. Dip. Route B is an intensive NCUK-monitored course running from January to June, which if completed successfully, guarantees progression to a Masters level course at an NCUK university. Students on this course do classes in Management Studies, EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and Research Methods. Assessment is via a combination of exams and coursework, including a 5,000 word dissertation based on primary research. Route A of the course runs from September to June, and so Route B students are expected to produce the same quantity of assessed work in a much shorter time-scale.

Access to Grad. Dip. is complex, depending not only on academic achievement, but also on obtaining a suitable length visa for postgraduate study. The issue of this visa is dependent on achieving a certain IELTS score. Unconditional offers for Grad. Dip. can only be made if the student is in possession of, or in a position to apply for, such a visa. There were two visa options for the EUS9 students: a Tier 4 Visa which could be applied for in the UK, and a Student Visitor Visa (giving six months of study time), which could only be applied for in their home country. The IELTS scores necessary for the Tier 4 visa are higher, with students needing to achieve a score of 5.5 overall with a minimum of 5.5 in all skills. The Student Visitor’s visa also requires a score of
5.5 overall, but they only need a 5.5 in Reading and Writing. The latter was also accessible by obtaining an equivalent score in the institutional online exam (3.1.2).

The main issue with obtaining a student visitor visa is one of time, as due to the intensive nature of Route B, students are not permitted to join it late. The possibilities of returning to their home country and obtaining the visa in time to return and start the course in early January are minimal, especially due to the bank holidays at British Embassies over the Christmas period. Therefore the only guaranteed visa option is to obtain the necessary IELTS score to apply for a Tier 4 visa in the UK. This means each student’s expectation and hope is to achieve the required 5.5 overall and 5.5 in all skills before the end of their EUS course. Although the Centre will fund one IELTS exam for them, many choose to attend various exams in search of the elusive 5.5. It is thus a very high-stakes course for the students, with complex decisions related to visas and future study plans towards the end of the course.

If students did not reach their goals, then they could not do the Grad. Dip. course. However, they did have the option of continuing in the Centre on another EUS course and applying directly to universities for their MA course. If they had paid the fees for the whole year up front, then they would have no option but to stay in the Centre or lose their fees.

The Centre’s approach to this group of students to date had been to teach them EAP while also covering some of the work that they would have done on Grad. Dip. Route A: an introduction to research methods. The class was called PG Prep (Preparation for Postgraduate study) and fell under the auspices of the Director of Studies for the Graduate Diploma courses. However, in the year of this study, the course was moved to the FTE (Full-time English) team under the management of the Assistant Programme manager for FTE, and there was to be no input from the research methods tutors. It was agreed that the class would focus on IELTS for 12 of the hours (taught by my co-teacher) and academic study skills for the remaining 8 hours (taught by myself). This was an unusual decision for our Centre, as although IELTS practice tests are done in many classes, the general ethos is to improve overall language levels rather than teach IELTS exam techniques. Neither our publicity nor our curriculum is aimed at the exam.
3.1.2 Changes to assessment procedures on EUS

The new focus on IELTS was not the only change to occur in relation to this course. The other major change was the way in which all EUS courses were now to be assessed. Until this point, exams were EAP-focused and developed by a national committee. A recent collaboration with Cambridge had led to a new, online test, which, while it still assessed the four skills, was based more on general than academic English. It was more akin to a Cambridge FCE (First Certificate Exam) or CAE (Cambridge Advanced Exam) than an academic language and skills test, with the exception of the writing, which was a 250-word IELTS-style essay. Despite this change, teachers were told to continue teaching EAP rather than FCE and General English, the rationale being that if students’ language improved, their test scores would also improve, the type of language taught being irrelevant.

Marking is done by Cambridge and the whole exam is administered within a two-hour period making it an extremely efficient way of assessing a large number of students. All students in December 2014 took these exams as their end-of-term assessment. Although this was a pilot scheme, the results were still valid for progression and visa purposes.

Because the exams were no longer academic in style, it was deemed necessary that students provide evidence of progression in academic skills in the form of a portfolio of independent work. As a pilot, this would not contribute to the overall final mark, but it would be given a grade which would appear on the students’ reports. A set of tasks was designed by the FTE Assistant Programme Manager to be completed over the 10 weeks aiming to evidence students’ development and progression in various transferable skills alongside academic skills related to listening, reading, writing and speaking. This was to be my focus throughout the course (3.2).

3.1.3 Class profile

The class consisted of 17 students, 16 of whom were postgraduates and one, a mature undergraduate student, whose level necessitated that he be placed in this class. Of these, seven were female and 10 male and the class was predominantly Chinese with only four students of other nationalities: a male and female student from Saudi Arabia, a female student from Thailand and one male from Azerbaijan. The two students from Saudi, were slightly older, 31 and 38 respectively, with the others all in their early twenties. One student (a Chinese male) withdrew from the course in week 8.
The entry scores of the class varied. 10 students had the required IELTS 5.5 overall and five of these also had a 5.5 or more in writing and reading (but were only in possession of a six-month visitor’s visa in September, and therefore were not eligible to begin a nine-month course). Of the other seven, five had a 5.0 overall, one had 4.5 and one had 4.0. Six students fell below 5.5 in only one skill and three students fell below in all skills. Speaking and listening were the weakest skills, with 10 students falling below in both of these, while there were seven not reaching the target in either reading or writing. This is fairly typical of a majority Chinese class who tend to have stronger reading and writing skills.

All, apart from the Saudi undergraduate (who wished to study ICT), were hoping to progress on to the Grad. Dip. Route B course and later pursue a Masters. The majority were intending to do a Masters degree in a business related area (Finance, Business Management, International Business, Human Resources) with only four students hoping to pursue other subjects: Engineering, Psychology, Law and International Relations.

Of the 17 students, 13 had arrived in the UK just days before the course started, the others having been studying in the UK for between three and five months. These students had already done at least one course in the Centre and were therefore familiar with both the teaching style and the structure of the courses.

Two teachers were assigned to teach this class: myself, and one other. I was scheduled to teach them on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and my co-teacher on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons. The Centre appointed a new EAP teacher before the course started and assigned her to this class. However, as she had to work out her notice in her previous job, a temporary teacher was given the class until she could take up her position. This took place on Friday of week 2, so he taught them for a total of five days.

I had been working in this centre since September 2006, two years before it was taken over by the international corporation. At the time the study was undertaken it was a multi-programme and pathway centre with a total of 710 students. I had taught on most of the English Language programmes that were run including General English, and EAP on both the FTE and Foundation courses. The exception was the Graduate Diploma course where the most I had done was sick leave cover for both EAP and Research Methods tutors. I reduced my days to one per week.
when I began my doctoral studies. During the course of the data collection, this increased to two days.

3.2 Exploratory Practice as research methodology and classroom pedagogy

In this second section, I explain how I used the EP principles as both my doctoral research methodology and my approach to classroom pedagogy. I show how I intended to work within the principles of EP to integrate some of the academic and language skills in the syllabus with the need to give the students an introduction to research, and how the pedagogical and exploratory research activities for the students were at the same time my own data collection activity for the purposes of this thesis. I then describe the differences between my pre-course intentions for classroom activities and thus data collection, and what actually happened.

As EP informed both my classroom pedagogy and my research methodology, I followed Principle 7 of ‘integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 260). My starting point in terms of planning the course was the FTE syllabus, a general document that informs the overall flavour of the course, and from which Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are drawn. Although these documents provide guidance, teachers are expected to respond to the specific needs of the students in their class. Needs analysis is the bedrock of EAP (Benesch, 1996), ascertaining the key elements students need to thrive in the target academic situation (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991: 299). The immediate target situation for EUS9 was Grad. Dip., and building the academic and research skills necessary to succeed on that course was primarily my responsibility, with my co-teacher being mainly responsible for helping them meet the assessment criteria through the IELTS and/or institutional exam, although there was naturally some overlap.

In planning this class, I built on my own experience of doing EP (see for example Dawson, 2012), and that of others (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2013; Salvi, 2012). At the planning stage, my ILOs were necessarily broad as more specific ones would be developed in response to the needs of the particular students in the class. However, they gave me a broad canvas to work from and a timeline (albeit a flexible one) to adhere to. In particular, I worked on integrating the classroom research activities of the students with the requirements of the portfolio tasks. As stated above (3.1.2), the portfolio was a new addition to the course requirements, and was to consist of a formalised set of tasks produced over the course of the 10 weeks. However, as this
was a pilot, with the agreement of the FTE Assistant Programme Manager, I was able to tailor my students’ portfolio and set my own tasks, which apart from the language learning autobiographies (3.2.1) and weekly learning logs (3.2.2), were all related to the EP work. Table 1 below shows how I envisaged the process unfolding in terms of the EP activities that would take place and the ILOs that would be addressed throughout the process (see Table 3 for how this translates into data for this study). No EP work was originally intended in week 1, and week 10 was exam week and therefore not included.

It is important to state that I always considered the EP work to be just one part of the 8 hours I would have with the students, taking between 2 and 3 hours each week. Thus EP was to run as a strand throughout the course, but I would be dealing with other aspects, such as reading skills, writing different essay genres and so on in consultation with my co-teacher. This other work would develop around different topics. I had decided to look at Ethics as a topic in the first two weeks. This would not only provide the learners with a greater understanding of research ethics in general, helping them grasp what they were agreeing to in signing the consent forms for my research project, but also deepen their understanding of potential ethical issues in their own research. The remaining topics would develop in consultation with students and as need arose.

One way in which I intended to facilitate collaborative group work and peer feedback was through a class wiki. I have been using wikis in class for several years, and although the institution uses Moodle, I have found a wiki to be a more flexible and user-friendly environment; one with an ‘open architecture’ which allows the structure to emerge through the participation of the students themselves (Lund, 2008). It provides a social and collaborative space allowing for immediate feedback from both teacher and peers (Bradley, Lindström, & Rystedt, 2010; Wheeler, Yeomans, & Wheeler, 2008). This was a particularly important feature in a time-constrained class, as learners could edit their work individually, and work on their page collaboratively between classes. The ‘page history’ facility not only enabled the learners to revert to any previous versions of their work (Kuteeva, 2011; Lund, 2008), but also allowed me to track all the changes that had been made and see the author and date of those changes, giving me a more detailed data set. From a practical point of view, it provided a space to upload the SMARTBoard pdf files, so that students had ready access to all the work we had done in class, a facility also used by my co-teacher.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>EP activity</th>
<th>ILOs addressed (taken from the FTE syllabus documents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2    | Class discussion on ethics  
Lecture on EP and summary writing  
Puzzle formation  
Individual Reflection: Why I chose this puzzle | Speaking:  
Production of compound and complex sentences  
Usage of appropriate chunking  
Usage of vocabulary to express themselves on most general academic topics  
Listening:  
Comprehension of key points and details in short academic talks & lectures on a range of topics  
Writing:  
Production of compound and complex sentences, but with some errors  
Usage of general academic vocabulary which adequately fulfils the task  
Accurate usage of various forms of punctuation  
Transferable Skills (TS):  
Improve both written and oral communication skills |
| 3    | Deciding which puzzle to investigate  
Forming puzzle groups  
Class discussion on different ways of collecting data  
Groups unpack puzzle and decide on data collection tool  
Group Reflections on process  
Individual Reflection | Speaking (as above)  
Writing (as above)  
TS (as above +):  
Work both independently and in a team  
Develop critical thinking skills  
Reflect upon learning and level of achievement  
Take responsibility for directing own learning  
Improve research skills |
| 4    | Groups refine and test data collection tools  
Groups collect data (homework task)  
Individual Reflection | Speaking and writing (as above)  
TS: (some of above +)  
Improve techniques to plan work and manage time  
Develop organisational skills |
| 5    | Class discussion on analysing data  
Groups collate and analyse data  
Individual and Group reflections | Speaking (as above +):  
Giving extended responses  
TS (as above) |
| 6    | Groups finish analysing data and begin posters  
Individual Reflection | Speaking (as above)  
TS (as above) |
| 7    | Finish posters, in-class presentations, peer feedback  
Individual and Group Reflections | Speaking (as above +):  
Usage of visual aids to support a talk  
Usage of discourse markers to indicate stages of a talk  
Usage of appropriate sentence stress & intonation to keep the interest of an audience  
Awareness of an audience’s needs  
TS (as above) |
| 8    | Mini learner conference (poster presentations to other classes)  
Record final presentations  
Begin group written reports  
Individual Reflection | Speaking and TS (as above)  
Writing (as above +):  
Connecting ideas by using a wide variety of appropriate discourse markers  
Ability to combine different genres of academic text types (e.g. descriptive, comparative and evaluative) |
| 9    | Class discussion about experience based on metaphor completion  
Finish group written reports | Speaking, writing, TS as above |
Table 2: The actual Scheme of Work for the EP work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>EP activity and class topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | **Language learning autobiographies**  
**Class topic: Ethics**  
Introduction to ethics and class discussion  
(HW: Write language learning autobiography LLA; learning log LL) |
| 2    | **Class topic: Ethics cont.**  
Presentation of my research with PIS and Consent forms  
Lecture on EP and summary writing  
Puzzle formation  
(HW: Write lecture summary; LL) |
| 3    | **Class topic: Innovation**  
Choosing puzzles and forming puzzle groups  
Individual Reflection: Why I chose this puzzle  
Class discussions on unpacking puzzle and data collection methods  
Groups unpack puzzle, choose data collection method and design tool  
Group Reflection on process in wiki  
(HW: Finish page in wiki; paraphrasing and finding synonyms; LL) |
| 4    | **Class topic: Innovation cont.**  
Groups test and refine data collection tools in class  
Group Reflection  
(HW: LL; finalise data collection tools) |
| 5    | **Class topic: Social entrepreneurs**  
Reciprocal data collection session with Int. Dip. class  
Class discussion on analysing data  
Groups collate and analyse data  
Individual Reflections (ID)  
(HW: individual presentations on social entrepreneurs; LL) |
| 6    | **Class topic: Social entrepreneurs cont.**  
Introduction to report writing: writing in an impersonal style  
(HW: Write methodology section; LL) |
| 7    | **Class topic: Crime and Punishment**  
Organising data into chart/table form with IELTS writing task 1  
Peer feedback on report writing  
Hedging language  
(HW: Write analysis and results section of report; LL) |
| 8    | **Class topic: Crime and Punishment cont.**  
Writing introductions and conclusions  
Peer feedback on report writing  
Make group posters  
Individual Reflections on report writing (RWR)  
(HW: Write discussion section and conclusion; LL) |
| 9    | **Class topic: introduction to plagiarism and referencing**  
Poster presentations in class and feedback  
‘Learner conference’ poster presentations  
Group Reflections on poster presentations  
Final Individual Reflection (FR)  
(HW: Submit finished report (FReport) and portfolios) |
| 10   | **Exam week** |

As stated above, the planning of the class was ongoing and emergent, reacting to and reflecting the needs of the students without deviating entirely from the original plan. Table 2 shows the
actual Scheme of Work and is compiled from SMARTBoard files and Records of Work. It gives an overview of the actual EP work done over the course and the themes we followed. The general ILOs addressed were the same as above. The following sections describe the main differences between the data I had originally planned to collect and what I did collect, showing the move from the EP practice of the classroom to the data used in the writing of this thesis.

3.2.1 Language learning autobiographies
I frequently ask learners to write their language learner histories at the beginning of a course as it gives me a quick insight into their beliefs, feelings, experiences, future goals and expectations for the classes (Deacon, Murphey, & Dore, 2006). Learner histories can also be used for research purposes (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik 2014: 37), although my initial intention was purely pragmatic: I wished to begin the EP work as soon as possible and as teacher and learners we needed to develop rapport and get to know each other quickly. I thus adopted a reciprocal approach. I wrote my language learning autobiography (LLA) along lines suggested by Davis, Garside and Rinvolucri (1998:48), and shared this with them in class. They wrote their own for homework based on the following prompts: how you feel about speaking your own language; positive and negative experiences of learning and speaking English; how you like to learn; how you don't like to learn; how you feel about using English now; how you will use English in the future.

Although these LLAs were not directly related to the puzzle work, they were generated naturalistically as part of the course and I have used them as data to inform a broader understanding of the learners’ past experiences, beliefs, hopes and expectations. This was particularly beneficial at the data analysis stage, as it enabled me to contextualise some of the learners’ comments and responses (see for example Chapter 4). I also used them when writing each learner’s story (3.3.3).

3.2.2 Learning logs
As part of the portfolio, I had always intended that the learners would keep weekly learning logs, and part of my adaptation of the portfolio was to use a format based on a template I had developed while doing my MATESOL, which is based on the premise that it is easier to express how you feel about your learning than identify what you have learnt (Powell, 1985: 45). I
therefore asked learners to describe the situation (based on a listening and speaking situation or a reading one) they were writing about, say how they felt about it and then reflect on anything that they would do differently or the same. I also intended to follow this pattern for the majority of the reflections that were written after various stages of the EP work.

As with the LLAs, I had not envisioned at the start of the course that the learning logs would form part of the main data corpus as they were not directly related to the EP work. Rather, they were part of the independent work I set them each week and were aimed at enabling them to reflect on their learning beyond the classroom. However, as with the LLAs, I used these to write the individual learner stories (3.3.3) and also to add depth of understanding to my analysis of their puzzle work.

3.2.3 Reflections

The number and format of the reflections deviated slightly from the original plan (Table 1). Some of the changes were in response to the reality of the class and the fact that I considered it would be unhelpful for students to write yet another reflection. Changes to the prompts were either a response to unexpected occurrences, for example following the visit of another class in week 5 (Table 2), or influenced by my own reaction to evolving classroom events. This was particularly evident from ‘crunch point’ (7.1) onwards, when the prompts I was using seemed to reflect the perceived need of the moment to help the learners see how they might be benefitting from the work in terms of their own language learning, rather than focussing on what might help me answer my research questions.

3.2.4 Research report writing

Perhaps the key difference between the planned and actual Schemes of Work (Tables 1 and 2) relates to the report writing. Initially planned as a collaborative group writing exercise in the final week, it became an individual piece of work spanning several weeks. The main reasons for this are two-fold: current Grad. Dip. students were having difficulties with producing a longer piece of work and my colleagues believed that a focus on extended writing would be helpful; secondly, I was struggling to find a topic that might interest the whole class and that we could work on collaboratively within the time available. The ‘puzzle work’ provided common ground and also the advantage of providing ‘ready made’ content for the writing. The students could thus focus on their language and structure, rather than having to worry about content as well.
The writing was done in stages, each relating to the corresponding stage of the EP work. It built on their written reflections and the language work we had been doing in other parts of the course (Table 2). These reports formed part of the portfolio and thus part of the formative rather than summative assessment.

3.2.5 Other changes

The poster making was undertaken as planned, although later than originally scheduled. This was mainly due to my pedagogic responses to student feedback in week 6 and the need to deal with tensions in the class (see Chapter 7). For similar reasons, I did not do the metaphor completion activity planned for week 9.

We did not record the poster presentations due to time issues. I did ask students to come in the day after their exams to film their presentations but there were no volunteers. This means that the verbal commentary accompanying the posters is missing from the data.

3.3 Collecting, processing and analysing my data

This section describes the whole corpus of data collected for the purposes of this thesis. It quantifies the data collected through the classroom-based research activities of the learners described in the previous section, the data generated by myself as teacher, and that collected after the end of the course. I also explain how I processed the data and detail my analytical processes.

3.3.1 Classroom-based learner generated data

As stated above (3.2), the majority of the data for this project were naturalistic data produced as part of the normal activities of the class in keeping with Principle 7 of EP, and was collected in various formats: handwritten; word-processed; entries in the class wiki; posters; emails; recordings of class discussions and individual conversations. The format was mostly determined by where the work was done: in class or as homework. Sometimes the students were given a choice of format. For example, the LLA could be handwritten, word-processed or in the class wiki (Figure 1). Table 3 quantifies the main data collected, by week, type, format and quantity. The quantity refers to the number of students or groups that submitted that particular piece of work.
In addition, I collected learning logs from every student each week. Eight students completed these throughout the nine weeks, while others tailed off towards the end of the course. One student only completed three throughout the course. I have detailed the actual process of collecting all classroom-generated data in the corresponding chapters in Part II.

Because the data was varied in format, I managed it in different ways. The majority of the data comprised of student work that I collected in, gave feedback on, and then returned. Before returning it to students, I made two copies of each (having received consent from the students to do so).

These were collated in folders, one of which I kept at home and one in a locked drawer in my university office. At the end of the course I verified I had all copies against their portfolios, and created a table to record the work collected from each student and group (Appendix 2). The work done in the wiki was printed and collated along with the other work. The posters were collected after the ‘learner conference’ and these were scanned and anonymised at the university Graphic Support Workshop, producing a higher quality image than a photograph would allow (Figures 20-25).
Table 3: Data collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Data collected</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Language learning autobiography</td>
<td>Handwritten/word processed/wiki entry</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>EP lecture summary</td>
<td>Handwritten/word processed/wiki entry</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Class discussion: their puzzles about teachers</td>
<td>MP3 recording</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Individual reflection: Why I chose this puzzle</td>
<td>Handwritten</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Expanding the puzzle</td>
<td>Collaborative work in the wiki</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Designing and justifying data collection tools</td>
<td>Collaborative work in wiki</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Group reflection: trialling data collection instruments</td>
<td>Handwritten</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Individual reflection: collecting data from the Int. Dip. students</td>
<td>Handwritten</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Class discussion: analysing data</td>
<td>MP3 recording</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Individual conversation with one student</td>
<td>MP3 recording</td>
<td>Teacher and student</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Group feedback: the classes</td>
<td>Handwritten bullet points on A3 paper</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Group feedback on ‘the feedback’</td>
<td>Handwritten bullet points on A3 paper</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Draft writing of ´methodology and analysis´</td>
<td>Handwritten/word processed</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Individual reflection: writing the report</td>
<td>Handwritten</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Group reflection: in-class presentations</td>
<td>Handwritten</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Final individual reflection</td>
<td>Handwritten</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Final report</td>
<td>Word processed</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>Hand made</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Exam week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For analysis purposes, folders full of photocopies felt rather unwieldy. As I was planning to take both a cross-sectional (e.g. all of the final reflections) and longitudinal (e.g. one individual throughout the 10 week course) approach to the data, I decided to word process everything. Ultimately, this is how the majority of the text would be represented in my thesis too. Although much has been written about the process of transcription (see for example 3.3.4), I found no literature relating to the process of transferring words from a handwritten to a word-processed form, and therefore draw on the literature on transcription to stimulate my thinking at this point.
Despite the mechanical nature of the transcription process, it is not a completely objective one (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997): all researchers make decisions about whether to transcribe, and what and how to transcribe (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999: 66). Transcription is thus a ‘re-presentation’ of a spoken event (Green et al., 1997: 172), a term I have adopted to refer to the process of word processing the handwritten texts. Re-presentation of a written event, like that of a spoken one, necessitates many choices. These included very practical choices: which font and font size to use; which layout to choose; how to order and group the reflections; whether to correct spelling and grammar for readability purposes or not; whether to guess unclear words from the context or leave a space. There were also other influencing factors surrounding the re-presentation: the context (the place and reason for the generation of the text); my understanding (or misunderstanding) of second language learners’ written discourse practices; my interaction with the text while re-presenting it; and the ethical mandate to represent the learners as truthfully and honestly as possible.

The practical choices I made were an interplay of pragmatism and other issues. Re-presenting each learners’ handwriting in the same font and size seems rather clinical, detracting from the individuality and personality of each person. One option was to choose a different font for each learner but this in itself would have been another interpretative process, and for pragmatic reasons I chose the same font as the finished thesis. However, as a tribute to the individuality of the learners, I have included the original handwritten version of their first reflection in Chapter 4, alongside the typed version. I copied all relevant work from the wiki into a word document, but again, where appropriate I have included a screenshot of the original in the thesis.

There was also a tension between being faithful to the students’ original work, while being mindful of how they would want their work presented. I felt it was important to maintain the same sentence structure that the students used, to maintain the authenticity of their voice throughout. I initially used their spellings too. However, as my analytical purpose was not an in-depth analysis of students’ writing, but rather the ideas they were expressing, I decided to use standard spelling for readability. I also believed that they would be mortified if their work were presented full of spelling errors, and thus this was also an ethically motivated choice. Where words were unclear, I copied the original, writing my ‘translation’ in square brackets alongside so that it could be tested.
Below, is an extreme example of this process, showing the original followed by the ‘translation’. This process was enabled by my understanding of the wider context that it referred to (the IELTS reading text); the immediate context and audience of the text (the response to my question about why she had chosen that particular puzzle); my knowledge of that student; and my general experience of teaching.

Why did you choose this puzzle?

Because my reading skill is very weak and I don’t have time to finish all article. I’ve have rodo hole the test and when I start to answer the questions I rode it again [I have read the whole text and when I start to answer the questions I read it all again]. Also if when I move to fill the gap I rode the passage again this took all my time. Whoever [moreover] some articles come with complex vocabulary, I had many difficulties to understand the general meaning. I need to solution to improve my reading speed and find the correct words in folen [filling the] gap.

Re-presentation is never an end in itself, but rather an analytical tool (Green et al., 1997: 173). As I began the process, I inevitably found myself interacting with what I was re-presenting and so added a column next to the text in which I wrote comments, thoughts, key ideas, and any
important contextual information from the data generation process (Figure 2). At this stage I was not looking at particular themes arising, nor was it an in-depth analysis, but was asking what was going on in the data in terms of student actions, decisions, thoughts and emotions. It is important to add, that as their teacher throughout the process, I had been reading all their work as we went through the course and feeding back to them on it, and my interactions with this same work now as ‘data’, were undoubtedly influenced by some of the key themes and issues that had arisen throughout the course. Once word-processed, I was able to manipulate and organise the data in many different ways for analytical purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Reflection (Week 9 Day 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2. Re-presenting the data**

### 3.3.2 Teacher-generated data and analysis

The central part of this data was my journal, which I describe below. However, the SMARTBoard files also provided a record of everything done in class and were made available to all the students in pdf format in the class wiki (Figure 3). These were complemented by my (messy) handwritten plans, complete with jottings made both during and after lessons (Appendix 3).

As a practitioner researcher, my journal was a key component of the data and served several purposes: it provided an audit trail of the research process and the decisions made (Borg, 2001);
it served as a descriptive record of what happened in and around class, giving contextual
information for the other data; it acted as a reflective journal for my own emergent
understandings, questions, feelings and experiences (Moon, 2006). It was key in providing
insight into my dual role of teacher and researcher particularly in relation to any issues of power
and control. This was vital in enabling me to achieve the level of reflexivity and transparency
necessary in practitioner research (Arber, 2006), contributing to the trustworthiness of the
report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Figure 3. Example of a SMARTBoard pdf file

The researcher and reflective aspects of the journal began at the start of my doctoral journey
and continued to the end, but the main part, which was written just before, during and after the
10-week course, forms the core of the data. I wrote the journal after each class as well as on
days between classes as I reflected on what had happened and planned for the next class. The journal was written in Evernote (Appendix 4), an online application giving me flexibility of access, while allowing me to print or copy entries for analysis purposes.

As stated above, my journal was multi-purpose and included reflections throughout. I began to organise my journal into themes, writing a reflective commentary alongside each extract that I copied in from my journal (Figure 4), and was also able to clarify facts and details I had not originally noted. The initial themes originated from a proposal I had written in week 3 of the course for a poster at an IATEFL Research SIG pre-conference event about developing as a researcher in which I proposed to highlight some of the creative, psychological, ethical and practical challenges that I was facing. These were my starting point, yet as I interacted with the journal, I came to see different levels of what Schön (1983) terms ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’. During the course, I was making on-the-spot decisions, writing a reflection after the class, and using that to inform my planning for the classes and the EP work. Now, I was reflecting on the reflections, interrogating my actions, responses and understandings through a dialogic interaction with the texts. It was through this process, alongside preparing the poster on the experience (Dawson, 2015b) and revisiting the literature on practitioner based doctoral theses, that I discovered the creative possibilities alongside the tensions in this sort of work.

Organising data from my journal (Weeks 5–6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Evidence (Reflection-in-action)</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Commentary (Reflection-on-action)</th>
<th>Linked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past Experience (Mine) PEM</td>
<td>So, I went in to this thinking that there was a great fit between EAP and EP - developing research skills; critical thinking skills; all the different language skills for writing - hedging, impersonal language yet the content is supposedly relevant and engaging (past experience would say that) and yet it hasn’t worked this time. By making it into a ‘project’ they haven’t been able to move on, puzzle about different things etc.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>I am still questioning the process as I had conceived of it and managed it with this class. By asking for an end product (a poster presentation and a written report), had I inadvertently achieved the opposite of what I had originally intended: rather than giving learners the time and space to investigate their own puzzles about their language learning lives, the need to produce had actually curtailed further understanding and knowledge creation.</td>
<td>EP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogic decisions/ dilemmas PED</td>
<td>Under the impression that they are feeling a bit swamped with homework anyway - a comment was made in class about too much last weekend from N. Then the Int Dip students came in. That worked really well and I had positive feedback from mine.</td>
<td>25b</td>
<td>How much homework to give?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data analysis, I’ve never talked about that before with students so that is new - when I was going through different ways of analysing data they seemed to switch off but it is very new for them. I am sure with more time, there would be better ways to do this. It worked better when I started using some of Antonio’s data. They could actually see it working out in practice. I then set them analysing their own data, but didn’t have much of a chance to really</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>This refers to an exchange with another class. The Int Dip students were doing the equivalent of a first year UG degree in business. Their first assessed assignment was to do a mini research project and their teacher had asked for volunteer classes for them to come and collect their data via questionnaires. As mine had reached a similar stage, I thought it could act as a mutual data collection activity, where both classes served as ready made participants for the other. On a practical level it was an efficient way of speaking to many people in a relatively short time and from a language learning point of view, it gave them the opportunity to speak to people of different nationalities and practice their communication skills. After an initial reticence, particularly on the part of the visiting class. It proved to be a useful exercise from many aspects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Processing and analysing my journal
3.3.3 Post-course data generation

One aspect underlying the term ‘key developing practitioners’ is that of lifelong learning, and I was keen to explore the influence, if any, the EP work had had on the learners’ developing thinking and learning beyond the end of the course. I was also interested in their retrospective views on the process. Rather than a more formal semi-structured interview approach (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 1995), I decided to take each learner’s ‘story’ of their time in EUS 9 back to them and use this as a catalyst for talking about their experience in the class. This decision was primarily based on my previous experiences of interviewing students (Dawson, 2014) where I had found using students’ visual journals (a combination of drawings and text) as a stimulus for talking about their experiences reduced the performative element of an interview as the visual was the focus rather than the learner themselves (Bagnoli, 2009: 561). These learner stories were not visual and yet, as they were compiled from the students’ own writing, I hoped that as well as being the focus, they would also give a sense of ownership to the discussion (Prosser & Loxley, 2008), continuing my concern for the learners themselves to be co-instigators in the research process rather than become the objects of my research. I was also very aware of the warning given by McDonough and McDonough (1997) that question-and-answer techniques are often used as a form of control and power in the language classroom, and therefore using interviews as a research tool ‘require[s] a good deal of linguistic sensitivity and adaptability by the researcher’ (p.185). Although I was no longer their teacher, it was the only role they had known me in, and although some form of question and answer was unavoidable, my hope was that the ‘stories’ would at least provide a starting point for a ‘follow-on conversation’.

These stories comprised my longitudinal approach to the data (3.3.1). I ‘re-storied’ the individual learner data into a series of summarised narrative accounts bringing together elements from the LLAs, learning logs, individual and group reflections on the puzzle work, final reports and presentations into one ‘story’ (Maxwell, 2013: 114). I also used my own journal for background and contextual material. This was not a summary of themes that I believed arose from the data, nor a final presentation of my interpretation and analysis of what had happened, but rather an initial part of the analytical process. The majority of the text was based on the students’ own words but was written in second person singular and plural showing my authorial voice in the composition. Initially I divided the stories into four parts: the language learning autobiography; the learning logs; the puzzle work; and my observations about them in class. However, to understand the connections and interconnections between the different aspects of the course
more clearly, I chose to write them chronologically, moving between these four aspects (Appendix 5).

I began by giving all students still studying in the Centre a copy of their ‘story in EUS9’, inviting them to chat to me about it. I was able to speak to 10 students over a period of about three months. I sent the remaining six (16 students completed the course) their stories via email. Only two of these responded.

In the face-to-face conversations, after a general chat about their new classes, their aspirations and frustrations, I asked how they felt about their ‘story’ (this same question was sent to the students with whom I corresponded by email). Their responses generally directed the remainder of the conversation. I was particularly interested in their retrospective views on ‘crunch point’ (Chapter 7) fuelled by my observation while writing the stories that all students had been positive up to that point. I had my hunches, but as Murphey and Falout (2012) point out, if teachers forget to include their students in the reflection stage, they isolate themselves with their own interpretations and position students as agentless objects.

These conversations were thus orientated to their reflections on the course.

I had initially assumed these conversations would all be with individual students, but some students for practical or timetabling reasons wished to come together. I spoke to a group of three students who had all moved onto the Grad. Dip. course and two students who were in the same EUS class. These group conversations offered different insights, as the students agreed with or challenged each other’s views. The length of the conversations was sometimes constrained by their need to get to class or other reasons. I recorded all the conversations, following student consent, bar one. This student had been very elusive, but I found myself covering his current class one day and he said he was available and willing to chat immediately after the class. I did not have my voice recorder with me and so made notes on that conversation, writing them up immediately after.

### 3.3.4 Transcription processes

The recordings, along with the class discussions and conversations I had recorded during the course itself were copied to my computer, and then imported into Scrivener (Figure 5). As
suggested above (3.3.1), transcription itself is an interpretative process involving many decisions including: what and how to transcribe, which transcription conventions to use, and how to represent that transcription in the final report (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999: 66). Transcription is thus an integral part of methodology; it ‘is a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions’ (Ochs, 1979: 44), and there is a need for transparency in terms of how those decisions are made (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999: 76). Although the recordings do not form the main body of my data, I outline my transcription procedure below.

![Example transcription in Scrivener](image)

**Figure 5.** Example transcription in Scrivener

I followed Kvale (1996: 166) who advocates using the most useful transcription style for the purposes of the research. I wanted to ensure that the end product was readable (Kvale, 1996: 267) while maintaining enough detail to avoid over-simplification (Richards, 2003: 200). To do this I transcribed in ‘chucks’, a ‘chunk’ being the words a learner speaks in one burst before pausing. This is a version of intonation units, which are thought to have various identifiable characteristics and represent the dynamic relationship between thought and speech (Stelma & Cameron, 2007: 366). Although language learners do not necessarily replicate native-speaker patterns, I believe there is still a link between the way they search to express their thoughts in language and the ‘chucks’ that they produce. I therefore used commas to separate these ‘chucks’, putting slightly longer pauses between brackets (...). I transcribed the majority of the conversations, writing summary notes where it became repetitive or was not immediately
relevant to the analytical purpose, and adding my own memos in the Scrivener comment function (Figure 5).

3.3.5 Analysing the learner data

As a practitioner researcher, my analysis was the outworking of a complex relationship not only between the data and the researcher, or the data, researcher and the researched (Richards, 2003: 268), but between myself as researcher and the learners and myself as practitioners. Clarifying and articulating these multiple roles through a reflexive stance in terms of who I am and what I bring to the process at each point is intrinsic to the trustworthiness of the analysis (Arber, 2006; Watt, 2007), and the transparency of the account in Part II. This is the approach I try to take here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem-solution-Improvement</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Affect</th>
<th>IELTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>A. Why I chose this puzzle ... (W3)</td>
<td>B. Why I chose this puzzle, final report (W9)</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar although I know how to use grammar?</td>
<td>When people are studying a foreign language, they will meet many problems. Moreover, the grammar problem should be the most difficult part for learners. But for everyone who wants to learn a foreign language well, the grammar also is the most important part for them. Because if you have studied lots of words, but you do not know how to link them and make sentences by these words, other people also cannot understand what did you say. So, the grammar is important for every learner. There are some questions about the grammar problems, and the title of puzzle is 'Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar although I know how to use grammar?' Some useful ideas hoped to get from this research, so that people can avoid these mistakes when they speak foreign language.</td>
<td>Good grammar = obeying rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think my grammar is not better. In China, I hardly ever study English grammar in the school and I can't remember the rules I must to obey. My IELTS grade is 5.0 in writing and I think the biggest problem is making too much mistakes in the writing. The vocabulary is important, but I think the grammar is the base of making sentences.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bad score = bad grammar/mistakes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Initial analysis of ‘why I chose this puzzle’ in first reflection and final report

In analysing my journal (3.3.2) and ‘re-storying’ the learners’ data (3.3.3), various recurring themes seemed to emerge: the pull of the IELTS exam; the pull towards a problem-solution framing of the puzzle work as opposed to a search for understanding; and the emotional work
going on in the classroom. These formed part of an initial deductive coding scheme to analyse the learner data where I colour-coded extracts as follows: problem-solution-improvement, understanding, affect, IELTS. However, I was also open to other themes that might emerge through a more inductive reading of the text and these were added alongside with my comments. This process was helping to answer my first RQ about what happens when EAP learners engage in learner-research (Figure 6).

Part of this initial analysis was also a tentative attempt to identify the different types of knowledge being manifested so that I could answer my second RQ: ‘What developing understandings (individual, collaborative and collective) emerge as they engage in learner-research?’ I used the categories and the understandings I had developed in my end of year one proposal: episteme, techne and phronesis (Figure 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Describe what you did today to understand your puzzle better</th>
<th>How do you feel about your experience today?</th>
<th>What understandings have you come to about your puzzle so far?</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Spring        | I asked a lot of student from international Diploma programme. I understand my puzzle more better than ever. They told me I should do more practice with native speaker and went to club to have training my confidence. I found many Chinese people felt nervous when they talk to native speaker at first time. However, other people who from Thailand, Azerbaijan felt enjoyable. Maybe Chinese people easily shy when they talk to strangers, I understood I should overcome afraid mentality when I speak to other people. Only in this way I can organise my thinking to speak better. | I felt this experience is very useful for me because I can brave to communicate with strangers. I overcome this problem that can hinder my improvement. Also, the International Diploma’s students ask some questions about manage time. I think it’s benefit for me. | I think I should more practice with other people to improve my speaking skill. And I think I should make a plan to practice. | Assumption that native speakers are the best.  
Self-confidence/self-belief (Phronesis)  
Self-concept - Awareness of others and self (Phronesis) – not alone, others share puzzle, agency and self-efficacy  
Skills and strategies - techne |
| Pete          | I made an interview with International diploma students. I asked the question about grammar and got some useful information. By the interview, I can know most of people use incorrect grammar when they talking with other people; while the tense problems are serious such as past finished tense. The people we interviewed said it’s important to use correct grammar, because it can help other people to understand what you say. | I think it is a good positive experience because I know that people comes from other class also having same puzzle with us. And the interview gives most valuable information to us to research our puzzle. And I also improve my speaking skill by the conversation. | We should pay attention to tense in English speaking because most of people will mistake in tense. | Link between techne/episteme (correct grammar) and phronesis - social-being in the world.  
Awareness of others and self (phronesis) – not alone, others share puzzle  
Strategy – tense is the most important thing to focus on (techne) |

**Figure 7. First categorisation of gnoseology**

I kept the colour-coding above, adding native speakers and subsuming understanding under phronesis. However, I noted a growing uneasiness about the impact of imposing such delineated categories as episteme, techne and phronesis on the data, when the boundaries in reality
appeared much fuzzier. This uneasiness fuelled a long search to understand and apply Aristotle’s gnoseology to my data, which I describe in detail below.

Having acquired an initial understanding of the data and some of the themes arising, the next stage of the analysis was largely determined by the dilemma of how to write the analysis chapters, alongside the need to understand and apply ‘gnoseology’. To deal with the first issue, I initially used the concept of hyphenated spaces, influenced by learner-research, as a heuristic tool for organising and writing about the data (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Fine, 1994; Hellawell, 2006), but attempts to find pertinent hyphenated terms proved difficult and unhelpful (Figure 8).

![Figure 8. Attempts to identify hyphenated terms](image)

I therefore decided to try a more chronological ‘story-telling’ approach. This is not a piece of narrative inquiry; I did not set out to collect participant stories which I would then analyse and interpret (Barkhuizen, 2011; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Rather, I have employed a broadly-informed narrative approach to the analysis and presentation of the data, synthesising events and actions into a coherent ‘story’ through a retrospective ‘reconstruction of … events and actions that produced a particular outcome’ (Polkinghorne,
1995: 18): the final products of the learners’ inquiries into their language learning puzzles. However, although the ‘plot’ is clear and the characters reasonably well defined, there is also evidence of contradiction, fragmentation and discontinuity; the reality of human life and experience in the classroom.

To produce this account, I began with the initial reflections the learners had written on their puzzles, also looking in their LLAs and learning logs for information that would aid my interpretation and give a richer picture of each individual learner. I reorganised the data again, collating this information alongside my own comments (Appendix 6) and this became the basis for Chapter 4.

I continued this way of working for the remaining chapters in Part II, although at times I have deliberately ‘subverted’ my own imposed structure (although not its chronological nature). This has been in part to vary the way I present the story: a focus on one student or group, or a more thematic and global presentation of one episode. It has also allowed me to offer interpretative commentaries as I move along.

3.3.6 Building the gnoseology framework

My other dilemma was related to gnoseology and my categorisation of understanding as episteme, techne and phronesis. Returning to the literature, I began an in-depth study of what these terms might mean, and in terms of analysis, I would contend that the literature itself is another equally influential element in the complex relationship described above (3.3.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge form</th>
<th>Evidence extract</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Techne</td>
<td>They told me I should do more practice with native speaker and went to club to have training my confidence. I found many Chinese people felt nervous when they talk to native speaker at first time. However, other people who from Thailand, Azerbaijan felt enjoyable. Maybe Chinese people easily shy when they talk to strangers. I understood I should overcome fear mentality when I speak to other people. Only in this way I can organise my thinking to speak better.</td>
<td>My idea: Being of the praxis – transformation Epistemic praxis is about understanding, but it is a vital step to phronetic praxis. Dialogue with others – understands there are differences between people, but many Chinese seem to experience the same thing – leads to a possible theory. Again – ways to improve, BUT, more practice but then not just practical activities – here we have a confidence building exercise - go to clubs why phronesis? – because confidence is something internal, but something that is in constant flux not stable belongs to those things which are part of us Phronetic praxis – doing to live well and enhance Qal. (Individual – confidence) Make a plan – planning learning key sign of autonomy, yet would refer to techne????</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phronetic praxis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemic praxis and theor</td>
<td>According to the research today I have open my mind in order to they give me lots of methods to overcome the problem of speaking and it makes me more aware that speaking is a significant problem for foreign students.</td>
<td>Need to be open to dialogue and how other people experience ideas and so on. So techne is related to dialogue, learning from others?? Awareness that he is not alone. Doesn’t list out the strategies like some others have done.</td>
<td>Mason</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Second categorisation of gnoseology
Having distinguished more specifically between the different types of knowledge and understanding through writing section 2.3, I returned to the data and embarked on a new iteration of the analysis, organising it in a different way, trying to discern the nuances and subtleties that I thought existed (Figure 9).

However, I was still unclear about the exact meaning of each term when applied to the data, and tried yet another means of organisation (Figure 10).

![Table](image)

**Figure 10.** Third categorisation of gnoseology

From this, I built my first version of the gnoseology framework (see Table 4 for current version) and began to write up the analysis. However, this process exposed yet more inconsistencies (note the frequency of question marks in the example) in my understanding of the categories. I therefore approached the data differently, cutting it up and placing it under the headings. As I did so, I was constantly asking questions about why I was classifying something for example as *praxis*$_1$ rather than *praxis*$_2$, how I was defining these terms in broader terms and where the outliers and problems lay. I also began to sort the data into subcategories of the main categories. *Theoria* for example was subdivided into themes pertinent to the outworking of
theoria through dialogue: comparing and contrasting, finding similarities and differences between things; defining; uncovering things not known; building and developing the ‘excellences’; mapping the strategies; articulating insights (Figure 11). I did not find examples of all of these categories, but this practical analytical step enabled me to understand more fully their nuances and richness, although this was again refined as I attempted to write about each category. My current understanding is represented in my Gnoseology Framework (Table 4) and in Chapter 10.

I am very aware that the finished research product (as represented in this thesis) can give the impression that analysis is a time-bound activity that takes place during a certain period and once complete, allows the researcher to embark on the process of writing up. This belies the reality, which as described, has been a messy, iterative and interactive process between the data, the ongoing analysis and the literature (Dey, 1993). Perhaps, most significantly, has been the role of writing in the analytical process, and here I wholeheartedly subscribe to the words of Miles and Huberman (1984: 91):

Writing, in short, does not come after analysis; it is analysis, happening as the writer thinks through the meaning of the data on display. Writing is thinking, not the report of thought.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>Concerned with</th>
<th>Form of knowledge</th>
<th>Main associated action/way of knowing</th>
<th>Aim/result</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>End</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phenomena and practices that are for the most part stable, change occurs within rather than through outside manipulation</td>
<td>episteme</td>
<td>theoria (understanding)</td>
<td>personally/collectively embodied (no distance between knower and known)</td>
<td>True statements, explanation, prediction about things outside knower</td>
<td>Astronomy, geology, medicine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the hows, whats and whys of things</td>
<td></td>
<td>theoria (insight/theory)</td>
<td>deduction, observation as a 'spectator' 'off-stage' (distance between knower and known)</td>
<td>Understanding, insight</td>
<td>Music, grammar, boxing, practice of a collective engaged in a profession/activity e.g. teaching, language learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations of an ethical/political/personal nature that can be changed</td>
<td>phronesis</td>
<td>phronesis (practical wisdom)</td>
<td>praxis; πράξις *tacit/enacted understandings *doing as training, practice, development *‘on-stage’ (rehearsal) performance *building ‘excellences’</td>
<td>Dialogue *articulated understandings *doing as bringing into language/consciousness *‘back-stage’ reflection *‘mapping topographies’</td>
<td>Deliberating different choices – context specific choice/judgement Asks ‘how should we act in this specific situation?’</td>
<td>Responding well in particular situations, making ethical decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External objects (or people) that can be changed, manipulated, created</td>
<td>techne</td>
<td>techne (technical, craft skill)</td>
<td>praxis; πράξις doing as virtuoso performance of specific acts/excellences</td>
<td>Deliberation *how to move around topographies once they have been mapped *analyses and interprets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>poiesis</td>
<td>poiesis (making action – means to an end)</td>
<td>Importance of skhole: time and space away from the pressure to act in a practical context, yet embedded in the context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kharis</td>
<td>kharis (means to an end)</td>
<td>poiesis poiesis using action – means to an end</td>
<td>Asks ‘how might we intervene/improve things to achieve specific end goal?’</td>
<td>Medicine, exam result, student progression, learning strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Before I move on, a note on confidentiality and anonymity. There are some, though few, details that I have chosen not to write about or expand on in this thesis. These decisions were based on my desire to act phronetically and make wise decisions that would not ‘bring harm’ to anyone directly or indirectly involved in this research. In speaking of the learners, I have used either the name that they chose and agreed to, or where I was not able to ask them, I have chosen a pseudonym.

3.3.7 Poster analysis

A poster has been defined as a ‘multimodal communicative genre, with text, graphics, colour, speech, and even gesture used to convey meaning’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, cited in D’Angelo, 2010: 38). D’Angelo (2010) has developed an intricate framework for analysing academic posters drawing on both written text and visual elements. This framework details both the interactional elements that attract, involve and engage the viewer, and the interactive elements, which organise the information and guide the reader. I have used these ideas to guide my analysis (Appendix 7), looking at what information the learners prioritised in their posters, and how they used the visual element to convey these priorities. I have done this in conjunction with my gnoseology framework (Table 4), in an attempt to trace the developing collaborative understandings of each group.

3.4 Concluding remarks and moving forward

This chapter has attempted to clarify the information necessary to understand the setting of the research as well as some of the more technical processes involved in the implementation of the research design, the collating and processing of data, and the data analysis. It also concludes the first part of this thesis, in which I have attempted to position the research with regards to the literature, other EP work and clarify my own research purposes. We now turn to Part II: the story of EUS9 as together as teacher and learners we embarked on a journey of inquiry and discovery, conflict and resolution, being and doing.
Part II

Part II offers a chronological account of the EP work done in EUS9 during weeks 2-9 of the course. It looks at the generation and choosing of puzzles, the process of learner data collection and analysis, followed by the presentation of their findings through a final ‘learner conference’ and written reports. It finishes with a retrospective look at the course from the viewpoint of some of the learners. The focus is on my first research question, although I offer emerging interpretations throughout that relate to RQs 2 and 3.
Chapter 4 Why I chose this puzzle ...

This chapter examines the initial stages in the EP process. It begins by recounting the steps taken by myself as teacher to introduce the learners to Exploratory Practice, and the subsequent generation and selection of puzzles. It then takes a deeper look at their explanations for that choice, reflecting on what these texts might reveal about the learners in terms of the assumptions, beliefs and expectations they bring with them as they embark on the journey of working at the hyphen: of doing learner-research. I also refer to their language learning autobiographies (LLA, 3.2.1) and their first two learning logs (3.2.2) for background information that might give further nuanced understandings of how they see themselves as English language learners in the world, seeking to draw connections between their past, present and future. The chapter also serves as an introduction to most of the learners in the class.

4.1 The genesis and generation of puzzles

In practitioner research, the questions and puzzles that teachers have, often arise from their experience (empeiria) in practice and the ensuing disparity and tension that emerge between what they plan for or wish to happen, and what actually occurs (Campbell, 2013: 4). I believe that many of the puzzles the learners had arose from a similar dissonance. Although EP’s philosophy encompasses understanding of both what is going well and what is not (Dar, 2012), even a positive puzzle can suggest a discrepancy: ‘why I often have idea when I meet the problem?’ (generated by a learner in this study), reveals a difference between the way the learner expects to react to problems, and the reality (to have ideas). If there were no tension, there would be no puzzle, an idea consistent with Dewey’s (1933: 12) notion of ‘reflective thinking’ which arises from a 'state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty'.

There is a recognition that the initiative for puzzle generation is ‘most likely going to have to come from a teacher’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 184,) and in this project, where time was short and EP unknown to the students, the initial move and direction came from myself, and puzzles were generated in response to a lecture I gave in class on EP. This was organised around three questions: what is EP? how can it help you as learners? and what next? I began with a brief overview of EP, focussing on its view of learners as idiosyncratic beings, with different learning
styles, goals, backgrounds and so on. This was followed by a summary of the principles and an explanation of puzzlement and puzzles, including examples from previous students showing what these puzzles might look like, and the sort of range they might have (see also Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 185). I then highlighted the potential benefits for them of working within an EP framework, issuing an invitation to consider the things that puzzled them.

The students wrote puzzles anonymously on post-it notes following the preferred EP formulation of ‘why’, and in the 10 minutes or so given to this process in class they generated over 40 puzzles. I have never found learners to have a shortage of things they are puzzled about, an experience others working with EP corroborate (see for example Hanks, 2013: 202). With two exceptions, all the puzzles generated were specifically related to language learning and the majority were focused on the individual learner. Remaining puzzles centred on the teacher (one puzzle), the class (three puzzles which were all concerned with why students spoke their own language in class), and the institution (two puzzles).

### 4.2 Choosing their puzzle

Having collated the puzzles into a document to give the students (Appendix 8), I asked them to choose the two they were most interested in. I then suggested they find other people interested in the same or a similar puzzle to work with. Of the forty plus puzzles generated by the students, they chose six of these to investigate further. For some, this was a puzzle-driven choice, for others, a more pragmatic one, perhaps influenced by who they wanted or were willing to work with. Based on previous experience, I limited the groups to a maximum of three people. In groups of more than three, some students will inevitably take a back seat, although this is of course a possibility with only two in a group (and did occur in the class). The six people who wanted to explore the grammar puzzle divided into two groups.

While I encouraged group work, there was the option of working alone. This might initially seem to go against the more ‘collegial’ principles (3-5) of EP, which speak of bringing people together and working cooperatively for mutual development, and which ‘are often seen as relating to group work and learner engagement’ (Hanks, 2013: 219). However, working alone in a classroom does not equate to working in isolation, as the classroom is primarily a social space, just as learners are primarily social beings (Tseng & Ivanić, 2006: 140). Perhaps the key for the classroom is to be found in Principle 3: ‘involve everybody as practitioners developing their own
understandings’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 260, italics original). It recognises that even when working with others, there will be individual as well as group understandings (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 176). The key thing is that no practitioner (teacher or learners) is excluded from the possibility of developing understandings, unless they wish to be. However, all students apart from one, Monzer, chose to work with others.

Monzer was absent from class the day the puzzles were chosen, as was Spring and they did not write the reflection which is the focus of the chapter. Spring later joined her friend’s group, while Monzer chose to explore his own reading puzzle.

4.2.1 The chosen puzzles

Here are the six (unedited) puzzles that the class chose to explore:

1. Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar although I know how to use grammar?
2. When I chat with foreigners, I feel more nervous and often make mistakes to organise my sentence. Why?
3. Why do I have so few ideas during IELTS speaking test?
4. Why I can't pay more attention in listening course?
5. Why when I read a passage I understand the meaning of each words, however, I can’t understand the whole meaning?
6. Why does team 3 (which is near the door) always speak in Chinese?

All of the puzzles, apart from the last, seem to focus on a deficit view of their own language abilities. The perplexity, or puzzlement (Dewey, 1933; Hanks, 1998) stems from a perceived lack of competence in their linguistic (grammar), cognitive (concentration and processing skills), interactive (social linguistic skills) and creative abilities (generating ideas).

The first puzzle was chosen by six students, an indication perhaps that grammar was a key concern among this class. The focus is on the practical usage of grammar in spoken communication rather than the need to understand more about grammatical rules and forms. The puzzle also suggests that the learners are making a binary distinction between ‘wrong’ and ‘right’ grammar, which raises questions around what they perceive as ‘wrong’ grammar, their beliefs about grammar, whose model of ‘right’ grammar counts, and its role in spoken language. The second puzzle shares elements with the first: it is related to communicative competence and although phrased as ‘making mistakes to organise my sentence’ also implies the idea of ‘wrong
grammar’. However, this puzzle is situated in the context of chatting to foreigners, where the ‘foreigner’, or ‘other’ in an international student context refers to those with a different mother tongue. Rather than beginning with why, the puzzle is framed as a statement of the situation followed by questioning why this happens and implies a cause and effect chain where chatting to foreigners causes nervousness, which results in mistakes. It is the only puzzle that makes specific reference to an emotion: nervousness. The third puzzle is also speaking-related and contextualised within the IELTS speaking test. There is a focus on content rather than form: what to say rather than how to say it. This is the only puzzle that names the IELTS exam.

The fourth puzzle refers to listening skills and is also highly contextualised. The use of ‘course’ seems to refer to classroom based listening activities and/or exam based listening tasks, and the puzzle is about focus and concentration in an activity designed to test or develop listening skills rather than listening in authentic situations. Puzzle five was chosen by Monzer and contrasts his confidence in his knowledge of vocabulary (I understand each word), with his seeming inability to extract the global meaning of those words when combined in a text; differences between his word-level, sentence-level and text-level comprehension abilities.

Within these first five puzzles are themes related to the students’ beliefs about the English language, self-concept, emotions and identity. The final puzzle though is different. Like some of the others, it is situation specific, but does not reflect a deficit view of language learning. Rather it reflects a genuine curiosity to understand why one group in the class, which are named as ‘team 3’ and geographically located ‘near the door’, speak Chinese. The use of ‘always’ reflects a perception of the frequency of this occurrence. It is an other-focused rather than self-focused puzzle.

4.2.2 Reflecting on why

Having chosen their puzzle, I asked them to write a reflection explaining why, encouraging them to write freely and not worry about grammar and spelling. This had a dual purpose: from the learners’ perspective, I hoped it would help them consider their puzzle more deeply, surfacing the actions, beliefs, and emotions associated with their puzzlement. These reflections could subsequently act as a springboard for the refinement of their puzzles into researchable questions (Po-ying, 2007: 229). The second purpose reflects EP Principles 3-5 (1.1.2) and my own developing understanding as a teacher of the learners in my class. These reflections furnished
me with insights into their learning needs, beliefs and expectations, revealing what was important to them at this point in the course, thus providing a quick entrée into understanding my class which is crucial in such a short, intensive course. With respect to the aims of this doctoral project, they also reveal some of the assumptions and the ideological underpinnings of each learner’s approach to the exploratory process.

In the sections that follow, I explore each individual learner’s response to why they chose that particular puzzle, drawing on other writings from the beginning of the course where I believe they provide a more nuanced understanding. I conclude by drawing together some of the key themes that arise from these texts.

4.3 Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar although I know how to use grammar?

As stated above, six learners worked on this puzzle in two groups throughout the 10 weeks: Pete, Boris and Orlan in one group, and Eshrag, Bena and Bert in another. Eshrag initially wrote about a reading puzzle that she was interested in, explaining later that she had not pursued this puzzle because nobody else was interested, Monzer being absent on the day they formed their puzzle groups. She thus made a pragmatic choice based on a wish to work with others rather than pursue her own puzzle alone.

Below, I examine the reasons given by these five students as to why they chose this particular puzzle, highlighting the similarities and differences between them.
4.3.1 Bert

When I was talking with others, I was always thinking about what to say and how to say. I could make others understand me, but I didn’t do well in the grammar. If I wanna speak in right grammar, I may have to correct it several times. When talking, this is impossible. When I was writing, I could do better than speaking. I can find the wrong and have time to correct it. But, what can I do when I am speaking? It is hard to use the correct grammar, and there is no time to correct. How to practise this?

Bert acknowledges his ability to self-correct from ‘wrong’ to ‘right’ grammar in both speaking and writing, thus implying that he believes his knowledge of grammar is sufficient to form sentences that would satisfy his own notion of ‘right’ grammar. However, he describes a perceived difference between his written and spoken performance in terms of his grammar usage, which he attributes to the time constraints he feels when speaking the language. He states that to use ‘right’ grammar, he needs to correct himself several times, and while the written word provides the necessary space for such thought and correction, the spoken word does not. The context for Bert’s puzzling comes from ‘talking with others’. He does not specify who these others might be, but it seems to imply a general rather than specific context.

This text also reveals to some extent, Bert’s beliefs about grammar and its role in the English language. He acknowledges his communicative ability in English, yet this does not appear to be sufficient. A good speaker of English for Bert is one who speaks accurately. This accuracy is defined by what he terms ‘right’ grammar and is placed in dialectical opposition to ‘wrong’
grammar. He does not expand on what he means by these adjectives, or whose view of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ he is basing his beliefs on.

In his LLA, Bert speaks of his previous language learning experiences in China:

“The way of learning was only reciting and repeating. I had to learn by this way because my teacher always gave the reciting homework to me, and I would also get a final exam. Even though learning in this way is really boring, it works.

This would seem to indicate that Bert was taught using the audiolingual approach, where the focus is on the presentation of language forms followed by intensive drilling until these patterns become internalised and can be used intuitively (Johnson, 1996). It seems fair to conclude that Bert’s view of ‘right’ grammar was that presented during his classes, and which he was tested on through homework activities and exams. Although there was no student choice in this method and he admits that he found it ‘really boring’, there is also the realisation that it enabled him to achieve his current level of ability and perhaps implicit too, his level of grammatical understanding.

Bert concludes his piece with a question: ‘How to practise this?’ Here there seems to be an admission that even though the previous method ‘worked’, it had not helped him achieve the speaking accuracy he desired, and wished to explore other possibilities for improvement. His learning logs recount his first social experiences in the UK:

... her [Korean girl] speaking is fluency and her vocabulary is brilliant ...
... the Germany’s pronunciation is wonderful and his vocabulary is also very wide ...

These students provide a model of his own ‘possible self’ (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and represent the ‘imagined community’ (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007) of fluent speakers that he wishes to be part of, confirmed by another statement in his LLA:

I wanna to speak fluent and idiomatic English in the future. So if anyone has a way of learning speaking English, please tell me.

Here, we have a clear picture of Bert’s goal, and implicit here and in the question that ends his puzzle text, is the desire to find a means to achieve that goal.
4.3.2 Orlan

Why did you choose this puzzle?

I chose this puzzle because I know English grammar but when I speak English I made mistakes. I try to use correct grammar in my speaking and the act slows my speaking speed. So I think I don’t have to care how to use grammar.

Orlan, who provides no contextualisation for his puzzle, reflects a very clear distinction between what could be termed his declarative knowledge about grammar and his procedural knowledge of how to use it. Like Bert, he alludes to time pressures while speaking, although it is the initial thinking time that concerns him. The tension resides in knowing grammar but needing too long to produce sentences that reflect that knowledge, with a resulting loss of fluency. Orlan apparently jumps to a quick conclusion, maybe even solution to the issue: he should stop caring about his grammar, with the implication that his fluency would then increase. However, to do this he would need to let go of the pull to accuracy, and the question then is, how easy would he find that.

Orlan was a multilingual speaker, writing in his LLA that he was fluent in Azerbaijani (his native language) and Turkish (learnt from the TV), had an excellent level in French and Latin (both school subjects), and also spoke some Russian (with Russian friends). He had picked up English as a subject at university:

When I was studied the university, I could choose French for foreign language. But I chose English for it. Because everyday I wanted to learn English. In addition, English is a global language. I need to learn that language as everyone. It was difficult to study English for me. But I did it. I investigated English grammar and then I learnt by heart a lot of words. I was keen on English.

This text reveals Orlan’s beliefs about the importance of English in the world today, his motivation for learning it, and how he has studied it until this point: through investigating the grammar and memorising vocabulary. This method and the achievement it has afforded him,
have given him a positive attitude towards the English language. This favourable view of English, combined with an ingrained belief that grammar and vocabulary are key to learning a language, hint that it might not be as easy to ‘stop caring’ as he suggests in his reflection.

4.3.3 Boris

If I write sentence or think sentence I know how to use grammar. How to use some awesome words and magnificent phrase. However, if I just general spoke it majority of mistake. Therefore this is priority issue for me which make me feel anxious and it also is root cause of speaking ability.

Boris also compares his grammatical performance in written and spoken English and acknowledges his ability to apply grammar when writing and also ‘thinking’ a sentence. Like Bert, he does not contextualise his speaking beyond ‘general’ interactions, but interestingly he includes his lexical knowledge, which he seems proud of, in his assessment of his writing and thinking proficiency.

Despite his general language competence, it is his mistake-ridden speech that he highlights as the most important issue in his language learning at this point in time, and which causes him feelings of anxiety. It appears to be the uncertainty of how to move forward and the concern about the effect this might have on his future studies that is causing these emotions rather than a situation specific anxiety.

I believe this interpretation is confirmed by something Boris describes in his LLA. He writes a lot about his ‘rural and outskirt’ accent when he speaks his native ‘Chong Qing’ Chinese, which he contrasts with ‘normal’ Chinese. He speaks of the embarrassment this caused him, and how he
‘had no idea to deal with it which make me feel anxious’; it is the not knowing what to do that causes the anxiety, rather than the actual situation.

4.3.4 Bena

Why did you choose this puzzle?

I choose this puzzle because I have many problems for my speaking. Sometime, I cannot speak all sentence, I speak just words and I don’t know how to apply the grammar to use when speaking. I always speak just Present Simple tense. But, actually, I have known the structure of many tense. For IELTS which I had tested, speaking was the main problem to me. In the test, I understood the question but I cannot speak and explain correctly. But when the test finished, I think, I can do it better, there are many things to say and I know what’s wrong I had say in test.

Bena moves from her issues with speaking in general, which include her perceived inability to form complete sentences and use a range of verb tenses, to speaking in an exam context. She links her general speaking problems explicitly to her inability to apply grammar, while this is present only implicitly in the context of the IELTS speaking exam. Despite understanding the questions and the realisation post-exam that she actually does have the capacity (both in terms of content and language) to respond, she does not perform to her full potential. She does not describe her feelings, but she states ‘I think, I can do it better’ suggesting that she feels she has let herself down under the exam pressure.

Bena’s assessment of her speaking ability is also evident in her LLA, where she again names it her
biggest problem. However, here, rather than grammar, it is choosing and understanding the best word to use in any given context that she gives as the reason:

However, I think my speaking skill still being the big problem to me and I want to enhance this skill the most. Sometime I understood what people said to me but I could not respond them very well because I did not know what’s the vocabulary which be suitable for using. For this reason I felt unconfident to speak to others.

There is a direct affective result of this: a lack of confidence in her interactions with others.

4.3.5 Pete

I think my grammar is not better. In China, I hardly ever study English grammar in the school and I can’t remember what rules I must to obey. My IELTS grade is 5.0 in writing and I think the biggest problem is making too much mistakes in the writing. The vocabulary is important, but I think the grammar is the base of making sentences.

Pete’s focus, while still centred on grammar, concerns writing rather than speaking. The reason for this is given in the second half of his text, where he situates his puzzle in the context of his low IELTS writing grade, which he attributes to his many grammatical mistakes, illustrating that for him, good writing equates to grammatically correct writing. In fact, the IELTS marking criteria are divided into four different sections of which grammatical range and accuracy are just one. The other three are task response, cohesion and coherence, and lexical resources (IELTS n.d.). While Pete does acknowledge the importance of vocabulary, he seems unaware of the other elements on which he is being examined in the writing tasks. Perhaps this is indicative of his (limited) understanding of what is expected in western academic writing discourse (Mayor, 2006), and specifically in an EAP test such as IELTS and might also be indicative of why his focus on grammar is not giving him the increased scores he hopes for. As he wrote in his LLA:
I have already attend IELTS test many times, but the point always between five or five dot five.

Pete conceives grammar as a set of rules that must be obeyed, rules which seem to be elusive to him. He connects this to his past experience of learning English, where there was very little emphasis on grammar, and he feels that this is something missing in his English knowledge.

4.4 When I chat with foreigners, I feel more nervous and often make mistakes to organise my sentence. Why?

This is also a speaking puzzle, and in many ways raises similar issues to those of the puzzle above. There were initially two learners in this group, with Spring joining later.

4.4.1 Vesper

I choose this puzzle because I have the same problem through learning English. When I speak with foreigners, I am so worry about they can’t understand my words and my pronounce is not correctly. Sometimes I answer the foreigners questions, the first thing I need how to answer use in Chinese then translate in English. I think is waste too much time to thinking. Even more makes me so nervous to answer questions. I think write sentence is easy more than speak sentence. Sometimes it’s difficult for me to organise my sentence to talk.

We see some of the same themes recurring in Vesper’s text: the time pressures of spoken English, and the idea that in writing it is somehow easier to produce better organised sentences. However, there are also some important differences and nuances. Time issues, for example, stem from a need to translate rather than self-correct. Her lack of confidence in her ability to
make herself comprehensible to others in English (through her choice of words and her pronunciation) affects both her performance in the spoken language and her own self-concept. She seems to see herself in relation to ‘foreigners’ in a position of weakness, perhaps inferiority, fuelled by emotional discomfort from worry and nervousness at the point of interaction.

Her LLA presents a contrastive picture, one in which there is an implicit sense of confidence in herself as a learner of English and her ability to achieve the result she desires. She explains the effect of hard work and independent study in China:

Through this learning a period, I think my English improve more quickly, and I also smoothly passed the test in the end.

However, she goes on to say:

Since I went to the UK, I feel my oral English is not very well, and I often speak with an accent. So I need pay more attention about my pronunciation, and listen to the local people pronunciation. After long term efforts, I believe that my spoken English will be a great progress. To be honest, I am not good at study foreign language, but I think if I spend more time and hard study in languages. Have a proverb saying ‘how much you have tillage, and how much you will gain harvest’.

Her identity as an English speaker has taken a battering since she arrived in the UK. She is more unsure of herself than she was in China, which perhaps reflects her choice of puzzle. Her identity, how she constitutes herself in relation to the world through language, how that changes over time and space through the different situations she encounters, and how she projects a future image of herself are all evident in her LLA and puzzle choice (Norton, 1997).
4.4.2 Mason

Mason is one of only two students (see also Kan below) to extend his puzzle beyond the personal. Mason’s oral performance depends on the degree of nervousness he feels. A high degree inhibits his ability to express his opinion, whereas a lower degree allows him to communicate more readily but with little attention paid to the grammatical accuracy of his utterances. His self-assessment of his oral ability in the second situation is very similar to Bena’s (4.3.4): restricted tense use and an inability to produce complete sentences.

Mason did not write a LLA, but his first learning log illustrates his reasoning above, and how his puzzle stems from his experience of living in the UK. He visited a department store to collect some shoes he had ordered and recounts the following:

I felt so nervous because when I got there I met a indian staff and I can’t get any point with his accent. Most time I just guess the word. It is very common in [the UK]. I asked some staff for a long time with difficult conversation.
4.5 Why do I have so few ideas during IELTS speaking test?

Another speaking related puzzle and the only one that refers specifically to the IELTS test, although IELTS is implicated in many of the puzzles. It focuses on the learner as an exam-taker rather than an engager-in-conversation, and on ‘what to say’ rather than ‘how to say it’.

4.5.1 Antonia

I have so few ideas during IELTS speaking test because I cannot arrange and organise many ideas and words to describe one thing or one event during a short period. In other words, I have few experiences and ideas, so I still cannot say for a long time even if I speak Chinese. I can talk with each other in general. However, if you give me two minutes to describe one thing, I will not produce too many ideas. So, I say almost nothing or say infrequently in the speaking test.

Antonia’s concern is with the part of the speaking test that requires you to speak for two minutes on a topic provided by the examiner, and her lack of ability to generate enough ideas and words to describe this one topic. She contrasts this with her ability to engage in general chat with people in non-exam situations. It is the unnaturalness and contrived nature of the exam task she struggles with. To highlight this she states that even in her own native language (Chinese) she would find it difficult to speak for two minutes about one topic, attributing this to her own lack of life experience.

Her puzzle is a refinement of her earlier LLA where she recounts her lack of experience of speaking exams, her first one being IELTS. She explains:
I was often laughed at my speaking when I learnt IELTS in Beijing. I even said almost nothing when I first did the IELTS speaking test. I think that the significant reason that my English speaking is poor is that I have no self-confidence. Therefore, I decided to come to [this institution] to study IELTS, especially speaking. I believe I will make progress in speaking by talking to teachers and students from other countries.

Antonia had suffered ridicule for her speaking ability which understandably affected her self-confidence, and yet she made a conscious decision to come to the UK believing that would enable her to make progress. In the ten days or so between writing this and choosing her puzzle, she has refined her thinking about the IELTS speaking exam and was able to articulate the much more focused puzzle and clearer understanding above.

4.5.2 Jake

**Why did you choose this puzzle?**

I am confusing about how can I show the true level of my speaking. Because when I talk to examiner my mind has gone blank, even general sentence or simple ideas, Everything has gone. I always spent a lot of time to organization the words, but I don‘t have enough time at that time so usually I talked same view and without any logics and steps.

Jake’s reflection highlights the effect of exam pressure on a learner’s oral performance and the resulting confusion and frustration he feels due to the discrepancy between his perceived competence and his ability to demonstrate that competence in an exam situation. He feels he is better than his performance and is letting himself down by allowing the pressure of the exam to affect him.

Jake, like those above, also speaks of the time pressures when speaking English in terms of
deciding how to say what you want to, but for him the focus is on the organisation of ideas into some logical sequence rather than speaking without mistakes. He gives the impression that he just says whatever comes into his head and that there is little coherence to it. Time pressures are exacerbated by the exam situation.

Both Jake and Antonia are puzzling about a very specific situation in the life of an English language learner and one in which they feel they underperform.

4.6 Why I can’t pay more attention in listening course?

This is the only listening focused puzzle, and as is evident from the reflections below, it is very IELTS focused. The use of the term ‘course’ is perhaps puzzling, but the learners clarified that they were referring to listening activities or tasks (5.6).

4.6.1 Zeno

Because I really not good at listening. I can’t concentrate better for a long time which means I will think other things during the listening course or feel tired in the class. That’s the reason why I just got 5 in the listening test. Moreover, I just know a little about the listening skills. I want to improve my listening level, that’s the reason why I choose this puzzle.

Zeno’s reason for choosing this puzzle is stated as a low self-assessment of his capacity in this skill. He identifies a cause and effect chain: a lack of ability in listening engenders concentration problems. This results in distraction and sleepiness, leading to a low IELTS listening score. This is compounded by his perceived lack of knowledge of listening skills. Although he appears to have
a reasonable grasp of why he struggles with listening, his motivation for choosing this puzzle is very clearly stated as one of improving his listening score, rather than furthering his understanding of why he lacks attention. This would seem to contradict the second EP principle of working for understanding first and foremost.

I think there are two things worthy of note here. The first stems from my explanation of this principle in the EP lecture I gave them, which was based on my previous experience of doing EP work in class. I had noted along with others (see for example Hanks, 2013: 240) that the pull of solutions is very attractive and that students often want quick fix answers to their problems. I had also noted that it was often the advice, skills and strategies that learners discovered for themselves through the process of doing EP that made this work so powerful (Dawson, 2012). I had perhaps a more ambiguous view of ‘understanding’ than the EP literature might suggest (Hanks, forthcoming). To this end, I talked about the benefits of seeking understanding primarily, without discounting the possibility of finding solutions. To illustrate these differences I used two quotes:

If you want truly to understand something, try to change it.  
Kurt Lewin, 1890 -1947

To understand is hard. Once one understands, action is easy. 
Sun Yat Sen, 1866-1925

These represent different views on the role of understanding in action. Lewin posits that understanding comes through attempts at change, while Sen states that the hard part is the understanding itself. Once you have understood, the appropriate action is clearer. I told the students that the EP approach was Sen’s way, and we would begin by trying to understand what was going on. Once we had understood, then perhaps we could think about changing things.

Zeno, when he wrote his summary of the lecture, cited both these quotes (the only student in the class to do so) and made the following comment:

From these two sentence, we can clearly seen that different people hold different methods about ‘understand’, because of the various kinds of views.

It seems that Zeno latched on to the idea that there are different ways of searching for understanding and perhaps he preferred Lewin’s version to Sen’s.
Secondly, perhaps Zeno felt that he had already achieved sufficient understanding of his puzzle and now wanted to move forward. One could (rightly) argue that Zeno had apparently put little effort into understanding his puzzle in any depth. Perhaps he could have considered his lack of concentration, his belief about his ability, and his low IELTS listening score more thoroughly and reached some profound understandings. This might have been the harder route to take. Yet how do we know when we have understood enough? Understanding is a multifaceted, gradual, complex and unfolding dynamic (2.3), and perhaps under the pressures of such a high-stakes, time-constrained course, the search for understanding becomes stymied and cut off before it really begins to take root.

Zeno’s thinking in relation to different ways of understanding has implications for teachers too: if we are serious about EP’s proposition that learners are capable of taking their own learning seriously (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 5), then we need to give them the intellectual space to make their own decisions about how they work for understanding, rather than insisting on one particular way.

### 4.6.2 Leo

**Why did you choose this puzzle?**

I always lost the first question in the IELTS listening test, and it’s the easiest one, but I always miss it. And I feel nervous in the listening test when I didn’t listen the answer. I feel the answer was pass and I need to choose one. When I face this situation I can’t pay attention in the test.

Leo is extremely specific in his reasoning, pinpointing his lack of attention to the very first question in the listening test. The first section of the listening test consists of a conversation between two people, and it is perhaps the unnatural nature of the test that unsettles Leo. A normal conversation gives room for comprehension checking and repetition, but the exam task
does not. This pressure makes Leo nervous and affects his overall exam performance. Like Zeno, he seems to have a partial understanding of what causes his lack of attention, but unlike Zeno, he does not state that he is looking for a solution.

Leo’s story of his English language learning experiences as explained in his LLA focuses on two main issues: his gradual understanding of the importance of English for his future coupled with a general rebellion towards all learning during his teenage years, resulting in huge personal regrets and disappointment for his family. Although he says that he stopped his bad habits and learnt from his mistakes, his university years were still not the best:

I spent my college years very insipid. After four years of study, I always feel lack of something. Yes, it's dream, lack of a dream for so many years. So I came to Britain. I know everything will be very difficult, hard, but I don’t want to give up. I want to have a try.

For Leo, as for all in the class, IELTS was the first hurdle to achieving his dream of studying at a UK university, and maybe this accounts for such an exam-focused reflection.

4.7 Why does team 3 (which is near the door) always speak Chinese?

This was the only group that chose a puzzle centred on a classroom situation rather than their personal learning. The rationale behind this choice varied from being completely other-orientated to using the puzzle as a mirror to reflect on oneself. None of the students who chose this puzzle had ever sat in ‘team 3’, which was the group around the tables nearest to the door.

4.7.1 Vivi

**Why did you choose this puzzle?**

1. Because the question relative to our classmates.
2. I am interested in questions about my classmates.
3. Also I want to know what our they talking about.
4. And when they speak, Chinese in my English class.
5. When are they think about. Do they think that it's better to help them understand the meaning of teach.
1. Because the question relative to our classmates. I am interested in questions about my classmates.
2. Also I want to know what are they talking about.
3. And when they speak Chinese in English class, what are they thinking about. Do they think that it’s better to help them understand the meaning of teacher.

On initial reading, it might appear that Vivi was a bit nosey, wanting to know what her classmates were up to and what they were talking about. She seemed more interested in their behaviour than her own. However, there is also a genuine attitude of puzzlement here about how productive this behaviour is in terms of their language learning.

Vivi was a psychology graduate and the only one in the class who had any research-related training. As part of her undergraduate degree, she had had training in using SPSS (a quantitative data analysis programme), and had done a research project. Her approach to the puzzle work generally reflected her training in an experimental, psychological tradition. She questioned our research methods, for example the validity of student-generated questionnaires. Her response to the puzzle work was completely other-focused and she never reflected on her own role or part in the process.

4.7.2 Kan

Personally say, I am really interest in ‘team 3’ because this one should be a good example to analyse the real question that most all International students will get in their English learning. Therefore the research of this puzzle is focus on solving the problems of English speaking.
Kan sees ‘team 3’ as a possible case study from which he can extrapolate generalisations for all international students. Despite being Chinese himself, he seems to have a broader vision of how this might relate to all English language learners.

Kan overtly frames his focus using problem-solution terminology. He understands the ‘always speak Chinese’ of the puzzle as a problem and suggests that by ‘solving’ this problem he can make a difference to students’ English speaking. However, although this might be the expected result and his ultimate goal, he recognises the need to analyse the situation first. There is an initial exploratory stage followed by the suggestion of possible solutions, perhaps his own version of Exploratory Action Research (Smith, 2015).

4.7.3 Annie

In last EUS team, there are many Chinese speaking Chinese in class. The teacher was angry and stop them many times. But they continuously spoke Chinese. I didn’t know why the teacher angry. So I went to ask some friends who have graduate from [our school]. They said that because in EUS class we must speak English all the time and this is rule.

In the other ways, I guess I always speak Chinese in the UK. I don’t know why and want to know the result. If I analyse this question it will improves my English and reduces the opportunity I speak Chinese.

Annie’s puzzlement is not new for her, and she has already taken steps to try and understand a class situation she found disconcerting: the teacher’s anger at languages other than English being used in class, coupled with the learners’ apparent disregard for the teacher’s wishes. Her initial puzzlement is about why the teacher got angry rather than why the students were
speaking Chinese, which she seems to accept as a natural state of affairs that should not concern the teacher unduly. There seems to be a clash of (unspoken) beliefs about expected behaviour in the language classroom.

She consults some ex-students to see if they can throw light on her puzzle and discovers a seemingly unwritten rule about speaking English in EUS classes. This raises questions about the role of native languages in class, and an apparent lack of communication between teacher and students as to behavioural expectations (Richards, 2015: 201). Annie appears to have defaulted to the institutional view that English should be spoken at all times. Perhaps there is a lack of confidence in her right to question the status quo; a deferral to the authority and power of the teachers and institution. This unquestioning assumption that the teacher is right is reflected in the second half of her text. Despite recognising that she also (not just ‘team 3’) speaks a lot in Chinese, she appears to give credence to the teacher’s insistence that English should be spoken as the way to improve her own language level. There is a genuine puzzlement as to why she speaks so much Chinese, and a suggestion that understanding why will have a direct impact on how she uses language in her everyday life.

4.8 Taking stock

Through an examination of the above texts, where the learners reflect on why they had chosen their puzzles, I have sought to uncover some of the assumptions they brought to the EP work, assumptions that are based on past experiences, present circumstances, and future goals and dreams. These assumptions are largely influenced by their beliefs about the world, about language learning and about what is important to them. It also throws light on their expectations of the inquiry process. Although there are similarities between the learners, there are also notable differences, which is to be expected if we agree with Tudor’s (2001: 14) observation that

our students are [not] ‘simply’ students, nor [are they] bundles of discrete variables. They are complex human beings who bring with them to the classroom their own individual personality as it is at a given point in time.

This chapter has shown that it is not just their personality, but also the complex interplay of beliefs, identities, hopes and emotions that they bring with them to the classroom, and thus to the research endeavour. I attempt to draw these threads together in the final sections of this chapter.
4.8.1 Expectations

Despite the focus of EP on understanding first and foremost and its self-distancing from the more improvement-focused, problem-solution framework of some practitioner research, and my own attempts to explain the reasons for this approach to the class, there is clear evidence that many of the learners were hoping that this work would provide a way to improve their language performance (praxis). Perhaps they were searching for a ‘best method’ (Prabhu, 1990); something as yet undiscovered that would enable them to reach their desired performance level. Although Kan is the only one who explicitly frames his puzzle as a problem-solution, many learners speak of a problem and there is an implicit desire for solutions in the reflections. This raises the questions as to whether the learners were completely on board with the principles of EP at the beginning of the process, and whether one short lecture was enough to impact on their own possible assumptions about the nature of research itself and its expected outcomes.

However, I do not believe these expectations were limited to the EP work. There is evidence from their LLAs that they were also expecting ‘results’ from the class in general and from living in the UK. This undoubtedly had an effect on how they viewed the puzzle work and their openness to searching for understanding prior to solutions.

4.8.2 Language-as-object and language-as-performance

Many of the learners seem to differentiate between their grammatical knowledge of the language (language-as-object) and their spoken production of the language (language-as-performance). They seem to equate their knowledge of the language with their past learning, their ability to study, understand and use the rules, perhaps reinforcing the view that language is a code that resides in a text book or grammar book, ‘a fixed and static object to be transferred from page to memory’ (Benesch, 2012: 68); a form of theoresis rather than an enacted and embodied theoria. This is contrasted unfavourably with their performance of the language; their ‘linguistic practice [as] situated, interactional, [and] communicatively motivated’ (Bauman, 2000: 1); their praxis. It is the tension arising from this clash of beliefs about what language is and how it operates that is evident in their reflections. They subject their own performance to scrutiny using the concept of language-as-object as their evaluative tool. There is little account given to other people’s assessment of that performance in social situations. However, in exam situations, the opposite is mostly true and I am calling this view language-as-achievement.
4.8.3 Language-as-achievement

I am using this term in a limited sense to refer to a view that language is the vehicle to success or failure, which is determined by an exam score. It is a techne view of language used to achieve an external goal. It shifts the view from a self-evaluation of one’s performance to an evaluation by an unknown examiner based on a disembodied set of assessment criteria. It is the frequent mention of IELTS scores and performance by many of the learners in relation to their puzzle that leads me to this conclusion. ‘Passing’ IELTS is their passport to a UK university career and it is their success or failure in that exam that will determine that future (Wilson, 2010).

4.8.4 Language-as-integration

Perhaps in contrast to the idea of language-as-achievement, is that of language as a means of social integration (praxis); integration into a desired community, which in many cases above seems to be a community of ‘foreigners’. The focus on their fluency and communicative ability, their desire to be part of a vibrant, fun and dynamic social network (Bert 4.3.1) reflects this view of language-as-integration. It is the dream of belonging to an imagined community; it is their imagined future (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

4.8.5 Language-as-power

This last phrase comes from the seemingly uncritical view held by the learners of the type of English that is needed and acceptable in a globalised, post-colonial world. The qualification of grammar as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and the emphasis on an error-free English seem to suggest a preference for the native-speaker norms of English as a foreign language as opposed to the more functional, communicative approach of English as a Lingua Franca. Is this choice the result of linguistic imperialism, of being brainwashed into believing the superiority of the native-speaker model as some might claim, or is it a pragmatic choice based on their desire to integrate into the academic culture of an English-speaking country (Kirkpatrick, 2006)? Whichever the case, it seems to exert a strong, almost constrictive power over the learners.

4.9 Concluding remarks

This chapter has looked at the beginning of the EP process. It has shown what the learners bring with them to the classroom (empeiria) by examining their initial reflections, and their LLAs and learning logs as background and contextual information. It has shown how past, present and future converge within the classroom space and how the beliefs, identities and assumptions that
have been brought into the classroom are enacted in this initial call to ‘puzzle about their learning’, showing what happens as the hyphen space of learner-research is opened up (RQ1). It also sheds light on RQ3, showing how learners construct and make meaning of their own learning lives; how they currently understand their *praxis*.
Chapter 5  Beginning as ‘researchers’

Having examined the reasons why the learners chose to explore their particular puzzle (Chapter 4), I now take a look at the first stages in the research process (weeks 3-4) as they unpacked the puzzles, and made decisions about data collection tools. I also trace their initial steps towards understanding as they trialled and refined those tools.

5.1   Unpacking the puzzles

Having chosen their puzzles, the next challenge was to help them ask the right questions about their puzzle to further the work for understanding. To aid this process, I took a puzzle from a previous class and we deconstructed it together by interrogating the puzzle using ‘Wh’ question words in the first person singular. In keeping with the EP principle of integrating work for understanding with the pedagogic aims of the class, this also provided some much needed practice in question forms, and my feedback focused on the accuracy of these as well as the content.

In contrast to the example we had done in class, most questions were written in the second person and resembled questionnaires. We had not yet talked about different ways of collecting information, so perhaps this reflects a desire to find answers to their puzzles as quickly as possible; a more techne approach. It may also indicate familiarity with the idea of questionnaires as research tools and an assumption that that is how they would collect their data, or it might suggest a distancing of themselves and their own personal reflections when working on a group task.

The movement throughout the process between group and individual work, group reflections and individual reflections was not always a smooth one. Storch (2005) notes that collaborative group writing, which is the focus of this section, is often shorter, although more accurate than individual writing. There is also the possibility that some of the group will sit back, leaving the majority of the work to one or two people. This was particularly evident in the reflections written on trialling their data collection instruments: one group’s reflection (Pete, Boris and Orlan), was written almost entirely in the first person singular, while Zeno and Leo’s, and Antonia and Jake’s switched between ‘we’ and ‘I’.
5.2 Choosing the data collection tools

In the following class, we had a discussion about the different ways we could collect information to find answers to our questions thus helping us to understand our puzzles more fully. A common component in EAP courses in the centre is a focus on writing surveys and questionnaires, the difference between open and closed questions and their advantages and disadvantages. I added the idea of observations and also focus groups (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011), using activities we had done in class to illustrate the latter. We also discussed the possibilities of using the Internet, books and reports for furthering understanding.

My aim was not for them to grasp the intricacies of these different methods, rather to understand the basic notion that information can be collected in different ways, and that the way we choose depends on what we want to find out (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000: 86); a research awareness-raising activity, which also aimed to develop critical thinking skills (one of the course ILOs, Table 1) as they discussed the methods most suited to their puzzle and the advantages and disadvantages of each. Their choices and reasons were recorded in the class wiki.

Many of the groups chose to do some sort of survey, perhaps not surprising given that surveys and their results pervade our everyday lives (Robson, 2002: 228), and are thus relatively familiar. Perhaps this familiarity gave a sense of security to the learners, particularly given their lack of experience in the other methods I was suggesting; the evidence below unveils a failure to fully grasp the distinctions between the different possibilities.

I perceive little evidence of critical thinking (in terms of reasoning about the different types of data collection tools in relation to their purposes) in the reflections written in the wiki. Although critical thinking is not a stated goal of EP, it was part of the course aims, and one that I hoped to develop through this sort of work. Most reasons given for choosing their particular method seem to be based on the perceived ease of both preparing their instruments and obtaining information. While what is written in the wiki is a summary of their group discussions rather than a transcript of every word said, I do not believe a recording of their discussions would have revealed many deeper insights. My journal entry suggests I had been too ambitious in my expectations for the outcomes of this particular class.
5.3 Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar even though I know grammar?

Two groups were investigating this puzzle, but as their thinking and inquiries led them in different directions, I deal with them separately.

5.3.1 Bert, Bena and Eshrag

This group unpacked their puzzle into six questions:

1. When and where do we use grammar the worst?
2. How many grammatical mistakes do you make?
3. When do you speak grammatically wrong in the morning or in the evening?
4. What situation do you think that you speak the worst grammar?
5. Who do you always speak in wrong grammar?
6. How often do you speak in wrong grammar?

Here the focus goes from first person (question 1) to second person in the following questions, with the idea in question 1 repeated in questions 3 and 4. Perhaps the first reflects my input in helping them to get started, which they then develop. The questions show they are beginning to think about the influence of various factors (time of day, situation, people) in their use of ‘wrong grammar’ alongside a concern for the frequency and quantity of mistakes made. There seems to be little evidence of research into these sorts of factors in the literature, with most research focussing on either teacher and learner attitudes to error correction and instruction (see for example Gardiner, 2012; Loewen et al., 2009; Pazaver & Wang, 2009; Zhou, Busch, & Cumming, 2013) or the mechanics of teaching and learning grammar (Batstone, 1996; Ellis, 2006). The learners are thus extending the scope of their puzzling beyond the classroom, to the practical, everyday usage of grammar in their lives.

The group decided to use questionnaires and interviews to explore their puzzle, giving the following reasons for their choice:

We use questionnaires to collect information and ideas from a lot of people and we also use interviews to get a specific details.
We don’t want to make the observation and focus group because they may use many tools such as recorder and camera and this is valuable. And also sometimes we cannot get the information clearly.
This shows an understanding, albeit a rather simplistic one, of the possible roles of a survey type questionnaire providing data quickly and relatively easily from a large number of people (Robson, 2002: 234), and the flexibility of an interview that might provide more tailored answers (p.272). However, their dismissal of focus groups and observations seems to be primarily based on the value of the equipment they believe is needed to record the conversation rather than an understanding of what information those methods might provide, perhaps highlighting one of the challenges of initiating learners into this sort of work in such a time-constrained course.

Bert, Bena and Eshrag wrote a multiple choice questionnaire covering the different areas they had identified above: context; quantity of mistakes; and nationality. After trialling their survey in class, they removed the time of day question as people didn’t understand it, and added a question about how students thought the grammar of their language differed from the grammar of English. They had only one interview question: do you think speaking correct grammar is important? Why or why not? They also wrote questions specifically to ask teachers (Figure 12).

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13 I have renamed some wiki pages to maintain student anonymity
At this stage in the process, it would appear that Bert, Bena and Eshrag are trying to understand how other people perceive the use of ‘wrong’ grammar and to understand whether it depends on the context of the conversation, nationality or first language. There is also a hint of critical questioning in their interview question, asking whether it actually matters or not that their grammar is often ‘wrong’.

These areas of concern are also implicit in the questions they prepared for the teachers, adding an additional dimension by asking ‘what advice you give us to correct our grammar mistakes?’ They turn to the teachers to get ‘expert advice’ on how to improve their language rather than to their peers.

5.3.2 Pete, Orlan and Boris

Pete, Orlan and Boris also came up with six questions from their puzzle:

1. Who told you your grammar is wrong?
2. What type of grammar are you afraid of?
3. Where can you write wrong grammar?
4. When do you speak wrong grammar?
5. Which part of grammar do you think is most difficult?
6. How do you cope with this issue?

Like the group above, the questions are all written in the second person singular, as if the unpacking of the puzzle constituted the writing of a questionnaire. There are similarities with Bert’s group (the situational aspects), but also several differences. They include a question (Q3) about writing, perhaps reflecting Pete’s concerns (4.3.5) about his grammar performance in writing. The other questions seem to have a strong affective element to them.

Question 1 is a self-challenge which questions their assumptions about the belief that their grammar is ‘wrong’, asking where that perception might come from: perhaps people such as teachers, peers, and others they communicate with. Questions 2 and 5 seem similar, although the idea of ‘being afraid’ of an aspect of grammar is a curious one. Given that traditionally, emotions have been more associated with irrationality and feminine behaviour (Golombek & Doran, 2014: 102), it is interesting that these questions come from an all-male group. Again, I could find no studies that examine the affective response of learners to grammar production in
everyday conversation. These questions as a unit reflect the thinking, feeling and doing, or cognition, emotion and activity of language learning (adapted from Golombek & Doran, 2014).

Giving similar reasons to Bert’s group, they decided to interview people because …

we think this is an efficient way, because we question is about the grammar, so we should take more attention on detail while the questionnaire and focus group is not suitable for our puzzle. We plan to interview 5 people each from different nationalities.

Their final list of interview questions (Figure 13) was based on those above with the addition of an introductory question to find out if the person they were interviewing believed they spoke in correct grammar or not, and a final question not dissimilar from Bert’s group:

Do you think it is important to use correct grammar when you are speaking? If yes, why? If not, what is important?

In their group reflection on trialling the data collection tools, they stated that this last question was the most useful as it helped them to see the importance of using correct grammar in their speaking.

Figure 13. Pete, Orlan and Boris’ final questionnaire

5.4 When I chat with foreigners, I feel more nervous and often make mistakes to organise my sentence. Why?

Vesper, Mason and Spring wrote the following questions:
1. What makes me nervous? people or my English level?
2. The foreigners refers to the locals or people who are come from other countries?
3. When the things was happened? In the social life or IELTS test?
4. Why often make mistakes in spoken English and can’t fluently in speaking?
5. What problem should notice in the spoken English?
6. How to behave very confident in oral English?

These questions appear to divide into two groups. Questions 1-3 relate to understanding the assumptions and ideas embedded in the puzzle itself and may reflect my own probing to help them develop their initial thinking about the puzzle. Questions 4-6 appear to be driven more by urgency and reflect a desire to get practical suggestions and answers. These reflect the very real issues they are facing in speaking and perhaps more importantly, the things that most concern them rather than the things I might find interesting about their puzzle, or believe will help them understand.

The group wrote a multiple choice questionnaire, followed by two open questions in which they explore different aspects of the questions above. They gave very little detail about how they chose this option, just saying that they believed it to be a ‘clear and efficient [way to] get lots of information from different kinds of person’.

In their group reflection on trialling the data collection instruments, and in response to whether they felt the data they had collected was helping them to understand their puzzle more, they wrote:

Just have a little help because our questionnaire not including question about how to improve in speaking.

They also wrote: ‘We need to add some questions about how to deal with the speaking problem in the future’.

This reveals the most important focus for them in doing the research: they wanted to know how they could improve their speaking. Perhaps this illustrates the possible tension in a class such as this between working for understanding as conceived in the EP sense, and the desire to find a means to move ahead quickly and efficiently in their language learning; a tension between theoria and techne. They consequently added a third open question asking directly for ideas on
how to improve (Figure 14). Interestingly they seem to extend the idea of solving speaking problems to those they will interview. In the introduction to their questionnaire, they wrote:

And we hope to deal with your problem in your speaking with our opinion. Please answer this questions honestly. Thank you!

This could be the result of a confusion with English pronouns, but they also stated that the reason they were asking these questions was due to a belief that speaking was the ‘most significant issue for us who go abroad to study’ which seems to imply that the students who participate in their study might also benefit from their developing understandings. Here the learners are extending one of the key concepts underlying EP, that the research enterprise should be beneficial to all (Allwright, 2003), including their research participants.

Figure 14. Vesper, Mason and Spring’s final questionnaire
5.5 Why do I have so few ideas during IELTS speaking test?

This puzzle belonged to Antonia and Jake, who I noted in my journal seemed to quickly grasp the task in hand. They were also the ones who provided the most detail about why they had chosen their particular data collection instrument. Below, is how they expanded their puzzle:

1. What topics are the hardest?
2. Do you have few ideas only in the exams or do you always lack of ideas?
3. Who is the person which has so few ideas during the IELTS speaking test?
4. Where is the best place for taking IELTS exams?
5. When do you fit for speaking exams? In the morning, or afternoon?
6. Which part in the speaking test do you think is the hardest? Part 1, part 2 or part 3?
7. How many times did you attend the IELTS test?
8. How often do you do the speaking practices?

The majority of these questions are related directly to the IELTS speaking exam, but the ‘Wh’ question words prompt a broader understanding to include factors related to the effect of a morning or afternoon exam on speaking performance (Q5), and also geographical location (Q4). There were several discussions in class as to the relative benefit of taking the exam in different cities, and which centres marked more or less severely in the speaking exam. This question perhaps reflects a desire to get more opinions on this issue to help in their choice of exam centre, although it disappeared from the final version (Figure 15). Questions 2 and 3 seem to reflect Antonia’s concern (4.5.1) that the lack of ideas was not a purely exam related phenomenon perhaps implying a desire to understand more about herself through dialogue with others who have also experienced this lack of ideas.

The last question implies an understanding on their part of a relationship between practice and performance (praxis); a move perhaps towards comparing their own commitment to practice with others who have done better in the exam or claim to have more ideas in the exam than they themselves.

They decided to interview people and after outlining the sorts of areas they would cover in their interviews, stated: ‘Finally, we cooperate together [with our interviewees] to find the solutions’. There are two things to note here, the first of which is again this expectation that the end product of the research is to find solutions, and which is reflected in the last question of their final questionnaire (Figure 15). The second is an extension of the idea of the collegial principles...
of EP (Principles 3-5), of inclusivity and mutual development, highlighting parallels with the question of who benefits from the research discussed above (5.4). In addition, there is the idea of a co-construction of knowledge between the learner-researchers and their participants; a relationship of equality between the researchers and the researched; an innate understanding that the best work will come through cooperation and collaboration. This extends the net of beneficiaries and collaborators beyond one class of teacher and learners to others in the centre.

![Data Collection (Antonia, Jake)](image)

*Figure 15. Antonia and Jake’s final questionnaire*

In debating their chosen data collection tool, Antonia and Jake showed perhaps more critical insight than some of the other groups. They rejected questionnaires ‘because the question is a complex issue about both thinking and speaking’, showing a clear recognition of both the cognitive and doing aspects of language learning (5.3.2). This is also evidenced in their reflection on trialling the data collection tools where they stated:

> We think the question ‘Do you have few ideas only in the exams or do you always lack of ideas?’ is very important for us.

This tension between having ideas in general conversation and in exams seems key for their understanding of their puzzle.
The affective realm is emphasised in their rejection of focus groups:

Thirdly, we don't choose the focus group because a lot of people wouldn't like to share some details and the drawbacks which they have in English to more people.

Perhaps this reflects their own disinclination to admit to their ‘problems’ in front of others, and is one of the reasons for which EP prefers the term ‘puzzle’ to ‘problem’ (Allwright, 2003: 117; Johnson, 2002: 61) (2.4.1), although the learners themselves would have been unaware of this distinction.

5.6 Why I can’t pay more attention in listening course?

This was Zeno and Leo’s puzzle and below is their initial expansion, with questions again written in the second person. We had an early exchange via the wiki on what they meant by ‘course’ in the puzzle and they changed this to task before they started collecting data. As stated above (3.3.1), as part of the ‘re-presentation’ of text, I have added square brackets where the original word is not clear (in meaning or spelling).

1. What’s the most important thing in listening course [task]?
2. How can help you concentrate better?
3. Which type of course [task] you can pay more attention to?
4. Which kind of listening martial [material] you used the most?
5. When you frequently do listening practice, afternoon or morning?
6. When is your most effective work time?
7. How did you deal with the vocabulary which you do not know?
8. Where is the suitable environment for you to do listening? Library or home?

Included here are questions related to the time of day and environment (Qs.5, 6&8), as we saw with Antonia and Jake. There are also two questions (2&3) directly related to the key theme of attention and concentration in the puzzle itself. The other questions seem to refer to listening strategies: the most important thing to do when you are doing a listening task (Q1); the kind of material that people choose to help them with listening (Q4); and dealing with unknown vocabulary (Q7).

As stated in their rationale (Figure 16), they decided to use interviews, rejecting focus groups because it would be too difficult to remember all the details, and closed questions because they wanted specific ideas rather than ‘yes/no’ answers. The questions in their final interview
schedule focus on discovering different listening strategies so they ‘can appreciate more effective listen skills from different types of learning habits’. This shows evidence of a willingness to learn from their peers and the different issues they face with listening, both those who are ‘good at listening’ and those with ‘puzzles in listening’. They also recognise the possibility of different approaches to the same goal.

Figure 16. Zeno and Leo’s final questionnaire and rationale

They ask people to self-classify themselves as ‘good’ or not at listening, and their first question to the second group of people asks if they believe that their ‘problem in the listening task ... is the main reason [they] fail in the listening exam’ implying that a good listener is perhaps one who has done well in the exam. However, they also want to know if people are aware of why they find it so difficult to concentrate and perhaps hope to glean some advice from ‘poor’ listeners too when they ask ‘do you know how to overcome these difficulties?’
It is also noteworthy that in their rationale, Zeno and Leo seem to use the idea of ‘problem’ and ‘puzzle’ interchangeably. Despite my constant emphasis on the need to put understanding first (for example Figure 17), I frequently noted in my journal how students seemed to understand puzzle and problem as synonyms, an issue I explore more fully in Chapter 11.

5.7 Why does team 3 (which is near the door) always speak Chinese?

As stated in 4.7, this puzzle was the only one that did not focus immediately on the students’ own learning, although as Annie’s reflection illustrated, she saw a direct correlation to her own situation and behaviour. In unpacking their puzzle, Kan, Vivi and Annie developed the following questions:

1. What kinds of groups prefer to speak in Chinese: A half of them are Chinese, Only one in the group is Chinese and Two people in the group are Chinese? All of them are Chinese?
2. What is the topic that they like to discuss in Chinese? English learning? Real life? Playing Games? e.g. talking about iPhone 6? IELTS Exam?
3. Do they speak Chinese in the whole Class?
4. Do they speak Chinese in the same group or different group?
5. Which places they like to speak in Chinese in [college name]?
6. How often do they speak Chinese in the class?
7. Which class they usually speak Chinese a lot? Monday? Tuesday? Friday?

Looking at these questions, one can see a direct relationship between the idea of language and place. Place relates both physically to where they were seated in the classroom and perhaps metaphorically to a space where they felt safe, and/or able to speak in Chinese (Canagarajah, 2004). In question 5, this moves beyond the geographical boundaries of the classroom to include the whole college, although this question, or the idea it contains, never appeared again in any of their discussions. The classroom we used was wide and shallow, and we arranged the tables into three groups distributed across the width of the classroom. The teacher’s desk was near the window, on the other side of the classroom to the door, and so ‘team 3’ was the group furthest from the teacher’s desk and perhaps the side of the classroom more closely associated with the teacher’s authority. ‘Team 1’ sat nearest to the window, and ‘team 2’ was in the middle.
By including the learners as practitioners and thus foregrounding their perspectives, we can appreciate more fully the complex and dynamic nature of classroom life (1.3). Although it would be unwise to draw conclusions based on such sparse evidence, I wonder if there is a connection here with Canagarajah’s concept of ‘safe houses’ which he defines in the ESL context as:

sites that are relatively free from surveillance, especially by authority figures, perhaps because these are considered unofficial, off-task, or extrapedagogical.

(Canagarajah, 2004: 121)

He exemplifies this through students using their own language in class concluding that ‘this communicative practice is a representation of the bilingual and bicultural life these students live outside the classroom’ (p. 124). Safe houses are spaces where learners can develop solidarity and community and resist dominant discourses and ideologies (p. 129).

Alongside the idea of place, is that of the linguistic mix within each team, with question 1 suggesting a suspected correlation between the number of Chinese speakers in the group and the quantity of Chinese spoken. Despite the use of ‘always’ in the puzzle question, there are hints (questions 3&4, 6&7) that this perception needs to be tested and validated rather than assumed. Interrogating the puzzle is one way of allowing the learners’ assumptions to surface and to make the implicit, explicit.

The group agreed to use a combination of observation and interviews. When explaining their reasons for this choice, they stated that interviews were the easiest way to get details, and observations had the following advantages:

1. convenience: we don't need to prepare in advance, such as questionnaire.
2. reliable: natural performance and real opinions (They don't know they get involved in the research.)

While the first perhaps reflects an initial misunderstanding of the work involved pre-observation, the second point raised an opportunity to talk again about the ethical issues of ‘informed consent’ with the learners, and the difference that knowing or not knowing they were being observed might make to the results of the observation. They did not initially pinpoint any disadvantages for either observations or interviews, although the observation schedule evolved over time (Figure 18).
Their final decision was to observe for five minutes every hour during class, taking one table each and noting how many people spoke Chinese, what they spoke about, what was happening in the class at that time, and how long they spoke for. After trialling their observations in class one day, they felt that the observation schedule they had written and the way they distributed the task had worked well. However, they noted several tensions in relation to their dual role as participant observers throughout the observation. Firstly, my co-teacher had changed the teams around, so ‘team 3’ was no longer composed of only Chinese speakers, so they noted that ‘our main target is not team 3 anymore’. They also needed to concentrate on the class and join in with the group work, and they felt that they had to choose between compromising the observation or their own learning:

We need to listen to the teacher in the class when we are observing. Sometime we can’t absolutely focus on observation. How to solve that?

They framed this situation as a problem that they needed to try and solve in relation to their chosen instrument of data collection rather than the puzzle. One suggestion they came up with was to enlist the help of the teachers. However, they never gave any further details to describe how they decided to proceed.

5.8 The learner-research hyphen space

In the sections above, I have looked at the early stages of the research process as the learners embarked on an exploration of their puzzles and decided on how they might further their understandings. We have seen evidence of purposeful thinking about their puzzles and the
beginnings of a research plan. However, my first research question asks what happens at that hyphen space when learners embark on doing research as part of their language learning activity. Here, I draw some initial observations of that hyphen space.

5.8.1 Doing Research or doing research?

I have observed throughout this chapter how the learners demonstrated a relatively shallow and sometimes mistaken comprehension of what the different research methods entailed and how they might be used to aid their work. Their data collection instruments would not stand up to the scrutiny of an academic reviewer, and the many well-rehearsed critiques levelled at teacher research could be amply justified in relation to the activity my learners were engaged in: a lack of rigour resulting in second-rate and inferior research because they are not trained researchers (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001: 298); the lack of time to become ‘expert’ researchers (Huberman, 1996: 126; Anderson & Herr, 1999: 13); a personal stake in the research topic (i.e. their own learning) disqualifying it from being ‘real research’ (Anderson & Herr, 1999: 13); the production of local, situated and personal knowledge, rather than generalisable knowledge (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001: 299).

I would agree in principle that these arguments when examined from the perspective of academic research are more than valid in the present case. The learners struggled to think like ‘professional’ researchers, were not properly trained in research methods and did not have the time or inclination to pursue their data collection in a rigorous manner. They did not appear to think as deeply as they could, and were very quick to articulate some sort of finding.

However, as Borg (2010: 405) so rightly asserts, any criticism of teacher research will stem from a particular view of the nature of research itself, and I would add, the nature of knowledge (a narrow epistemology or a broader gnoseology, 2.3) that research seeks to produce. If we understand the research activity that the learners were engaged in as defined and validated by the academic community, ‘Research’ with a capital ‘R’, theoresis perhaps, or inquiry for its own sake rather than inquiry that is subordinate to activity (Hammersley, 2004: 167), then we will be left wanting.

Exploratory Practice is about prioritising quality of life through working for understanding, and the activity that is central to that is the language learning endeavour of the classroom. This then
is a different perspective on research, research with a small ‘r’ where rigour and validity are subordinate to the main activity of language learning. However, this is not to say that the learners involved in doing EP should not be encouraged to push their understandings as deep as possible (Allwright, 2005a: 359), and to work hard to gather their information in a systematic and well-thought through way.

5.8.2 Process or product?

The concept of giving people the space, time and encouragement to think as deeply as possible implies that the process of doing the research is as important, if not more so, than the product. However, I think this is something that the learners struggled to appreciate and understand; they wanted answers, and answers as quickly as possible. In response to a reflection prompt from me, ‘what do you think you have understood about your puzzle so far?’ after they had trialled their data collection instruments (in which they had spoken to a maximum of two or three people), all groups, with the exception of Kan’s group (who wrote nothing was ‘very clear’ due to the teacher changing the groups during their observation), implied that they had now ‘understood’ their puzzle.

Vesper’s group listed some strategies to overcome nerves when chatting to foreigners: ‘Overcome nervous mood and adjust your mood, More relax to talk with others’. Antonia and Jake gave a reason for not having ideas in the speaking test: ‘We have understood our puzzles. We have so few ideas in speaking test because we lack of practise’. Zeno and Leo stated that they had found solutions, although they did not specify them at this stage:

We have understood our puzzle better than ever. We got the better solutions to overcome the puzzle in listening.

The other two groups, while not being as specific, stated that they now understood their puzzle, with Bena’s group stating that they understood ‘the main cause of making wrong grammar in speaking’.

The unpacking of the puzzle I believe focused mainly on understanding their puzzle and their own puzzlement more fully. However, in some cases that quite quickly moved to a focus on solutions and strategies for improvement. Even where there is a more vague and unsubstantiated ‘we now understand’, this does not yet appear to be the result of engagement
in dialogue as described in 2.3.3. I will explore this more fully as we progress through the story, but for now suffice it to say that solutions and problem-solving appear to offer a very real, attractive and seductive route (Hanks, 2013: 240) to the learners; one which provides a tangible product rather than the perhaps more difficult process of working to understand, which offers no guaranteed, concrete product at the end.

It would be unfair to say however, that there was no understanding at all being developed at this stage. The process gave them the opportunity to raise questions, fears, and in some cases to begin to further articulate their possible assumptions and beliefs about learning; to make explicit the implicit. It also gave them an opportunity however limited at this stage to interact and share with others and learn from them: to ‘work cooperatively for mutual development’ (EP Principle 5).

5.9 Concluding remarks

This chapter has attempted to show how the learners fared in the initial stages of doing learner-research, in particular in relation to RQ1. We have suggested that perhaps they struggled with the ambiguity of ‘puzzlement’, preferring tangible results, ideas and solutions and there initially appears to be a very instrumental, techne-focused approach to understanding; wanting to know what to do to achieve an end product (adequate IELTS score) that would get them on to the next stage of their academic careers. However, there is also a growing recognition that practice is key and this is very much a part of praxis, the doing action associated with episteme, that helps move us from novice to expert (2.3.3). Perhaps what is emerging are different facets of what it means for the learners to understand, and I will continue to trace this development in subsequent chapters.
Chapter 6  Working at the learner-research hyphen

So far, we have followed the learners’ journey as they have chosen their puzzles, decided how to collect their data, and trialled and refined their instruments. We have seen how their beliefs and past experiences of language learning, along with their future hopes and desires influenced the way they approached the EP work and their expectations of it; the nature of the things that puzzled them; the pull of the problem-solution framework evident in much of their early work; and some of the opportunities that arise through engaging in learner-research.

This chapter continues to explore what happens in the classroom looking at the continuing possibilities opened up by learner-research, and the emergent understandings being articulated by the learners at this stage of the work. It ends with the introduction of a student who was the first dissident voice in the process, a hint that alongside possibilities there are also potential sites of contestation.

6.1  An unforeseen opportunity

We had now reached week 5 of the course, and the learners needed to collect data for their puzzles. An unplanned opportunity arose when a colleague who taught EAP on the International Diploma (Int. Dip.) course (the equivalent of a first year UG business degree) circulated an email asking if any teacher would be willing to allow her students to come in and ask questions for a research project they were doing. As my students seemed reluctant to approach people and interview them, I proposed a reciprocal interviewing session to my colleague, which subsequently took place during the last two hours of class. When they had gone, I asked my learners to complete an individual reflection (ID) based around the following three prompts:

ID1: Describe what you did today to understand your puzzle better.
ID2: How do you feel about your experience today?
ID3: What understandings have you come to about your puzzle so far? Be specific.

The design of these questions was influenced by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985a: 37), who suggest that by firstly describing what you did, there is less likelihood of jumping immediately to interpretation or analysis, and Powell's (1985: 45) observation that is easier to describe your
feelings about a learning experience than identify what you have learnt. However, many learners wrote their emergent understandings in response to the first prompt, perhaps misunderstanding the question, or perhaps feeling that once they had stated ‘I interviewed 6 people’, there was no need for further description and they could describe their discoveries. The next section deals mainly with the responses to the second prompt, with the following section covering the emergent understandings.

6.2 Expanding possibilities …

The second prompt asked them to describe how they felt about the data collecting experience, which, with the exception of Monzer (6.4), seemed overwhelmingly positive for all learners. Their reflections included many affirmative adjectives: excellent, wonderful, fantastic, valuable, interesting, useful, good, helpful, relaxed, exciting, fun, great, beneficial, and awesome.

This last adjective comes from Boris, who wrote the following response:

It really awesome, I am into it, that give us positive influence through this activity. We can practice our English ability, we can cultivate some confidence to speak English with other, we can fulfil potential ourselves, it is really helpful for us. I strongly recommend we need this activity which really helpful.

Boris summarises here many of the themes that surfaced in the other reflections: a chance to practise English; an increased confidence; an opportunity to speak to others beyond their classmates; a positive and fruitful learning experience; and a perceived personal benefit. Here, the research activity of the learners, the ‘doing research’, has created a portal into a space abundant with possibilities for them. All, except Monzer, seem to have embraced these possibilities and benefitted from them. Before turning to their developing understandings from this stage of the puzzle work, I will take a closer look at their affective engagement with the data collection activity.

6.2.1 Improving our skills

Many learners felt the experience had enabled them to improve their skills, and as this was the overarching aim of the course, it might explain to some extent why there was such a positive response to the activity. It is also true to say that these same benefits might well have been achieved through any other inter-class activity. However, for our present purposes, it is this
activity that is under discussion and it is the responses to that spatiotemporal moment that I examine here.

Most of the learners who highlighted the enhancement of their skills in their reflections, focused on listening and/or speaking skills (praxis): ‘I also improve my speaking skill by the conversation’ (Pete); ‘I have practised my listening and speaking with them’ (Mason). Vivi referred to an improvement in English skills in general and expanded on that by saying: ‘we need to talk to others and explain [our] purpose if they unable to understand’. Here is an awareness that meaning needs to be negotiated in a social context (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987), and it is the opportunity to practice that negotiation through the specific nature of the task that offered her the possibility of enhancing her skills.

6.2.2 Engaging in social interaction

Perhaps as teachers there is an assumption that students studying in an institution that caters exclusively for internationals will mix with each other, and use the break out areas scattered around the centre to forge new friendships. However, the reaction of some of my learners to this activity would suggest that this is not the case. Perhaps this is best articulated by Leo:

I would like to talk with other people, but only have little chance. I’m very happy about that I talked with some people today.

Despite being surrounded on a daily basis by other people, many of whom were of a similar age and with similar goals and aims, Leo perceives a lack of opportunity to engage with others despite proclaiming a desire to do so. He does not explain why he feels this way but there seems to be some barrier that keeps him from interacting with others. Annie also wrote that she felt ‘happy because [she had] opportunity to chat with people from different countries’ and others spoke about how it had been ‘an excellent experience to make friends from other countries’ (Antonia), and ‘to know new people’ (Jake).

This one classroom activity served to enhance not just the quality of life in the classroom, but also QoL beyond, by providing an opportunity for learners to engage in those social interactions which they find so difficult to initiate. This is QoL as being and doing: the fulfilment (albeit temporarily) of their social needs through the work for understanding. Perhaps this is summed up by Jake who wrote ‘that [knowing new people and listening to others] is good for study and
our daily life’. This experience, the doing of listening and speaking to others, made being a student and resident in the UK that little bit better; more ‘pleasant and productive’ (Allwright, 2003: 114).

Others wrote of how the activity had increased their confidence. Spring reflected that:

I felt this experience is very useful for me because I can brave to communicate with strangers. I overcame this problem that can hinder my improvement.

Spring recognises that she lacks the courage to address people she does not know. This opportunity pushes her out of her comfort zone and enables her to be ‘brave’ with strangers. The activity, which took place in the familiar ground of her classroom, provides a safe space in which to step out into unfamiliar and perhaps frightening territory. Fear of speaking to others had hindered her improvement, but now she can move forward. It is this capacity for movement that is vital for her sense of agency (van Lier, 2010: 4). This is not a direct result of a deeper understanding of her puzzle but is related to the process of engaging in the research activity. In exercising her agency through participation in the activity, she has heightened her sense of agency for similar situations and contexts (Mercer, 2012), helping her to move towards a virtuoso performance as she develops her praxis.

In addition to his class reflection, which described the experience as positive, Pete also chose to write his weekly learning log about the activity:

I feel confident when I talked with them because I had prepared the research about two weeks, so it is easy for me to communicate with people.

Pete equates his confidence with the preparation time the research project afforded him. This was not a one-off class activity but an ongoing process which had given him the time and space for the mental rehearsal (de Guerrero, 1999) he needed to prepare himself to interact with others. Pete sat in ‘team 3’, seemed very reluctant to participate in class and group discussions, and his early learning logs spoke of his fear of having to speak to other people. This activity was something of a breakthrough for Pete in terms of his willingness and ability to communicate, a significant development in his praxis.
6.2.3 Mutual development

I noted in the last chapter (5.4 and 5.5) that for some groups there was the anticipation of mutual development (Principle 5) for both themselves and their participants. I do not have data from the Int. Dip. students giving their reflections on the process, and therefore can only speculate (based on their teacher’s report that they had found it helpful and learner comments below) about the benefits they derived from it. There is evidence in my data however, that some of the EUS9 learners benefitted not only from the common activity of research that they were engaged in, but also from the research topic that the Int. Dip. students were investigating. They were doing individual assessed research projects around Personal Development Plans (PDPs), a topic set by NCUK, and had developed interview questions around this theme.

Spring said that it helped her understand more about her own time management:

Also, the International Diploma’s students ask some questions about manage time. I think it’s benefit for me.

Mason noted the mutual benefit to their language skills, as well as the contribution to his own PDP noting that: ‘it not only improve our English skills each other, but also make my PDP more completed’. Annie also hints at the mutual language benefit derived from an authentic purpose for communication:

Even if we come from different countries, we have the same reasons to answer questions.

Bringing learners together in a common (research) activity, seemed to bring mutual benefit. However, perhaps there is a challenge here to EP Principle 4, which speaks of the need to ‘bring people together in a common enterprise’. The enterprise that the Int. Dip. students and EUS9 learners were involved in was arguably different: the Int. Dip. learners were primarily concerned with understanding other people’s approaches to personal development to fulfil an assessment brief rather than necessarily understanding their own puzzles relating to PDPs, although this might have been one outcome. How important then is the idea of ‘common enterprise’? I do not have adequate data to explore this question thoroughly, but perhaps the experience related here suggests a need for further exploration of this principle.
Having looked at how working at the hyphen of doing learner-research has opened up possibilities of engagement, improvement of language skills, increased confidence and mutual development, I now take a closer look at the emerging and developing understandings that the learners articulate.

6.3 Emerging, developing and multifaceted understandings

Using data primarily written in response to the first and third prompts (6.1), I trace the budding understandings that emanate through the learners’ engagement in ongoing dialogue. This dialogue, which began with the first steps of puzzlement as recounted in previous chapters, was now extended to other learner practitioners, as the EUS9 learners sought to discover how others in their own ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) articulated their experiences and understandings of the puzzles under discussion. In 2.3.3, I argued for the importance of dialogue in the process of understanding, of moving from our praxis, to theoria, as it helps us to distinguish similarities and differences in our actions and words, and reveals tacit assumptions and ways of working (Eikeland, 2006: 40-41). I will examine this in more detail in Chapter 10 as I apply my gnoseology framework to the data, but here I continue my chronological account, looking at what these burgeoning understandings contribute to answering RQ1, while making some initial observations in relation to RQ2.

6.3.1 Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar even though I know grammar?

Eshrag was absent the day of the reciprocal interviews and so I do not have her reflections on the process, but for Bert, Pete and Boris, perhaps one of the key understandings to emerge from the interviews with the Int. Dip. students was the realisation that they were not alone in their puzzlement. Questions about grammar were common to ‘almost all that who were not native speakers’ (Bert). For Pete, this discovery led him to a favourable interpretation of the encounter:

I think it is a good positive experience because I know that people comes from other class also having same puzzle with us.

There is a sense of collegiality, not so much in terms of working together towards a common goal, but in sharing the struggles of second language learning and no longer feeling isolated by those struggles. Boris too affirms these findings and also outlines the discussions he had:
Yep, I ask some foreign friend, they also have this puzzle. Whilst we discuss how to deal with and this puzzle root cause.

Here, I suggest, we see two different ways of understanding working concurrently: the phrase ‘how to deal with’ implies a desire for concrete suggestions for improvement, perhaps as a means to an end (techne), and yet there is also a wish to discover the ‘root cause’, the underlying ‘why’ of grammar mistakes (theoria), although he gives details of neither.

Another understanding expressed by Pete, Bert and Bena relates to the role and importance of grammar in being understood by others. Pete pinpoints the importance of verb tense:

The people we interviewed said it is important to use correct grammar, because it can help other people to understand what you say … We should pay attention to tense in English speaking because most of people will mistake in tense.

Bena accentuates pronunciation alongside grammar, recognising that for some nationalities that causes more issues for comprehension:

Some of them have problem about pronunciation which can mistake about understanding.

whereas Bert highlights three implications of speaking correct grammar:

Everyone agrees that speaking correct grammar is quite important. It will make us get a better IELTS score and will make others understand us better. And also it is helpful for our future studies.

There is a consensus among the learners Bert spoke to that grammatical correctness is important; it is the means to a higher IELTS result (techne), and will impact positively on their future academic studies. However, it is also important from a social aspect, for building relationships, for getting along in a country which is not your own, for living well in the world (eudaimonia). Again, we see the interplay of different types of understanding, which I explore more fully in Chapter 10.
6.3.2 When I chat with foreigners, I feel more nervous and often make mistakes to organise my sentence. Why?

For Spring, Vesper and Mason, the opportunity to engage in dialogue with other learner practitioners brings cognitive, emotional and practical understandings (Eikeland, 2006: 41).

Vesper speaks of how dialogue has enabled her to uncover areas of weakness, which she can then act on:

Through the communication we can find our problem and weakness in speaking. Then find best way for ours to cope with that.

In many ways, this is what EP is about: working to understand the whats, whys and hows, so that any change we make is informed rather than uninformed (Allwright, 2003: 129). I would also suggest that this is the work of *theoria* through dialogue from *praxis*, giving us the understandings we need to engage in deliberation and so choose the best way (*phronesis*).

Vesper goes on to list some of the weaknesses that she has discovered, as well as things she might do to ‘cope with that’.

First of all don’t feel nervous when talk to another speaker in English. Because if you nervous that result upon make some mistakes in sentences. Secondly, improve speaking skill need spend more time, otherwise you can’t speaking influence. Thirdly, I should study the correctly pronunciation in words and imitate native speaker accent.

There is awareness of the impact nervousness has on her accuracy, of the importance of giving time to practise her language, and a practical suggestion about how to work on her pronunciation. I also think it shows a general move towards greater agency and autonomy in her learning, concepts which I explore in greater detail in relation to Spring below.

Spring’s reflection too moves between cognitive, emotional and practical aspects of understanding:

They [the Int Dip students] told me I should do more practice with native speaker and went to club to have training my confidence. I found many Chinese people felt nervous when they talk to native speaker at first time. However, other people who from Thailand, Azerbaijan felt enjoyable. Maybe Chinese people easily shy when they talk to strangers. I understood I should overcome afraid mentality when I speak to other people. Only in this way I can organise my thinking to speak better ... I think I should more practice with other people to improve my speaking skill. And I think I should make a plan to practice.
She begins with the practical suggestion of going clubbing to practise with native speakers (praxis₁) before comparing Chinese speakers with other nationalities, tentatively theorising that shyness in personal communication might be a specifically Chinese issue (theoria); this leads her to reflect on her own need to conquer the fear she has when speaking to others (phronesis and praxis₂) and the impact that will have on her ability to think clearly; she concludes that practice is the way to improvement (praxis₁) and that she needs to make a plan to ensure enough practice (techne).

As we have seen above, there are different types of understanding at work here, arguably coalescing to facilitate her agency. This agency is expressed in her ability to ‘think, desire, and act’ shown through her ‘self-consciousness, reflexivity, intentionality, cognition, and emotionality’ (Gao, 2013: 227). Also key, is the fact that dialogue with others has enabled her to dialogue with herself, a ‘back-stage’ reflective process:

> Internal dialogue is the practice through which we ‘make up our minds’ by questioning ourselves, clarifying our beliefs and inclinations, diagnosing our situations, deliberating about our concerns and defining our own projects.

(Archer, 2003: 103)

Mason, like Vesper, refers to the role of dialogue in revealing the hitherto unknown, and suggests that working at the learner-hyphen has helped him to be more open to new ideas and possibilities:

> According to the research today I have open my mind in order to they [Int. Dip. students] give me lots of methods to overcome the problem of speaking ... In addition, I found out my problem during the learning of speaking. I have to positive in communication.

Mason is less specific in his articulations than Vesper or Spring, and the problem he claims to have overcome seems to be implied in his solution rather than clearly stated in and of itself. The solution too is rather vague: does he need to be positive in his attitude to others, positive in his own ability, or positive in the sense of seizing opportunities to communicate? It seems unclear as to what he has really discovered, but maybe this is an example of ‘understandings too deep for words’ (Allwright, 2005a: 309), that can nevertheless be lived (praxis).
6.3.3 Why do I have so few ideas during IELTS speaking test?

A problem-solution framework dominates Antonia and Jake’s reflections, with both listing specific strategies to help overcome the problem. Jake says:

Yes, the interview is helpful for my puzzle. Now I am more clear how I can solve my problem of have a few ideas in the IELTS speaking test. I’ve got many different answer from another class-mate. Some of the answer is really good a solution from my puzzle. For example, we need go out talk English speaker and watch English film. The other example we can imitate the speaking test and talk to others.

He evaluates the usefulness of doing learner-research in terms of the good ideas he received from his fellow practitioners underlining what is relevant for him about this process. Although his ‘solutions’ are neither innovative nor different from those we might suggest as teachers (perhaps imparted as technē or even theōresis knowledge), there is something powerful about a learner investing time and energy to find answers to the questions he deems are meaningful for him. Doing learner-research permits him to question from his own experience (empeiria) and facilitates his move from novice to expert language user (praxis).

However, perhaps there is another perspective on this. Jake also wrote: ‘We got the answer which we want’, which I believe refers to the practical suggestions above for how to improve his performance in the speaking test, and suggests a preconceived idea of what he was looking for. Rather than engaging in dialogue as defined above (2.3.3) he appears to have bypassed the quest for understanding (theoria) and jumped to a list of solutions to achieve his end goal (technē), a strategy that may close down rather than open up further questioning and possible understanding (Hanks, 1998: 129). And yet, as I suggested above (6.2.2), for Jake this stage of the process enhanced his perceived QoL (at least temporarily), hinting at a subtly complex relationship between understanding and QoL.

Antonia likewise lists practical suggestions, yet unlike Jake, appears to engage in her own theorisation (theoria):

I think the main reason why I have so few ideas in the speaking test is that I did so few practise in general life. Most of them have got 6 in the past IELTS speaking test. They told me they often speak to the natural [native] speaker. The other good way to improve speaking is to watch the American or British TV series programme.
Through comparing her own behaviour and experience with those who have achieved the score she desires, she theorises that practice (praxis) is key, and links her own low score to her lack of general practice. She is seeking to understand both the why and the how (theoria) of getting a good exam score, so that she can then make decisions about what to do (phronesis).

6.3.4 Why I can’t pay more attention in listening course?

Zeno and Leo also list strategies given by those they classified as ‘good at listening’. Leo states that he got ‘some advice’ and ‘some useful information’ and concludes:

Maybe I can do more practice about listening. For example listening radio, watch some English movie and talk with native speaker. Finally be confidence is vital. Do not be nervous.

Like Antonia, he speaks of practice, but this practice seems directly linked to potential practical suggestions rather than Antonia’s more thoughtful consideration on the connection between her praxis and her puzzle. However, Leo also highlights the importance of confidence, an important factor which is not necessarily going to increase with the activities he lists. Perhaps there is another puzzle here, one which may have deepened his understanding of his own relationship to the IELTS listening task: ‘Why do I lack confidence/feel so nervous in the exam?’

Maybe this was a missed opportunity for me as teacher to encourage him to take his puzzling one step further.

At this point, I refer the reader to 10.7, where I take a much closer look at Zeno’s reflections. However, there is one aspect that I would like to examine here. Zeno extends the potential of practitioner research to life in general:

If we have the same puzzles in our life, we can ask other people for help, they can always help us to find the better solution.

Apart from the fact that he uses the same problem/solution framework to talk about his life as he does his language learning, he highlights the role of other people in understanding. I believe this was influenced in part by broader reflections as he observed the lives and attitudes of those around him. In his second learning log (week 3), he described several everyday situations, where he had observed people helping each other, such as holding a door open for someone. He reflected:
I feel they are very friendly, warm-comcoming [welcoming] and considerate to others. The native person usually put themselves into others place and do their best to help them. It’s quite different from China.

In China, people have a great deal of work to do everyday, even the weekend. Which means they leave no opportunities to slow down their steps to help others. I think this phenomenon will lead them miss so many significant things.

... this kind of action plays a positive impact on my life. I wish to do the same things like the native person ... I think it will help me to build a good personality.

As he observes, compares, constructs and deconstructs his understandings (theoria), his awareness of what phronesis looks like with regards to interrelationships is expanding and changing, potentially enabling him to make wise choices in his own life, enacted in his praxis1, and increasing his well-being (eudaimonia). Here we see how theoria and phronesis might be connected, and thus the role of both in enhancing QoL. This example also illustrates the interplay between life in the classroom and life beyond, and how classroom life is embedded in, rather than separate from, life in general (Celani, 2006: 233).

6.3.5 Why does team 3 (which is near the door) always speak Chinese?

Kan, Vivi and Annie had chosen observation as their main research method and therefore they used the opportunity with the Int. Dip. students to compare the situations in the two classes. Kan reflected:

It is really helpful for my teamwork. We can make a comparison between this class to my class, the analysis should help us to understand the puzzle and also get some advises to solve it.

Kan resists my push for the learners to articulate their understandings (prompt 3, perhaps influenced by my researcher need to collect ‘evidence’ of their developing understanding), and suggests it is through the analysis of their data that they will both understand their puzzle more fully and decide how to act on it. Again, I think this illustrates the interplay between theoria and phronesis being developed. Theoria is developed through the dialogic process of comparing, observing, and defining what is happening in shared classroom practice (praxis1), and followed by deliberation between different choices about the best way to act (praxis2). However, if they decided on an end goal of eliminating languages other than English in the classroom, the advice would be more techne orientated.
In contrast to Kan, Vivi and Annie both respond to my prompt by listing the reasons they have discovered for students speaking their own language. Annie wrote:

Firstly, it is easy for people to communicate. Secondly, it is easy for Chinese to deal with problems. Thirdly, too much Chinese are in one class.

She expands on her second reason:

Sometimes if people face difficult problems, they will use local language to deal with problems easily. Because they can ... understand meaning and ideals.

Vivi also cited the first reason adding:

2. They have common idea to talk. 3. For studying when they can not understand teachers.

In one sense, all their reasons (developing *theoria*) concern issues of QoL (*eudaimonia*). Speaking their own language enables better communication with peers, the ability to follow the teacher and the lesson, and the solving of problems based on a shared heritage, set of values, worldview and background. It helps them fulfil their personal, academic and social needs. Despite their earlier protestations that speaking one’s native language was an issue for all students and perhaps they should not do it (4.7), the reasons here are resonant of the observations of Slimani-Rolls (2003: 230) in relation to group work; that maintaining an average QoL is more important than pedagogic advancement.

With Annie’s third reason, we may observe the outworking of dialogue, as they sift and sort the patterns of *praxis* (Eikeland, 2012: 29). They do not yet articulate an understanding regarding this observation, but the observation that there are too many Chinese in each class, perhaps implicates the role of the institution as it distributes students within its classes, and more broadly its marketing, recruitment and admission policies.

As yet, I have said little about the contestations that might arise from working at the learner-research hyphen. That changes now as I briefly introduce Monzer, a student who has only been alluded to so far. Monzer was not part of a puzzle group (for reasons I explain below), was an irregular attender, and yet seemed to hold some influence in the class. I believe that the actions
and attitudes of both Monzer and myself had some impact on the events that unfolded in week 6 and beyond, and I therefore include his story so far at this point.

6.4 Dissident voices: Monzer

Monzer, a Saudi male, was the only undergraduate student in the class and had been placed there because of his level. I was informed early on that his attendance would be sporadic as he was enrolled on the course for visa and funding purposes rather than a desire to improve his English. Like many Saudis, he had excellent speaking and listening skills, but struggled with reading and writing, rarely completing learning logs for me, or essays for my co-teacher.

Although he was present for the puzzle generation, he was absent the day the class chose their puzzles and therefore was not attached to a group. As all groups had chosen either a listening or a speaking puzzle, which he had no desire to explore, he decided to pursue the puzzle he had written on reading: ‘Why when I read a passage I understand the meaning of each words, however, I can’t understand the whole meaning?’ While the other groups were deciding how they would collect data, Monzer was a stage behind, attempting to unpack his puzzle. He came up with the following questions:

1. What sort of reading gives me this issue?
2. Are there some topics that are harder than others?
3. Is it the whole sentence or part of the sentence?
4. When do I stop understanding the meaning?
5. Do other people have this problem?
6. How many times do I have to read to start understand?

Monzer stated clearly at the beginning that he needed an answer to his problem. However, as he began to unpack his puzzle, he reflected on his attitude to reading in his own language, telling me he had never read a book from cover to cover in Arabic, and maybe the real issue was a general dislike of reading. He recorded these thoughts as follows:

While I am asking myself those questions, I start realized that it could be a general problem with reading for me even in my own language.

He also added this question:

7. Does it happen when I read a passage that written in my own language?
Despite my feelings that this was perhaps the most exciting beginning to the puzzling process so far in bringing to consciousness underlying and perhaps unexpected attitudes through dialogue with himself (an initial move towards *theoria*), he continued by writing that he considered an interview with open questions as the ‘best way to solve this problem’ and that he would use the same questions he had written above as the basis of his interview with the addition of ‘what is the solution in your opinion?’ Perhaps this was the result of a *techne* vision of the puzzle work, or perhaps Monzer needed more time than the momentum of the class allowed to reflect on his emerging understandings. This perhaps hints at one of the contested spaces of learner-research: the tension of providing sufficient time and space (*skhole*) for dialogue to develop into *theoria*. I was moving them through the research process at a pace that suited my own pedagogic and research goals, perhaps guilty of a *techne*, goal-orientated approach myself.

He attended the class with the Int. Dip. students, although I noted in my journal that he did not engage in the same way as other students. His reflection was minimal, but repeated the phrase ‘I feel like I am not moving forward’ twice, and stated that his questions were not helping him. This was the one dissident voice at this stage, as the rest of the class seemed overwhelmingly positive about the experience to date (6.2).

I resolved to speak to him after the next class that he attended, and to find a way I could help him move forward. The result was a 17 minute conversation (which I recorded) full of seeming contradictions and ambiguities. He began by stating his reasons for saying he was not moving forward, making it very clear what his priorities were, and dismissing the puzzle work as being irrelevant to those goals:

M: So for me the most important thing is the IELTS, so maybe, I have to be honest, maybe I’m not interested in this topic, because I think its not helping me with IELTS score

The conversation continued with him proposing that reading was not so much an issue as writing. I challenged him about how little he wrote in class and for homework, and he responded by attributing his absences and lack of homework to family problems. We returned to his puzzle about reading, and he said he had now rejected his previous hypothesis:

M: Emm but when I, you know the last question in my questionnaire was about, is this problem happen when I read in my own language. I thought this might be the key for my
puzzle but, last week I was reading a book in Arabic, it was so easy, so its not that, not that problem
S: So that’s not the problem
M: So I think more, I think I have, I have said this here, it’s my idea it’s my answering for the puzzle, so I think its, my problem in the vocabulary ... and that’s another point, because I knew that, my problem is in the vocabulary so why, do I need have to do everything
(Laughs)

The presenting issue now was vocabulary, and he therefore questioned the need to continue with the puzzle work. We then talked about writing, his frustration with the difference in levels between his spoken and written skills, how he always translated from Arabic when writing but never when speaking. He concluded that he should now focus on reading articles, and I gave him the option of using class puzzle time for that:

M: for me I think, I just had this idea, for me, just ignore the puzzle I have and work on just reading different articles every week ... and then, I think, just enjoy anyone of the groups, work with them, so I don’t just sit and don’t have anything to do.

Monzer seemed adamant he had done enough ‘puzzling’, which I believe he saw as a means to an end (techne) that had not delivered its promises. I suggested he make a poster about his understandings for the benefit of other students, but he reiterated (after 17 minutes of chat) that: ‘I think I can just enjoy the students’. Having initially opted not to join a group, this prospect now seemed more appealing than either working alone or continuing with the perceived hard graft of puzzlement.

6.5 Concluding remarks

The chapter has taken us to the end of week five; the mid-point in the puzzle work. It has continued to explore RQ 1 looking at some of the opportunities to develop intellectually, emotionally and socially that emerged as the learners engaged in learner-research. It has begun to trace their burgeoning understandings (RQ2) through my gnoseology framework, noting the nuanced, complex and interrelated nature of these understandings, and highlighting the key role that dialogue has to play in the work for understanding. It has also through Monzer’s story, looked at some of the emerging tensions that working at this hyphen space might create, both for the learners and the teacher. These tensions rise to a climax in the next stage of the process, described in the following chapter.
Chapter 7 ‘Crunch point’ and its aftermath

The first three chapters of Part II have taken us through the EP work done during the first five weeks of the course: the initial puzzle generation process and forming groups around the puzzles; decisions regarding data collection tools; and the collection of data. There seemed to be a genuinely positive reaction to the puzzle work (bar Monzer) and my assessment was one of general benefit to all. This next chapter narrates the happenings of week 6, the puzzlement that ensued, and my attempts to understand and move forward from that point.

7.1 Eliciting feedback

At the beginning of week 6 I followed my usual practice of collecting feedback from students on the classes, adapting a ‘stop-start-continue’ strategy (Hoon, Oliver, Szpakowska, & Newton, 2015). To elicit the feedback, I wrote three headings on the board, ‘helpful, not helpful and wish list’, gave each group a marker and large piece of paper, and asked them to talk about the classes and write ideas under each heading. I assured them that the feedback was anonymous, that I would respond to whatever they wrote, and I left the class for 10 minutes or so while they discussed their ideas.

This was never intended as data for this thesis and yet when I collected the feedback, every group had written ‘puzzle work’ in the ‘not helpful’ column. My own reaction to this feedback was complex, ranging from opposing knee-jerk reactions such as ‘how dare they’ and ‘I need to stop the EP work for ethical reasons’, to a more measured, reflective questioning of my own assumptions about the benefit of this work for students, my understanding of the EP principles, and my integrity as both teacher and researcher; my own dialogic work. I came to refer to this point as ‘crunch point’, and to view it as a turning point for myself and the students in many ways; a site of both contestation and expanding possibilities as we worked in that hyphen space together. I had to continue performing (praxis₁) and making wise decisions (phronesis) about how, as teachers and learners, we could move forward from here (praxis₂). However, we were practitioners together and the need for collective dialogue and reflection was also crucial at this point. The time constraints and pressure to act left little space for skhole, but ‘crunch point’ shaped the way we worked together in the remaining weeks of the course.
I needed to understand why they were not finding the puzzle work helpful. Not only was this part of my own puzzling about life in the language classroom, but it was also fuelled by my belief that talking and negotiating together can help develop a mutual understanding of differing perceptions and expectations (Barkhuizen, 1998). I had my hunches based on other comments made on the feedback sheets under the ‘wish list’ heading: two of the three groups had stated they wanted to do more IELTS related work and the third had written ‘try to find a significant way to improve our English’. The need to achieve that elusive IELTS score seemed all-consuming, and yet this class were getting three days a week of IELTS related study. Perhaps there was something I had missed, something else going on which I needed to understand.

As is my usual practice, I gave feedback on the feedback, beginning by saying how I would address some of the things they had raised and asking for further clarification about some of their comments. However, to understand more fully why they were so unhappy with the puzzle work I again asked them to chat in groups and then feed back to me. I decided not to record these sessions, not wanting them to feel that I was only interested in their responses for research purposes. The following data comes from their written feedback and notes I wrote post-class in my journal.

7.1.1 Group 1

Group 1 wrote ‘we find out the puzzles but cannot find out the solutions’. This comment perhaps encapsulates, more than any other, the desire of the students to understand their puzzles through concrete solutions, and the frustration that ensues when these solutions do not materialise. The puzzles are seen as a means to an end (techne) and understanding defined as ‘what to do to improve’. This was confirmed as we talked together. Bert said that with his puzzle about making grammatical errors, everyone had the problem but nobody knew the solution, and therefore it was not helpful. In contrast, Zeno had found ‘answers’ to his listening puzzle, the implication being that puzzles with readily available solutions were more helpful.

7.1.2 Group 2

Group 2 wrote three comments which all bring into focus the issue of relevance (2.2.3): ‘it does not help us with our goals (IELTS)’; ‘it wastes a lot of time to research puzzles’; and ‘it does not fit to our level’. In Chapter 3, I described the pressure on these learners to achieve the expected IELTS score by the end of the course. IELTS was an ‘imposed relevance’ (Hammersley, 2004:38).
resulting in an apparent rejection of anything not perceived as being directly relevant to their personal goals. The entire course appears to be seen as a means to an end (techne). This was highlighted by Vivi who stated that there would be time in the future, once on their Masters courses, to learn research skills. Without that IELTS score they would not be able to do a Masters course, and therefore it was currently irrelevant. Perhaps these comments also highlight an apparent mismatch in expectations for the course between students and institution (see 7.3.1).

7.1.3 Group 3

In a slightly more positive vein, Group 3 said the puzzle work ‘takes too much time even though it is helpful’, although how it was helping is not specified. Another comment, ‘it only improves speaking a little’, points to some marginal benefit to speaking, although perhaps not enough to warrant the time we were spending on it. Again, this seems to contrast with the comments from the previous week, which were almost unanimous in their assessment that conversing with the students from the Int. Dip. Class had helped their speaking skills (6.2.1).

I think there are various explanations for the above reactions. We were over half way through the course, many had IELTS exams and/or results looming and there was the realisation that time to achieve their goals was running out. Some students openly told me they missed my classes the week before an IELTS exam because I did ‘academic skills not IELTS’. My co-teacher had reported several students doing exercises from their Chinese IELTS books during her classes despite her focus on the exam, which seems to corroborate the importance of that exam to many of the learners, as well as the perception that the classes were not meeting their needs and they wanted both teachers to focus fully on IELTS. Perhaps there had been tension and dissatisfaction building, but I had not previously provided the means (through the reflective prompts) for the learners to feel comfortable expressing it (see also Brown, Smith, & Ushioda, 2007).

My journal also recorded my concern about Monzer’s influence in this situation. This reason was never vocalised by the students other than by Monzer himself six months later, during our follow-on conversation around his learning story (3.3.3). My notes stated the following:

He was worried that I thought the other students had been influenced by him when he said he didn’t like the puzzle work, as it was after that that they said they didn’t like it.
I can not categorically say that he did have an influence, but perhaps this illustrates the complexity and influence of social relationships in the classroom (Stone & Kidd, 2011), and how many things might combine to affect students’ attitudes and behaviour.

Whatever the causes, I was faced with a reality of discontent and tension. I suspected that little learning would take place unless I could find a way to bring my own concerns and those of the students together. Having attempted to understand the situation as best as I could in the time available (theoria), I now needed to deliberate about how to get us all moving in the same direction (phronesis). Rather than abandoning the work altogether, I changed my approach. The following describes the decisions I took in this regard.

### 7.2 Towards a resolution

I had not used any class time for the EP work after the first feedback session, and decided to continue with that policy for a time. However, I also wanted to address their concerns over IELTS, and therefore in week 7 I took the calculated risk of combining the two, as part of the data analysis stage. I asked them to turn their data into charts, graphs and tables and use them to do an IELTS task 1 writing question, which requires students to write a short descriptive report of visual information or data. This was not my original plan for data analysis, but it seemed to address the pressing need for perceived relevance. I noted in my journal that they seemed very engaged, so much so that they stayed beyond the end of the class to finish.

The second main decision was to continue with the report writing, which I had begun in week 6 and whose rationale and execution I explained in 3.2.4. However, the way I dealt with this in class from week 7 onwards was influenced in part by ‘crunch point’, but also by chats in tutorials with students who said that their writing was not improving, and my co-teacher’s frustration that despite her feedback, they were making the same mistakes over and over again.

I began by giving individual, written feedback on their writing. Then, I asked them to compare their feedback within each puzzle group, learning from each other how to make their writing better. The focus was on language, structure, content, organisation, and in particular the way they discussed and evaluated each aspect of the work. This was not a peer feedback exercise (see for example Hirvela, 1999; Zheng, 2012), but rather an exchange of strengths and weaknesses, identified by myself and subsequently discussed by the learners.
I asked the learners to write a reflection in week 8 on the experience of writing the research reports (RWR) in response to three questions:

- **RWR1:** What have you found useful about writing the report so far?
- **RWR2:** What have you found challenging?
- **RWR3:** What do you need to do to improve your writing and improve the final draft?

The final question expanded on the ideas above, asking each learner to articulate their understandings of the feedback exchange and was designed with the observation of my co-teacher in mind that the learners were not taking on board her comments. I do not wish to dwell on those reflections in detail, but will summarise only what I believe is pertinent to the ongoing account and the answering of my RQs.

### 7.3 Finding relevance ...

I have referred above to the centrality of relevance in ‘crunch point’, and I now examine how the learners’ perceptions of relevance were manifested in their reflections and attitudes over the following classes.

#### 7.3.1 ... to future goals

Four learners identified a connection between writing the report and their future studies. Antonia referred to general benefits, saying ‘it is beneficial for people’s writing and further study at university’, while Spring said ‘it helps me prepare my study Graduate Diploma and Master’. Jake focused on the process of doing the research itself, stating that ‘I learned how to do interview that will be useful in future’, whereas Bena linked the process directly to her understanding of what she would need to do in her future course:

> Moreover, this writing improve my critical thinking which is very useful for me in the future when I study Graduate diploma or postgraduate because for my master degree I have to do a research and I have to analyse the data and write the report.

These comments might appear to contradict those made above (7.1.2), where it seemed that achieving the required IELTS score reduced their ability to see connections between the course and their longer-term goals. As teachers (and institution), we held a broader and longer-term vision of what the students needed to know and do to succeed in their UK university dream: broader in that we believed their IELTS score would not reach the required standard by merely
practising more exam techniques and skills; and longer-term in the sense of initiating them into western academic discourse. Perhaps this is an indication of our different starting points in terms of experience and knowledge (empeiria), as well as differing expectations about the aims of the course. Perhaps it also has implications for asking students to add the activity of research (learner-research) to their learning in such a high-stakes, assessed course. Yet from the above reflections it appears that some students were perhaps beginning to grasp this more encompassing vision. But what was enabling them to do so at this point?

7.3.2  ... to developing language

It is perhaps not surprising that all four learners mentioned above also highlighted the usefulness of the report in helping them to identify and correct their mistakes and build their vocabulary and language. Bena said her writing had improved overall and ‘especially grammar is improved most’. Her puzzle was a grammar related one, and she had been part of Group 1 (7.1.1), finding the puzzle work unhelpful because it did not give her solutions. It seems to be in the practice of writing (praxis), and in the dialogue with peers about the mechanics of writing that she has found the progress (and relevance) she desired.

Spring wrote:

It helps me to correct my mistake that I always have written these mistake, such as the article grammar and plural.

Spring now articulates my co-teacher’s frustration: she was making the same mistakes over and over again. There seems to have been something about the exchange of feedback and the dialogue between students around the report writing that has enabled her to engage with her (very specific) mistakes and articulate the understanding (theoria) she needed to be able to deal with them.

Other references to ways in which the report writing had contributed to their learning included: how to use tenses (Zeno); how to use hedging language and to increase academic vocabulary (Kan); how to organise language (Leo); how to build new sentences with new vocabulary (Orlan); how to use passive structures and express personal opinion (Pete); and how to structure a report (Bert). Antonia, Jake and Vesper all referred to how it had helped them find and correct mistakes, with Vesper even saying that it had given her ‘methods to understand our grammar
mistakes and grammatical accuracy’. Her puzzle was not a grammar one, but it is interesting that she calls the report writing process a ‘method for understanding’ grammar related issues. I see all these understandings as belonging to praxis (part of the ongoing practice that takes us from novice to expert) and theoria (the building of more general understanding of how both academic English and academic texts work).

7.3.3 Challenges and expanding possibilities

RQ1 is concerned with what happens when learners engage in the relatively uncommon activity of research. The report writing was part of that activity, one that has afforded them new ways of moving towards greater accuracy and breadth in their writing skills. However, there were other aspects highlighted that illustrate the emotional, cognitive and practical work taking place as the learners engage in praxis, dialogue, and tentatively develop theoria through learner-research.

None of the learners had ever written anything that long in English before (the aim was to write around 1,500 words), and their reactions to this varied. Bert manifested a positive response, although we should note that he never submitted a final report:

This is also the first time to write something long in English. It is a nice challenge. 😊

The length seemed overwhelming for Leo who said, ‘I’m worry that I cannot finish this essay before I do it’. Like Bert, he produced a draft, but no final report. Jake also failed to produce a final report and said that it was very challenging for him. However, he recognised that to help himself he ‘should care about have a good and reasonable plan for it’. There is a sense here in which he is accepting responsibility for the completion of the task and identifying steps that will help him to achieve that.

Bert said that he found paraphrasing difficult and recognised how easy it was to stick to the familiar and comfortable when using language.

When I am writing, I always use what I am familiar with. It is very difficult to think another way.

Despite pushing him out of his comfort zone, perhaps this was part of the ‘nice challenge’ for him. It also shows how the process has enabled him to become more aware of his own learning
habits and attitudes, which is part of becoming an academically autonomous learner (Kumaravadivelu, 2001: 545).

For Vesper, the newness of the task unsettled and confused her, not just in her ability to complete the task in English, but also the mechanics of writing a report.

Secondly, I never write report use English before. So when I always have confuse when I write report. Thirdly I don’t know how to write a good and clearly report.

Despite this expression of confusion and uncertainty, Vesper persevered and submitted a final report, again evidence of the fact that although hard, she could see relevance for her learning.

Pete, interestingly, spoke about his growing awareness of the importance of audience when writing:

In my methodology and data analysis, I need to add some pictures and some reasons. There are many datas, But I don’t make them in a pie chart or line chart, so readers will feel unclear what is my data. If I draw some pictures, it can describe the data to readers easily.

He was the only one to refer to this important aspect of writing, and it is not related to any comments I had made on his draft feedback. It seems that this awareness has come through the activity of sharing writing together, maybe through peer feedback or maybe through seeing the way other students had used visuals in their reports. Pete is developing both praxis1 and praxis2 as his insights about academic writing develop (theoria), enabling him to make better choices (phronesis) in his presentation of that writing.

7.4 Concluding remarks

This chapter has moved the account on from the seemingly positive response to the puzzle work in week 5 to a seemingly unanimous expression of dissatisfaction in week 6. It has also documented my attempts to respond to that, particularly with regard to the relevance that the learners perceived in the work we did together, which focused almost entirely on the work done for the research report writing.
The EP principles continued to inform my approach to the classes, particularly with regards to helping everyone to develop (EP Principle 5), and the need to restore some sort of quality of life for us all (EP Principle 1). However, could similar understandings have surfaced through working in groups to explore an area of inquiry related to more traditional EAP topics such as the environment or globalisation, rather than their own language learning puzzles? Would that have been perceived as more relevant? I have no evidence to make a categorical statement either way. However, there is growing evidence that understanding (in line with my gnoseology framework) can take many different shapes and forms, is potentially happening across all classroom activities, and may develop whether we focus on it explicitly or not, and whether it is formally articulated or not. The next chapter looks at some of these more formal articulations in the final presentations and reflections.
Chapter 8  Disseminating findings

We have now come to the end of the course and the end of the EP work. This chapter looks at the last stage of the EP process, the dissemination of what they have found, learnt and understood throughout. The chapter begins with a brief cameo of the class during the weeks following ‘crunch point’. It then explores the preparation for the learner conference and the posters before taking a thematic look at their final reflections. It ends by examining the final reports submitted by 11 of the learners; their articulated understandings of their puzzles at the end of the course.

8.1  The ambience in class

Several learners were planning to retake IELTS again, travelling as far as London to find a centre with available places. Others had already received results and were disappointed. Antonia had increased her speaking score from 4.5 to 6.0, but her writing had dropped from 6.0 to 5.0. She had not improved in two skills and was unsure whether she was eligible to apply for another visitor’s visa. Annie was distraught that her speaking had stayed at 4.5 despite her efforts to speak more English. Boris had got a 6.0 overall and 5.5 or above in all skills, but his parents had said it was not good enough and were unwilling to fund his Masters study unless he got 6.5. He stopped coming to class in week 8 and withdrew from the course at the beginning of week 9. Leo seemed distracted by his mobile for an entire class, telling me he was checking to see if his IELTS score was available yet. Orlan had been worried about his visa situation since week 6, believing that the British government did not want him in the country as his visa expired 4 weeks before any other student in the class, coupled with his failure to achieve the required IELTS score so far. He told me he could not concentrate in class or on homework because of these issues, and he too spent much time on his phone. Eshrag had both childcare and health problems which meant she missed some classes, and Monzer, whose attendance had increased since ‘crunch point’, missed a class to meet a solicitor as he had a court case pending over a speeding fine and was concerned that would jeopardise his visa renewal. He spent one class with his court papers in front of him, asking me to translate/explain bits whenever I passed by. There were many distractions, many absences, and the tension in the students was palpable.
8.2 Making posters and another dissident voice

However, despite feeling I had added the role of counsellor to that of teacher, we continued to focus on language and skills. Apart from the work described in Chapter 7, we had spent much of the weeks since ‘crunch point’ doing loosely related exam work based around topics chosen by the learners. With three classes left before exam week in week 10, I had to make decisions about the final stage of the EP work.

The report writing seemed to have brought them back on board vis-à-vis the puzzle work, and I felt a final presentation would pull together some of the speaking skills we had been working on and by articulating some of their findings, writing the final section of the report might be less arduous. Poster presentations are a recognised academic genre, albeit a marginal one (D’Angelo, 2010), aiding initiation into academic discourse. However, the dissemination of findings was also part of how I had defined research (1.4.2), so in the last class of week 8, I distributed sheets of coloured card, glue, scissors, and marker pens allocating the last 50 minutes to poster making for presentations the following week. I gave no guidelines beyond ‘make a poster of the puzzle work’.

This task engendered various reactions. Some groups worked well together and got on with the task, while others seemed to struggle. However, at the end of the class there was one person who expressed extreme dissatisfaction when I suggested they finish the posters in class the following week. Several of the students were doing IELTS again that weekend, and as the poster required them to work together in teams I deemed this the best option (phronesis). At this Jake became quite distressed. I recorded the incident and conversation in my journal. He said making posters was a waste of class time and they should do it at home. I said if the class felt able to organise that and were happy to do so, that would be fine. Some were, and some were not. We compromised. Those who wished to continue over the weekend took theirs with them. I told the others to come fully prepared, as there would be limited time allocated in class.

Jake still seemed disgruntled and we continued to talk as the other students were leaving class. He repeated the feedback from week 6 that the puzzle work was unhelpful and wasting their time. As we talked through his learning preferences, his attitude in class, and his progress with the language, several things began to emerge. He spoke Chinese with Antonia because it was impolite to refuse, and fell asleep in listening tasks because he liked being active and playing
games. When I suggested that making posters was active, and as a minimum he had learnt several items of new vocabulary through the activity, he replied he was better working and studying alone than in a class. He then said it was not just studying that was an issue, but his whole life, and he needed to change his way of living. This is a clear example of dialogue which turns reflectively in on itself to challenge assumptions, make the tacit explicit, sift and sort the patterns of his praxis (Eikeland, 2008).

This brief incident, which I have related from the account I wrote in my journal soon after the conversation, illustrates (along with some of the examples above) the complexity of each individual student in the class, and that the presenting issue (in this case anger at using class time to make posters) maybe only part of the picture. The conversation I had with Jake illustrates the complex intertwining of emotions, identity and how those affect actions (Barcelos, 2015; Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Negueruela-Azarola, 2011): his identity as a Chinese speaker and his beliefs about how to behave with another Chinese speaker; a gradual articulation of how he liked to learn and how he learnt best (a developing theoria and praxis, which impacted the choices he made, phronesis, about how to act in class in any particular situation); the relationship between learning and life, and how what goes on in the classroom can not be separated from the bigger picture of life (Gieve & Miller, 2006); the possible ‘emotion work’ (Benesch, 2012: 109-129) he is undertaking in class as he seeks to reconcile and monitor differing identities, beliefs, actions and reactions. The presenting issue in this case was part of the research process, of working at the hyphen of learner-research. It shows how that space can be one of contestation as personal beliefs about learning come into contact with alternative approaches and ways of doing things. However, these beliefs are not isolated from other aspects of our being and doing in the world. Rather they combine in an often ambiguous and even contradictory manner to shape our growth as human beings. This is part of the expanding possibilities that working at that hyphen space can facilitate; a developing understanding of what we are and can be.

Jake later sent me an email thanking me for understanding and apologising for his outburst. In the next class, he was absent, and the students said he was in the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) printing off stuff for his poster. Jake did not turn up for the first two hours of class and nor did he come in after the break, so Antonia and I went to find him. He was in the LRC cutting out pieces of paper, but had done nothing to the poster itself. Having been so vocal about his belief that the posters should be made at home, perhaps he had felt too embarrassed to come to class
without a poster, so had spent (unallocated) class time doing it instead. This seeming contradiction between his stated beliefs (the week before) and his present actions again illustrates the complex relationship between what we say, how we feel, who we are (or how we would like to be seen), and what we do. As Aragão (2011: 303, emphases original) suggests:

*embarrassment* and *self-esteem* are emotions influenced by beliefs associated with a student’s self-concept and ... this relationship plays a fundamental role in the way students see themselves in class and how they behave in their learning environment.

### 8.3 Practising the presentations

In week 9, the learners finished their posters, practised their presentations with their classmates and wrote group reflections in response to the comments that they had received from their peers. These were based around the following three questions:

1. Describe how you did your presentation and how you felt about it
2. What questions were you asked?
3. Is there anything you need to improve/change for Thursday? If yes, how will you do this?

Most of the reflections were concerned with the more technical aspects of the posters or presentation (*techne*), or the need for more rehearsal (*praxis*):

**Poster** — add the proportion of Chinese students in T1 is 60%, T2 is 40%, T3 is 100%  
Do more practices and try to speak in the correct pronunciation.  
(Kan, Vivi and Annie)

In next presentation we will talk more about data and introduce the member of team in introduction of presentation.  
(Bert, Bena and Eshrag)

We can make the picture more bigger because the data is too small to see.  
(Zeno and Leo)

However, there was also evidence of a developing understanding of how research needs to hold together in terms of the coherence between research question, data and discussion. Pete and Orlan realised there was a mismatch between data and question, although one could query the way they contemplated resolving this:
The data are not matching for our question ... we should change our questions or datas which can match them together.

Bert, Bena and Eshrag noted the need to ‘talk more about “why”’: to go beyond a description of their data and explain what it meant (theoria). Mason, Spring and Vesper also highlighted the need to go beyond description by giving their personal rationale, and relating their findings to the wider body of international students: ‘Why us choose this question and what effect for international students?’ Again, this is the articulation of theoria concerning their perceptions of what is for the most part stable within their community of practitioners.

Jake and Antonia did not return from the LRC to practise their presentation and did not complete a reflection.

8.4 The learner ‘conference’

This took place on my last teaching day of the course in week 9 in a rather cramped break out area and computer suite near our classroom. I had invited four other EAP classes who had lessons at the same time to attend the ‘conference’, and all attended. They moved around the posters listening to the presentations, asking questions and making comments in a similar way to the poster sessions at an academic conference (Figure 19). This meant that my students gave their presentations many times and responded to a variety of questions from the different audiences, giving them opportunities for recycling and retrial of language (Lynch & Maclean, 2000). The feedback from teachers was very positive saying their classes had found it interesting and useful. The learners seemed to grow in confidence with each presentation, visibly relaxing and enjoying it more as time went on.

8.5 The posters

The posters represent what each group chose to prioritise and visualise about their explorations for their audience. The proliferation of graphs, charts or tables may be the result of the IELTS task 1 writing we had done, but are also a common feature of academic posters (D’Angelo, 2010). Hanks (2013: 127) found a similar occurrence in the posters produced by learners in her study. As outlined in 3.3.7, my aim is not a detailed visual and textual analysis of the posters themselves, rather a focus on the collaborative, developing understandings of each group.
Bert, Eshrag and Bena informed me that their poster (Figure 20) was the product of many discussions and emails. It is clearly and logically structured using different colours and fonts to separate the various elements and includes the original puzzle question and methodology. The results from the questionnaire on the left establish the fact that all students believe they make mistakes, and that exams incur the greatest frequency of mistakes. On the right, they have sample interview questions and a section entitled how to improve, followed by an exclamation mark suggesting its importance for the reader. These suggestions, despite the use of an imperative in the first, appear to focus on the potential development of their praxis, moving from novice to expert in their knowledge and use of the language, rather than an explicit means to an end (techne).

Pete and Orlan’s poster (Figure 21) is perhaps a more typical example of a handwritten student poster, and in contrast to Bert’s group, the emphasis is on their developing theoria about the role of correct grammar rather than practical suggestions (praxis). The topic, grammar, is given most prominence with the puzzle beneath. They have included one piece of data, giving the most common types of grammar mistakes made, in graph, table and pie chart forms. This does not address any of the three interview questions they have included (their only hint at methodology) and seems rather at odds with the rest of the poster. Only the third question is
answered in the poster, suggesting perhaps a progression from their original puzzle about why they use wrong grammar, to look at the situations when grammatical accuracy is more or less important (praxis). Both the text and the drawing in the bottom half of the poster would seem to support this view. Although Orlan seemed to have little input to the poster, his original reflection (4.3.2) suggested that he felt a need to let go of his focus on accuracy, so perhaps this focus is partly due to his influence, as the inclusion of writing may be Pete’s (4.3.5).

Figure 20. Bert, Bena and Eshrag’s poster
Figure 21. Pete and Orlan’s poster

Figure 22. Mason, Vesper and Spring’s poster
Mason, Vesper and Spring also produced a handwritten poster (Figure 22), with a clear focus on how to improve speaking. The answers to that question are placed next to a happy face in an eye-catching yellow, and although there are only three, because of their placement they occupy prominent space again emphasizing their importance. One of the charts also deals with ways to practise (praxis). This is in contrast to the original puzzle, which seems to have been added as a late addition possibly in response to peer feedback (8.3), and may be associated with the sad face; feelings of nervousness when speaking to foreigners. The key understandings presented by this group to their fellow learner practitioners, and collected through dialogue with them, is of ideas that if enacted will enhance their praxis.

The poster produced by Antonia and Jake (Figure 23) does not seem to reflect the amount of time spent working on it in the LRC. Although the puzzle is clearly written, and they have included all their data, there is no attempt to explain these results, discuss them or give reasons; no evidence of developing understandings. I think this probably reflects the team dynamic and Jake’s own ambivalent relationship with the poster production, and perhaps this poster is an example of techne: a means to an end, the end being placating the teacher.

Zeno and Leo’s poster (Figure 24) boasts their changed puzzle question, although only the bottom left hand corner is dedicated to ways to improve (the development of their praxis). The majority of the poster explores what they have learnt through dialogue with their peers about the way others concentrate in listening tasks (the original puzzle). These ideas could be classified as techne understanding if they were presented purely as a means to an end, as a route to a higher exam score, but I think they are more akin to a tentative and developing theoria that might then move down into praxis.

The final poster by Vivi, Kan and Annie (Figure 25) clearly emphasises the puzzle question through the use of big, bold letters, and there is a clear story to the poster that zigzags from left to right. They use pictures to illustrate the different data collection tools they use, explain the context using a pie chart, and use a table to show the results of their observations. Their understandings, derived from the interviews, are clearly presented in a flow chart, and express their developing theoria about why people use their native language in class. It is perhaps the most complete ‘research’ poster produced.
Figure 23. Antonia and Jake’s poster
How to improve our listening skills.

What they do during listening task:

- Choose members
  - Keep noting: 7
  - Just listening: 1
  - Others: 1

What TV program.
- Do more practice
- Talk with native person

What are the most important things in listening task?

- Key words.
- Understand.
- Vocabularies.
- Spelling.
- Others.

How can we improve our listening:

- Listen foreign TV programs: 40%
- Talk with native person: 30%
- Understand: 20%
- Review materials: 10%
Figure 25. Kan, Vivi and Annie’s poster
8.6 Final reflections

After the ‘learner conference’, we returned to the classroom and all students (except Monzer) wrote their final reflections (FR) in response to the following prompts:

- **FR1**: How has the puzzle work helped you understand more about your learning?
- **FR2**: How has the puzzle work helped you with your academic skills?
- **FR3**: How has it helped you with your English language?

I believe my framing of these prompts was partly due to the tension I was experiencing as both researcher and teacher (Li, 2006). From a research perspective, I believe these prompts should have been framed in a way that allowed learners to report dissatisfaction, dissonance and disagreement, whereas they are all framed positively. The feedback session in week 6 was the only time I had really given them permission as a class to say what they were not happy with. However, these prompts were written wearing my ‘teacher hat’, albeit a rather bruised and battered hat at the end of the course, and perhaps I needed to hear some benefits from the work we had done together; a decision which might have contributed to my own feeling of well-being, one founded in self-interest rather than a wise choice (*phronesis*). Only one student chose to express his dissent at this final stage (8.7.4), and that was in the context of the final report rather than the reflection.

The prompts did not work particularly well pedagogically either. Although they were designed to move from the general to the more specific, there was repetition in some of the responses, with many including language issues under the first question. Here I focus on some of the common themes that arose, examining their reflections in greater detail in relation to my gnoseology framework in Chapter 10.

8.6.1 Academic skills

The overwhelming majority of these reflections spoke of how the puzzle work had helped their academic skills, their move from novice to expert (*praxis*), particularly in writing and speaking. As the two main ‘products’ of the work were a spoken presentation and a written report, this is perhaps not surprising.
In terms of speaking, the overall focus was on the presentation although several students also referred to the interviews. Some students specifically stated that it had improved their confidence of speaking in front of others (Pete, Bert, Antonia), which as Bena recognises ‘is very useful for me when I study master degree in the future’. Others wrote of how the interviews or the process in general had increased their speaking confidence (Mason, Spring, Zeno). Annie reflected on how doing the presentation various times had been helpful, exemplified by the general improvement in her delivery (praxis1):

> For presentation at first I read the paper all the time. But I improve my speaking speed and don’t look at the paper to do presentation.

Writing the report was also mentioned by many learners. Antonia said ‘my writing skills have been enriched because of the report’; Bena referred to the need to use academic vocabulary and complex sentences; Eshrag said ‘I learnt a new vocabularies and the structure of building a report’; Spring referred to the different genres she had learnt, ‘report and reflection’; Annie also spoke of learning ‘academic words instead of simple words and how to use words to link whole essay’ as well as ‘understand the difference of essay between UK and China’. These are again all examples of the development of praxis, which in turn undoubtedly contributed to the fulfilment of the ILOs.

### 8.6.2 IELTS

Jake said he now knew ‘how to make more ideas during the IELTS exams’ and Mason wrote ‘it is good for my academic skills like IELTS’. Leo and Spring both made a direct link between the puzzle work and their improved IELTS score in listening and speaking respectively, attributing the increase to practical suggestions received during the interviews. Leo, however contextualised this further by saying:

> Before that I often feel fear on listening, because I always can’t catch the point and afraid about that I can’t understand, however through the puzzle I found that listening is not difficult like I thought.

The ideas he was given not only helped him achieve his end goal (techne), but also changed his attitude towards the listening test, enabling him to break through his barrier of fear and his ‘can’t do’ attitude going into the exam (praxis2 and phronesis; 10.4). His self-confidence in his
ability to complete the task increased, and his latest listening score (an increase from 5.0 to 6.0) was for him evidence of this.

Vivi provides a different perspective on relevance. So far, the focus has been on the perceived relevance of the puzzle work to the learners’ own studies and goals, in particular to the IELTS exam. Vivi gives the flip side of this, understanding the practical relevance of the first IELTS writing task to her academic work:

IELTS writing task 1 is related to the report. We can use what we learn from IELTS in practice.

Instead of seeing this writing task as unrelated to her academic studies, she now appreciates that it is not just a pointless exam task, but one that is applicable to her present learning and potentially important for her future studies.

8.6.3 Collaborative learning

The dissemination process through the final presentations was also referred to as a source of collaboration and development for some of the learners, the outworking of EP principles (3-5) concerning collegiality. Antonia, Jake, and Zeno all noted the encouragement and ideas they had from those students who attended their presentations in the learner conference, with Zeno stating he ‘got lots of useful feedback’, and Antonia saying she had ‘found a better solution from students who listened to my presentation’. Gaining feedback from peers is recognised as one of the benefits of presenting at conferences (Ferman, 2002: 153), which the learners experienced for themselves, albeit in a small and localised ambit. These reflections highlight the importance of dialogue among those engaged in a similar practice in the development of collective and individual theoria.

Jake brings together ideas of collegiality and the power of dialogue in the process of understanding:

I got many difference ideas to solve my puzzle thought [through] the work. It is better than just thinking by myself. While I have remember the solution due to talk to others.
Earlier in this chapter (8.2), I suggested that part of doing learner-research for Jake has been the surfacing of conflicting thoughts, emotions, actions and beliefs. Here we have another apparent contradiction. Having stated that he preferred working alone, he now suggests that collective thinking is better than thinking alone. He also gives a tangible benefit of this collective thinking: it helps him to assimilate and remember what he is discovering. To what extent Jake managed to reconcile or live (temporarily) with the dissonance and ambiguity created through learner-research I am not sure. However, as I stated above (8.2), these contradictions and ambiguities are an essential part of our development as human beings, a journey towards virtuoso performance (praxis,) as we build theoria and develop our praxis, or as Edge and Richards (1998: 571) poignantly suggest:

Dialogues of doubt can be at least as important as the dictates of success, for whereas the former hold out the prospect of development for the sake of improvement, the latter imply that the destination is already decided.

Perhaps Jake’s story mirrors the journey of many of the EUS9 learners, as they too had to deal with conflicting emotions, thoughts and beliefs that arose.

Another aspect of collaborative learning was the experience of working in a team, a key setting for potential dialogue. Kan wrote:

It was the first time I worked in a team as an English process ... the puzzle work has helped me to understand how important team work was.

The learners had been working in their puzzle groups for seven weeks, and despite the (normal) ups and downs caused by the bringing together of different personalities, ways of working, commitment and aims, they had mostly managed to achieve a final product and give a team presentation. Kan’s eyes had been opened to the benefits that working alongside others can bring and Vesper highlights the process of learning to work together, saying ‘team work helps me how to discussion and conversation with partners’ perhaps referring to developing skills of negotiation, learning how to compromise, and distribute tasks. Mason, who worked with Vesper, also picks up on this aspect of team work. He admits that he found it hard:

I find out my shortage is team work which is the most significant skill for university study ... I am try to enjoy the team work with my classmates.
Despite finding it hard, he adopted a pragmatic and positive approach which is both attitudinal and emotional, one of being and doing. He takes the decision to act in a way (praxis) that he hopes will enable him to enjoy it, that will enhance his quality of life (eudaimonia) in an activity that he understands is a necessary part of his academic life in the UK.

A further aspect of collaboration afforded by the puzzle work is an engendered sense of solidarity as language learners, through a shared experience (empeiria) and purpose; of wanting to work out how to get better at doing what they do (theoria and praxis). This is helpfully articulated by Bert:

It has helped me know that our puzzle was very common for everyone. It was also important that everyone wanted to improve.

8.7 Final research reports

The learners were given until the middle of exam week to submit their final reports to me. Whereas the posters and presentations had been negotiated as a group, and the understandings and findings presented were the result of a collaborative endeavour, the research reports were written individually. Although they were based on collaborative research and the drafts had been shared in class, the focus of the discussion and reflection were their own.

As discussed in 3.2.4, the research report was written over several weeks and each section focused on a different aspect of the research as well as incorporating the different language and academic skills we had been working on. Here I briefly examine the reports that were finished (none of the drafts included a discussion section, and were mostly descriptive), paying particular attention to what is happening at the hyphen space (RQ1). Although I continue to offer initial thoughts on the understandings generated (RQ2), these are developed more fully in Chapter 10 and I reference this where appropriate. Where pertinent, I also interject comments from their final reflections, which help illuminate or contribute to these answers.

8.7.1 Bena

Bena’s puzzle was ‘Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar even though I know grammar?’ and she submitted a research report of over 1,700 words. She devotes little space to suggestions for improvement in direct contrast to the poster that her group produced (Figure
This result make me understand that the first language structure may affect on second language learning because the participants spoke their own language for long time, if they want to speak English without wrong grammar, they may have to speak English everyday which is the same way that they learn how to speak their first language.

This theory is that to learn a language well you need to speak it everyday, just as you did to learn your own language: grammatical competence is developed through praxis_{1}, moving second language learners from novice to expert. She continues to write of her discoveries, recognising that there is not a ‘one size fits all’ solution, and that each individual has to discover what works for them:

In this report I have understood the reasons why people always speak wrong grammar although they know how to use it. However, I think the best way to solve this problem depend on individual because each person has different problems. But, in my opinion, practice is the best way to reduce this problem because if we usually try to talk to others with correct grammar, we will be familiar with it and can use it naturally.

Again, she refers to the importance of practice (praxis_{1}) in developing competence in the language because it fosters familiarity (habitus), which in turn facilitates natural usage. Having mapped out the different reasons why people make mistakes and developed her own theory that practice (praxis_{1}) is important, she is now in a position to make choices about her own practice (phronesis).

The extent to which these understandings have developed as a direct result of the EP work, or were tacit understandings now made explicit is not clear. What is clear though, is that doing learner-research has opened a space for Bena to wonder, to engage in dialogue with others, to be curious and to question, and this does not stop at understanding her present puzzle. The participants she had spoken to and the information she discovered had caused further puzzlement to arise. In this sense, puzzlement never ends, as constant interaction with a situation throws up new doubts and questions (Schön, 1992: 122), which can then be explored:

After I had analysed my data, I had found new puzzles. I wonder why some people learn English language better than others although some of the participants have the same
age and learn English language in the same period of time? What is the main factor that enable people to pick up language really easily?

Bena lights on a question that applied linguists have grappled with for years, and the search for the ‘good language learner’ has sought answers in learner strategy use (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; J. Rubin, 1975), in individual differences (Singleton, 2001; Skehan, 1991), anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz, 2010) and so on.

8.7.2 Eshrag

Eshrag’s weakest skill by far was writing, beginning the course with an IELTS writing score of 3.0. The challenge of writing a report for her was huge, and yet she rose to that challenge. Despite being in the same group, she displays none of Bena’s reasoning, writing a mainly descriptive report. Rather than explaining her understanding of why people use wrong grammar, she lists the reasons why good grammar is important, reasons which I discuss in 10.6.3 and which reflect the interrelated nature of different ways of knowing.

In her reflections, Eshrag appears more interested in the experience itself than in what she has learnt. She did refer briefly to learning more research skills ‘who[how] can I make different kind of survey such as questionnaires and interviews’; language improvement ‘I learnt a new vocabularies’; and academic writing skills ‘the structure of building report or research’. However, the main focus seemed to be on the collaborative and social nature of the research project.

She told me that Bena and Bert had been a big support, especially in helping her with computer skills, and she wrote in her final reflection:

Finally I learnt a pit [bit] about to who [how] I use my Mak [Mac] to taybe [type] the report 😊

Her final comment seems to reiterate the fact that for her doing learner-research had been much more than understanding her puzzle (see also 10.5), it was about life, about eudaimonia: ‘Thanks Susan for this experience, I like it more’.
8.7.3 Pete

Pete had also looked at the same grammar puzzle as Bena and Eshrag, but in a different group, and with a very different group experience. In his report, Pete lists all the questions they have asked, the results for each question, and then attempts to interpret those results. So for example, in response to ‘what type of grammar are you afraid of?’ which is also the question they chose to focus on in their poster (Figure 21), he wrote:

The reason that why most of students choose tenses is easy to understand, because there are many kinds of tenses they need to study and use, so they will make more grammar mistake on tenses.

This is an interesting insight into how students rate the difficulty of different aspects of the English language. For the learners Pete and his colleagues interviewed, tenses were perceived as the most difficult and therefore the most common source of errors.

Another interesting insight comes from the question about why students think their grammar is wrong:

The result is that students think their grammar is wrong because other people can not understand means and they will feel nervous when they speak in English.

There appears to be a vicious circle at work here. They are not understood, and they blame that on their grammar. This in turn makes them more nervous about their grammar and they make mistakes, the consequence being that they are not understood. I referred to the apparent lack of research on the affective issues of learning grammar above (5.3.2), and perhaps this resonates with the call by Barcelos (2015) for an integrated research approach to beliefs, emotions and identity.

I examine some of Pete’s expressed understandings in the light of my gnoseology framework in 10.6.4, so here I offer one final observation of what it meant for Pete to work at the hyphen space of learner-research. He wrote the following in his conclusion:

Personally, I think the interview tool is interesting for me, because before I used to be an interviewee, but this time I make interview with other peoples including students and teachers.
The roles have been reversed. Pete has stepped into a role that he had never had the opportunity to try before, and he has enjoyed it.

8.7.4 Dissident voices: Orlan

Orlan was the only student who chose to write his report in the wiki (Figure 26). The title he gave to the page he created for the report clearly expresses his dislike of the puzzle work, and by using the wiki as the platform, it seems clear that he wishes everyone to know how he feels. There is a hint of subversiveness here; perhaps a subtle call for solidarity, against a conformist identity and the perceived expected pedagogic behaviour (Canagarajah, 2004: 128-129), although like Jake, there is evidence of contradictions and ambiguities.

![Figure 26. Orlan’s report in the wiki](image)

During the ‘learner conference’, Orlan abandoned Pete several times to ask me whether he needed to complete a report to pass his exam. I said it was not assessed, but I would use it to write his final progress report. There is a sense of instrumentality about his report writing; he feels obliged to write something, to placate the teacher and consequently not jeopardise his chance of a good progress report. However, he also wants to express his dissent regarding the process, and perhaps he feels this is the only legitimate way in which he can rebel. His final reflection was also very perfunctory, saying that the puzzle work had helped his skills, his ability to speak to an audience and listening, writing and vocabulary.

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14 I edited the name in the title to preserve anonymity
I have explained Orlan’s behaviour in terms of a causal relationship between his dislike of the puzzle work and his very marginal participation in everything puzzle related. I suspect the reality was more complex. Orlan frequently stayed after class to tell me of his visa problems, explain his distraction and his desperation to get a 5.5 in all skills in IELTS (8.1). Perhaps as teacher, I had not permitted or enabled Orlan to critically question what we were doing, helping him to explore the different possibilities proffered by the puzzle work (Benesch, 2001: 82) in relation to his personal circumstances.

8.7.5 Spring

Spring’s report reflects the same focus as her group’s poster: how to improve speaking (Figure 22). However, these solutions do not seem purely instrumental; a means to an end (techne). Spring had told me that she had really wanted to study History of Art, but her parents wanted her to study business. However, through the research process she has found a way of combining her hobby with her studies:

Most importantly, I will go to Manchester ART Gallery where not only improve my speaking skills, but also can close [fallow] my habit [hobby] that is work of art.

This is the being and doing of eudaimonia, having understood that she needs to practise (theoria) and having received ideas through speaking to other people (dialogue) she is now in a position to choose wisely (phronesis) what is best for her own development and practice.

Although she seems to use a problem-solution framework, and has evidence of a tangible improvement in her speaking (in her final reflection she writes ‘as a result of [using the suggestions] my speaking improved in my last IELTS exam’), I think there is a broader framework at work here visible in the conclusion of her report:

There are many advices that help me to improve my speaking skills through this report. And I have already use these suggest to improve my speaking skill. When I talk with foreigners, I become more confident and enjoyable. From my perspective, I think this puzzle work help me to solve this problem I did not understand. I felt extremely happy, because I solve this puzzle.
She has grown in confidence and this has enabled her to enjoy conversations in English rather than fearing them (see also 10.4). The process has helped her towards achieving her end goal of an increased IELTS score (techne), but it has also given her liveable understandings (praxis). For Spring then, working at the learner-research hyphen has enabled her to grow as an autonomous and confident language learner, whose own well-being (eudaimonia) has been enhanced through the process.

### 8.7.6 Vesper

Vesper, like Spring, speaks of the need for confidence and practice, but unlike Spring, she is more impersonal in her expression. She highlights a clear link between speaking competence and enjoyment, concluding that practice (praxis) is vital:

> In a word, for improving speaking skills and no longer feel nervous when talk with foreigners the best method is practice. An old proverb says, “Real knowledge comes from practice.” So only more communication with others and practice are help students to enhancing speaking skills.

She quotes a proverb, I assume a Chinese one, that equates real knowledge with practice. This resonates with Aristotle’s concept of praxis being linked to both episteme and phronesis.

### 8.7.7 Antonia

Antonia also highlights the role of practice, but like Bena, this understanding has sparked her curiosity and she expresses a new puzzle:

> To be specific, students should increase the time to speak to native speakers as well as the quantity of practice. However, I have a new puzzle now because of what I have found out, which is “how should students allocate their time for class and practice?”

Realising the importance of practice has caused a dilemma for her as a learner with regards to how much time she should spend on class related activities and how much practising her English. She is not yet equipped to make those decisions (phronesis) needing to develop new understandings (theoria) so she can make wise choices about how to weigh priorities and fit practice (praxis) into her life. In the conclusion, she states she will do more practice, both with native speakers and alone, suggesting that she will find ways to prioritise it.
Antonia concludes her report by stating ‘it [the puzzle work] has changed me in a positive way’. This is resonant of what Edge (2011: 38) refers to as ‘retrospective reflexivity’, the changes that occur in oneself as a person through the undertaking of research, and hints at personal transformation (see also 10.2.3).

8.7.8 Zeno

Zeno (whose developing understandings I examine in 10.7) and Leo had divided their respondents into two teams: those who were good at listening (Team 1) and those who were not (Team 2) (5.6).

In his data analysis, Zeno points out that what Team 2 pinpointed as issues for them in the listening task (spelling, speed and the meaning of the task), directly corresponded to the ones that Team 1 deemed important, concluding that:

the important things in listening task which collected from “Team 1”, are key words, spelling and the meaning of task, which exactly reflects why students from “Team 2” do not have better performance in listening task.

Having discovered that these things might help explain why he is struggling with the listening task, he then explains the practical steps he himself has taken through systematising one of those suggestions in a way that works for him:

The important things I have to do is watching programs with the subtitle at first time, and then watch it again without the subtitle, just listening what they talk and imitate their pronounce. This method not only better for my speaking, but also help me improve my listening.

Doing learner-research has given Zeno the opportunity to share and learn from fellow practitioners. He has come to understand why he might struggle with concentrating during listening tasks (theoria), received suggestions about how to get better at listening through dialogue, and this has enabled him to choose between the different options (phronesis) and then embed those in his practice (praxis).
8.7.9 Vivi

Vivi was the only student in the class who had had any research training (4.7.1), and she approached the puzzle work within the positivist, quantitative tradition that she had studied in psychology in China. The report fully described the methods and results, but there was very little discussion, or reference to her own praxis. Perhaps one exception is when she alludes to challenges faced by her team while doing observations (5.7), suggesting that without this experience, they would not have developed the ability to surmount these challenges:

If you had not carried out, you would not have known how to deal with those situations.

However, she ends her report with the conclusion that

If teachers mix the groups which students are diverse nationalities, class would be more efficient.

There is a sense that responsibility for learning is abdicated to teachers. The behaviour of the students and hence the efficiency of the class, which seems to be equated with speaking English, is in their hands and their control. In her final reflection, which focuses primarily on the academic skills she has learnt, she does concede some student responsibility:

Try to sit near those students who are from different country. That is a best way to improve your speaking.

Vivi had always chosen this path in class, sitting with Bena and/or Monzer, and perhaps the process has confirmed that decision to her as the wisest one, suggesting she had already developed virtuoso performance (praxis2) in this respect.

8.7.10 Kan

Kan like Vivi highlights the responsibility of the teachers and institution in his report (‘external’ conditions), giving various suggestions for both:

Firstly, colleges might set up rules to limit speaking native language. For instance if students had spoken mother tongue more than three times, they might get a big challenge which was leaving the class immediately. Secondly, teachers should mix the nationalities of the teams or groups ... Thirdly, the class should set English language background. Teachers and colleges should encourage students to speak English.
For Kan, it is the institution’s responsibility to set the rules and the consequences of speaking in one’s native language; a technical imposition from above (techne). There is no hint here of teacher and learners negotiating a set of class rules together (a typical first week class for many teachers in the centre).

However, Kan, unlike Vivi, does not shift all responsibility from the learner. He balances the above ‘external’ conditions, with the ‘internal’. As 12 of their 13 respondents stated ‘convenience’ was the reason they spoke their own language, he concludes that:

people prepared to stay in the comfortable place. If it was not necessary, most of all people would not change their situation.

So, the natural tendency of all students is to take the easier and more familiar route. To counteract this pull towards the easy life, he says that:

A student who extremely wants to be a good one, he has to learn being a student who is good at self-motivation and self-regulation.

This is a call to the development of phronesis and Kan’s own behaviour in class, like Vivi’s, reflected his desire to speak English and he sat next to Orlan when possible. His LLAs also document his efforts in initiating and sustaining long conversations in the gym with various people.

8.7.11 Annie

In her report, Annie offers no conclusions or discussion beyond what her group had presented via their poster. However, her initial reasons for wanting to pursue this puzzle were very personal (4.7.3), as are her final reflections:

When I research the puzzle I know the reasons about why I always speak Chinese in UK. According to these reasons, I will reduce the opportunity of speaking English [Chinese].

She claims to have understood why she speaks so much Chinese and also claims that she will act on this knowledge, although no reasons or details are given. My own observations of Annie in class were that despite her obvious difficulties with pronunciation and the ridicule of her classmates at times, she was making an extreme effort to speak and express herself in English (her praxis1). Even though she could not, or chose not to articulate her understandings in written
form, I believe there was evidence of an attempt to live out her understandings; evidence of a
being doing learner.

8.8 Concluding remarks

This chapter has taken us from the aftermath of ‘crunch point’ to the dissemination of findings
and final reflections. Throughout, I have highlighted the tensions with their accompanying
ambiguities and contradictions, as well as the discoveries and possibilities that occurred when
the EUS9 learners engaged in learner-research. For some, the more open-ended and ambiguous
nature of this sort of work was unpalatable, and the perception that it did not contribute directly
to an improved IELTS score rendered it irrelevant and thus a waste of time. Others forged their
own way to relevance by making the focus of their explorations more directly IELTS-related, or
by putting time and effort into those aspects of the work that they deemed most helpful for
achieving their goals. As teacher, I also sought to carve out a path of relevance for the learners
through the IELTS task 1 work and the emphasis on academic writing, to recover and maintain
quality of life.

In terms of their findings, many posters and final reports were concerned with different
strategies, skills and attitudes necessary for developing language competence (praxis1), and may
not appear that different from those discussed and encouraged by many teachers. Yet the
impact of discovering these things for yourself, because that is what you decided you wanted to
find out about, seems to be so much more powerful. This is a move from the ‘banking concept’
of education (Freire, 1970/1996), where the knowledge being imparted is ‘how to’ knowledge,
such as ‘how to improve your speaking skills’, to that of inquiry, exploration and discovery,
where the agenda is set through the puzzling process of the learners themselves. It also
exemplifies what Freire (1970/1996: 60) terms a ‘liberating education [which] consists in acts of
cognition, not transferrals of information’. However, I believe what also comes through is that
the understandings that come from such a bottom-up approach are multifaceted, interrelated
and connected to all aspects of life and learning. I develop these ideas in greater detail in
Chapter 10, but before that I take a brief look at the learners’ retrospective thoughts on the EP
work.
Chapter 9 The sequel

In the months following the course, and having re-storied the learners’ experiences of their time in EUS9 (3.3.3), I approached all the learners who were still in the centre, gave them their stories and asked if they would read them and then chat to me about what I had written. My main focus was to understand how they felt about the puzzle work retrospectively and to understand if it had had any impact or influence on them as developing practitioners.

Of the 15 postgraduate students remaining at the end of the course, five had achieved the necessary score to progress to Grad Dip: Bert, Bena, Zeno, Pete and Kan. I spoke to all of these, and to Eshrag, Vivi, Antonia, Vesper and Monzer. Jake and Spring both responded to my email, but said little more than thank you and that they had enjoyed reading their ‘stories’. This brief chapter centres on those parts of the conversations that I believe enrich understanding of my research questions.

9.1 Issues of time

One of the reasons given by the learners for finding the puzzle work ‘unhelpful’ was that it took ‘too much time’ (7.1.3). I had always assumed that they were referring to time in class and adjusted my approach accordingly. Bena seemed to confirm this at the beginning of the conversation I had with her, Zeno and Bert:

Bena: yeah I think, that time, you know, I worry about IELTS, so I think I need to practice more IELTS, and the puzzle it take time to do, so at that time I think, it’s quite, a little bit waste our time.

However, later in the conversation, a comment by Zeno suggested that my conclusion was mistaken. Zeno said that he had always found the puzzle work useful apart from one thing:

Zeno: I think it’s OK, just the homework.
Bert: [laughs loudly]
Zeno: not only spend 2 hours at class, but you have to spend much more than 2 hours, at home to do your work, yes, so many students think it will take, it take a long time.
Susan: So, it’s not just two hours of class time that was a waste of time, it was the homework I gave you
Zeno: I think the students don’t care about what the content of our class, maybe they care about how they can learn from the class, and the practice, and the practice they give in class, I think more practice in class is OK, no matter, what is Bena: Yeah, I agree with Zeno.

What apparently concerned them was the homework time it required, which with my adjusted approach post-‘crunch point’ was even greater. Independent study at home was an obligatory part of the course, but the puzzle work demanded too much of them in this respect. Zeno makes the interesting point that students do not really mind how they learn as long as they do feel they are learning and have opportunities to practise. So the puzzle work was viewed positively as long as it provided those opportunities (in the case of the exchanges with the Int. Dip. class for example), but not when the benefits were not immediately obvious.

9.2 Understanding their puzzles

It is perhaps striking that in these follow-on conversations, only one student (Bert) ever referred to the topic of his puzzle. His verdict on the contribution the puzzle work had made to his grammatical accuracy remained unchanged from week 6 (7.1.1):

Bert: it’s just a question, you have no [unintelligible], it’s not efficient, our question, our puzzle is the grammar, ... but now, when I’m talking, some grammar mistakes, is still here, I have correct it, even though I speak more English than before, it’s still here ... the way I solve this grammar puzzle is to speak more, to read more, but, it didn’t work that well, just a little.

Bert’s hope of a direct improvement in his grammar as a result of the puzzle work had not materialised. This suggests he perceived the puzzle as a means to an end (techne), one that did not deliver and was thus inefficient. In following up this comment, Bert stated that he had reverted to the way he did things in China, which he had talked about in his LLA (4.3.1):

Bert: Just recite, if I read something and then recite it, for myself, it’s better, my speaking it’s better, ... it’s how I learnt, recite and repeat.

It would appear that the puzzle work had confirmed Bert’s belief about the best way to move his speaking forward (a common practice seen as a form of independent learning in China, Jin & Cortazzi, 2006: 12). One could suggest that this belief was too entrenched and resistant to
change (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005), especially in such a short time scale, and yet Bert had been open to new ways of doing things, but found they ‘didn’t work’.

No other student specifically mentioned what they had learnt about the puzzle itself. Even when I asked a direct question, other elements of the work were deemed more important:

**Susan:** What about the actual puzzle? Did you learn anything from that?
**Pete:** I think most things, its about like, presentation skills, I forgot some useful things for my puzzle, but I think the more useful things is like how to do presentation, how to work with other people, that’s like it.

For Pete, and this was echoed by other learners as well, the lasting impression and benefit of working at the learner-research hyphen, was not the understandings they had come to about the puzzle itself, but the development of more generic skills (*praxis*) and the possibilities for collaboration (and dialogue) that the work had afforded. The latter was by far the most important thing for Eshrag:

**Eshrag:** No it [the puzzle work] was not so important as the team work, ... and even if I, I don’t know how I can print it on the computer, or how can I use the computer, they show me and learning me, and we, you know, work together ... until now I have their email, if I have any problem, I send them, after that they, answer me.

The possibilities for working with other learners with different skills from her was the abiding benefit for Eshrag, and this collaboration had continued beyond the end of the course despite the fact that Bert and Bena had both progressed to Grad. Dip. and she remained in an EUS class. She went on to compare the puzzle work to the group work they were doing in her current class:

**Eshrag:** When I told my classmates now, I told them we had experience for puzzle in the first semester, it was more useful, more than this group, you know group working, because only we have, group presentation, that’s it, I think we didn’t have a lot of research like the first term, and we didn’t have any kind of questionnaire, we didn’t meet the people outside, and I think we lost this skills.

She explained to me that she had asked to do the group presentation with a non-Arabic speaker hoping to replicate the experience of the first term, but had been disappointed, because each student had prepared their part of the presentation separately so there had been little interaction. The research had been topic-based and did not involve any data collection, whereas the various elements of the puzzle work had provided different opportunities and experiences of
working together. It would be presumptuous to suggest that this could only be achieved through working within the EP principles, not least because many learners did not have the same testimony as Eshrag. Still, it does illustrate the benefits of learner initiated research projects that have enough different elements to necessitate working together in different ways.

However, as the accounts in the preceding chapters have shown, the need for the learners to perceive a direct relevance to their immediate goals of any work done in class was key. While writing the re-storied accounts for each individual learner, I had been struck again by the contrast between the almost unanimous positivity of the weeks leading up to ‘crunch point’ and the blanket negativity of that week. I was interested to see whether in retrospect the learners of EUS9 now saw the puzzle work in a different light.

### 9.3 Issues of relevance

As we have seen, the pull of IELTS, the need to achieve their target score and the emotional and psychological impact of what appeared an insurmountable obstacle before them, had a huge impact on our class. Although various views were expressed in these follow-on conversations, and in general those who had progressed to Grad. Dip. were more inclined to appreciate the relevance of what we had done to their current situation, IELTS was still a central concern to many of them. For example, Antonia, when asked if she would have preferred all classes to focus on IELTS, said:

**Antonia**: yes, because we must have higher score, to go to university, in the last term, we need IELTS result to go to Graduate Diploma.

Vivi was also vocal in her continued questioning of anything that did not directly and tangibly benefit her IELTS score:

**Vivi**: I say about the negative, just because, this is not our vital important things, because we need IELTS, this is our important things, if we can’t go to university, what we learn is nothing, right, just this problem, but you taught to us the report, the research, I think it’s very useful for our university.

IELTS was the narrow gate they had to pass through to get to university, and anything that did not help manoeuvre them through that gate was as good as useless. While appreciating the potential benefit for her university career, those skills were not necessary to get into university,
and if she did not achieve a place there would be no need for them at all. There is an undeniable logic to her thinking, but Vivi was also clear about the role of the teacher in enabling them to achieve their goals:

Vivi: yes because, [sighs], the teacher method between China and here is very different, but I really want to say, Chinese teachers very good at this one

Susan: they’re very good at that, at telling you what to do to get the next level

Vivi: yeah because, that’s why Chinese students good at tests.

The role of the teacher is to identify the exam skills and techniques needed to improve her score, and there is the implication that we were not meeting those expectations. Vesper also highlighted the Chinese way of seeing things, although unlike Vivi, she seems to take a different view herself:

Vesper: Because I think many Chinese people, think IELTS is the only goal in the UK, but I think not only for IELTS, we need to study other ways too, to improve our English.

The importance of taking a broader view to language learning as opposed to a narrow focus on exam preparation, was something frequently discussed in class. Both Kan and Zeno picked up on this:

Kan: I think in the beginning of the class, in 5 weeks, some of our classmates said, (...) we want to improve our language, we want to get a good result of IELTS, you said, don’t worry, your English level will improve, in a few weeks, I think you are right.

Zeno: yes because I think, you told us, it help us, to improve our writing skill, yes, I think so, and I think this puzzle work it was, speaking with others, so I think it help us, to practise our speaking

Kan and Zeno had both tested my words and found them to be true (theoria), Vesper had also concluded that a broader approach was more beneficial, whereas Vivi was still questioning and floundering. Kan and Zeno had both progressed to Grad. Dip. and therefore a more positive stance towards the work might be expected. However, Vesper, like Vivi, had failed to progress and so this is not the only explanation for the difference. While Vivi wanted the teachers to tell her what she needed to do to improve her IELTS score, a method that had served her well in the past, Vesper had discovered that she could also make these discoveries for herself through the puzzle work:
Vesper: But I think puzzle work sometimes useful, to improve my IELTS, because we found our drawback in IELTS, in this puzzle.

As the saying goes, ‘you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink’. This is perhaps a challenge for teachers attempting to implement inclusive practitioner research in such a high-stakes course: helping students to appreciate the personal relevance of this sort of work is of the utmost importance, but the learners themselves also have to be willing to go on that journey with the teacher.

As ‘crunch point’ so clearly illustrated, there was a point during this course when the learners failed to understand why we were doing the puzzle work and could see no real purpose, and it was not until they could look back on it that those doubts began to be resolved as Bert (and Bena) reflected:

Bert: because at that time, I don’t feel it will helpful
Bena: yeah
Susan: you couldn’t see a reason
Bert: at that time, I don’t know why I should do this
Bena: yeah
Bert: but for now, it’s different.

Bena and Bert agree that in those middle weeks of the course they saw no benefit of doing the puzzle work, more than that, they did not understand the purpose. This may reflect a lack on my part to clarify these links for them, although Kan and Zeno’s comments above suggest that some students were able to perceive them. In retrospect, however, that view had changed. Bert went on to reiterate and elaborate on those ideas further on in the conversation:

Bert: When I was doing IELTS, I was just thinking, why I should do this, but for now, when I go back to think about it, I think the presentation, and preparing the start of the presentation, is a very nice experience, and its very useful for us to do the interview, to do the questionnaire, and when doing presentation it makes us feel more confident, stand up and speaking to others, it’s much better than just IELTS, than just do that things.

In the period around ‘crunch point’, I had sensed a subtle, mutinous undercurrent in the class and EP had began to feel like the elephant in the room; it was certainly not helping to make life ‘more pleasant and productive’ (Allwright, 2003: 114). The quality of classroom life was distinctly diminished, and yet comments like the above raise the question of whether QoL is a short-term
goal, a long-term one, or both. Our daily QoL as a class was impoverished, and yet, as Bert and others testified, both at the end of the course and in the following months, they now appreciated the benefits of what they had previously considered a waste of time. It was considered a ‘nice experience’, a ‘useful’ one that built their confidence and their ability to interact with others: in short, their QoL, their well-being as language learners (eudaimonia) had been enhanced despite the conflict and tensions that surfaced at the time.

The experience and the general impression it had made on the learners was acknowledged by Kan. He had spoken to many of his former classmates about their progress in new classes and how they compared to EUS9. He made the following remark:

**Kan:** oh, it’s quite interesting, they never mention Hannah’s class, only yours, because maybe we got an impression of your class, rather than Hannah’s, maybe Hannah’s class is just like a normal class, an English class.

The point here is that the puzzle work had made the class different from the average EAP class and this is what had made it more memorable. While this difference was a sticking point for some, for others it provided a distinctive experience of teaching and learning.

### 9.4 Differing expectations

During ‘crunch point’, Bert had concluded that some puzzles were harder because there were no solutions (7.1.1). He reiterated that viewpoint again in our conversation, but was challenged with regards to his expectations by Bena:

**Bena:** I think in the puzzle, I didn’t hope to, my purpose is, I didn’t hope to find a solution, of the puzzle, I think the puzzle can improve my writing skill, Yeah.

Although Bena, like Bert, had struggled with the purpose of the EP work in the middle of the course she states that her expectations were not to find a solution. Given her comment above (9.1), it would seem that this awareness came after ‘crunch point’ as she began to experience and see the benefits of the puzzle work for her academic skills. Bert did not disengage with the process in the same way that others appeared to (Monzer and Orlan for example) despite the fact that his immediate expectations were not fulfilled, whereas Bena speaks of the pedagogical benefits of working at the learner hyphen, rather than the understandings she has reached.
about her own learning. In the course of the conversation, Bert, Bena and Zeno listed the following aspects of their learning that had been helped by the puzzle work: doing presentations; how to do research; how to think about the question; how to make a questionnaire, how to interview others; opportunities to practise speaking; critical thinking through analysing results; and how to write an introduction. Perhaps the emphasis on research skills reflects the fact that all three were now doing Grad. Dip. and working on their dissertations.

However, these comments, along with the evidence provided through the previous chapters, suggest that their perceptions of the purpose of the puzzle work and their personal expectations of it, will influence to a greater or lesser extent their engagement with the work itself.

9.5 Concluding remarks

This final chapter of Part II has taken a retrospective look at the EP work through conversations with the learners in the months following the course: their reflections on EUS9 and the puzzle work. It has highlighted that it was not the understandings regarding their puzzles that had stayed with them so much as the confidence they had gained, the skills they had learnt and the opportunities the process had given for dialogue and collaboration with others. It also reiterated the very real concerns and tensions of the time surrounding ‘crunch point’, and the power and influence the IELTS exam exerted on the learners.
Part III

This last part of the thesis builds on the account given in Part II, expanding the interpretations I have offered throughout and offering new ones as I discuss answers to RQs 2 and 3. Chapter 10 takes a much closer look at the articulated understandings of the learners as interpreted through my gnoseology framework, while Chapter 11 sets out my discussion of RQ3 showing what the academy might learn from the learner-research work reported in this thesis. It also presents the contributions that this thesis seeks to make.
Chapter 10 Exploring ‘gnoseology’ (in my data)

This chapter takes a much more detailed look at my second research question: What developing understandings (individual, collaborative and collective) emerge as we engage in practitioner research? To do this, I have taken the framework I developed in Chapter 3 (Table 4) and applied it deductively to my data. The purpose here has been two-fold. Firstly, to use the framework as a tool to take a more in-depth look at the understandings generated by the learners, and secondly, to evaluate its usefulness for exploring the knowledge claims of inclusive practitioner research.

Here then, rather than a chronological, narratively-framed account, I give a conceptual one. By conceptualising understanding, it becomes a tool that I can move around in a way that I could not do with the story. I begin by looking at each knowledge category in turn, and giving specific examples from the data that I believe exemplify that category. Most of the data comes from the second half of the course as the learners’ understandings were perhaps developing more clearly. I then look at some of the movements between categories and the murkier and fuzzier delineations, before tracing one learner’s developing gnoseology. I then raise questions about the extent to which these categories have explanatory power for understanding ‘understanding’ in practitioner research and particularly EP, before identifying areas of knowledge that the framework might not so readily account for.

10.1 Theoresis (or observing from the stands)

In Chapter 2, I suggested that the modern translation of episteme as science was too narrow, and that Aristotle’s meaning was far more nuanced. I have followed Eikeland’s (2007, 2008) interpretation of episteme, identifying two dimensions: theoresis and theoria. Episteme (and thus both theoresis and theoria) is concerned with things that are relatively stable, where change happens from within, rather than through external imposition or manipulation. Stability here does not mean static, unmoving or unchanging. Rather, it sits in contrast to those things that are in constant flux, or that happen by chance or accident. The difference between theoresis and theoria is the distance between the knower and the known. Firstly then, let me consider theoresis.
I have found only tentative, rather than explicit, examples of theoresis in my data (see 10.6.1 and 10.6.2). This is not surprising as theoresis is concerned with observation from a distance: the spectator in the audience who is not part of what is happening ‘on-stage’; the third-party researcher who observes the classroom but does not take part in its practices. As the EUS9 learners were exploring their own learning lives and their own practice, they were not spectators; there was no distance between the knower (learner) and the known (their language learning lives) in this sense. They were not concerned with developing Theory (as we might traditionally understand it), about things external to their practice, but rather with understanding their own learning.

However, the language sometimes used by the learners in their reflections might suggest more distance than I have implied. For example, the use of ‘they’ as opposed to ‘I/we/us’ could be interpreted as indicating a distance between interviewer and interviewee, between our activity and their activity, between knower and known. I believe this is a consequence of the wording of the reflective prompts I gave them, rather than an implication of distance. So in response to the first prompt after the interview with the Int. Dip. learners (6.1), ‘describe what you did today to understand your puzzle better’, most learners began by using ‘I’ or ‘we’ to describe what they did followed by the use of ‘they’ to report what they had learnt. The following example comes from Annie’s response to this prompt:

I asked some questions about my puzzle to the students who come from International Diploma course just now. They told me that there are 8 Chinese person in their class […] Moreover, They answered my question that why Chinese speak one language in class. (Annie, ID1)

In response to my third prompt, which was ‘what understandings have you come to about your puzzle so far?’, like the majority of the learners, she began with a first person pronoun: ‘I understand some reasons why people like to speak their own language’, (Annie, ID3). Rather than a distancing of themselves from the other language learners they spoke to, I believe this reflects the process of dialogue, of talking to others, and thinking about what they have said in relation to their own learning. I discuss a possible exception to this in 10.6.1 below.

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15 ID refers to the reflective prompts given after the visit from the Int.Dip. students (6.1)
10.2  *Theoria* (or participating in the arena)

*Theoria*, although also a form of *episteme*, differs from *theoresis* in that rather than observing from afar, there is no distance between what is being understood and the person seeking to understand; both the activity and the developing understanding of that activity are personally and collectively embodied. *Theoria* is about gaining insight into our everyday practices and lives as both individuals and collectives engaged in them. The starting point for *theoria* is our own experience and practice, it works from the bottom up seeking to make sense of what we do primarily through dialogue, and then (possibly) moves down again into our practice through *praxis*, where we enact and continue to practice (in the sense of becoming habituated) those understandings. *Theoria*, through dialogue, seeks to define things, to compare and contrast looking for similarities and differences, finding the relationship between things and how they fit together. It reveals and uncovers the not-yet-known as we bring into language and consciousness (through articulation) the nature of our practices. Time and space to reflect from within the practical context (*skhole*), rather than removed from it, is key to this process.

Here then, I attempt to illustrate from my data various aspects of *theoria* as developed through and related to dialogue and *praxis*. I found plentiful examples of some of these aspects (such as comparing and contrasting), but few or none for others (like attempts to define).

10.2.1  Finding differences and similarities

Several of the reflections, especially those written after the interviews with the Int. Dip. students, included understandings of the differences between nationalities and ways of doing things, alongside issues shared by language learners. So Bert realises that questions about grammar are common to many non-native speakers:

> Then I knew almost all that who were not native speakers would get the grammar questions. It is quite a common question.

(Bert, ID1)

Pete pinpoints what these common questions consist of and when they might occur:

> I can know most of people use incorrect grammar when they talking with other people; while the tense problems are serious such as past finished tense.

(Pete, ID1)
Kan observes a similarity in behaviour between those of the same nationality in both his class and the Int. Dip. class:

In that class, they got the similar situation as ours. The class has 16 students, a half of them are Chinese. In the class, the students who get the same nationalities sit together, they prefer speak in the same language.

(Kan, ID1)

Spring compares and contrasts the emotional responses of various nationalities when speaking to a native speaker:

I found many Chinese people felt nervous when they talk to native speaker at first time. However, other people who from Thailand, Azerbaijan felt enjoyable.

(Spring, ID1)

Annie in her final reflection shows that she has reflected on the similarities and differences of essay writing in the UK and her home country: ‘It helps me [...] understand the difference of essay between UK and China’ (Annie FR216).

The provision of time and space (skhole) for inquiry within their practice setting has enabled these learners to begin articulating the similarities and differences within their common experience as language learners. These few illustrative statements cover a range of different aspects related to language learning: the structure of the language (Bert and Pete); social interactions, affect and identity (Kan and Spring); and academic conventions (Annie).

10.2.2 Revealing the unknown

Another aspect of theoria (as revealed through the process of dialogue), is uncovering those previously unknown and/or unarticulated aspects of our practice: assumptions, beliefs and attitudes; possibly entrenched ways of being and doing; good and helpful practices and so on. The following reflections exemplify the type of revelation we are talking about here. Jake says ‘from the work I have look out some problems I didn’t know before do the work’ (Jake, FR1). While Jake does not specify his problems, Mason does: ‘I find out my shortage is team work which is the most significant skill for university study’ (Mason, FR1). Both are examples of self-discovery, a bringing to consciousness of something of which they were previously unaware.

16 FR: Final Reflection (8.6)
A further aspect of this unveiling is a growing awareness of those areas of our practice that can be developed. The following two reflections both refer to the process of writing, but there is a sense here in which bad habits, perhaps even attitudes of laziness and sloppiness, have been revealed:

In addition, I have to proof my writing when I finish it and try to correct the grammar mistakes before send it as a final report. ☺

(Bena, RWR3\textsuperscript{17})

I need to do more writing and correct my common mistakes. When I write the final draft, I will pay more attention to above problems. I can improve my grammar, because I always lack of a verb in a complex sentence.

(Spring, RWR3)

For both learners, this awareness suggests a practical outcome, a moving down into praxis\textsubscript{1}. As they begin to enact these changes through continual training, they will gradually become accustomed (habitus) to acting in this way, moving them towards expertise as language users.

\textbf{10.2.3 Dialogue}

Dialogue is essential for developing theoria and is at work in all of the above examples. Dialogue is not mere conversation, nor is it devoid of action (Freire 1970/1996: 68). In fact, dialogue itself is a praxis (Eikeland, 2008: 235; Eikeland, 2007: 354; Freire, 1970/1996: 68), and is the means by which we begin to articulate and bring to consciousness our understandings (individual, collaborative and collective). In many ways, dialogue as used by Aristotle seems synonymous with the inquiry process, and I believe it is key to developing the sort of understanding that EP seeks. To use Eikeland’s (2008: 270) metaphor, it is dialogue that enables us to map the topographies of our practitioner lives, to understand the interconnected landscapes; the social, practical, emotional, personal, cognitive and so on (2.3.3).

My data does not include recordings of conversations between students while working on their puzzles, and therefore I do not have evidence of the development of ideas through their dialogues with each other and other learners. I have the reflections derived from the result of those dialogues. Therefore, the extent to which the exchanges were just conversations or

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{17} RWR: Reflection on writing the research report (7.2)
dialogues has to be judged from these reflections. What distinguishes dialogue from conversation is that dialogue turns reflectively upon itself creating transitions and transformations, both emotional and cognitive, for those involved, constructing and deconstructing in personal understanding, advancing to deeper insight by grasping and making explicit premises and principles mostly taken for granted or subconscious.

(Eikeland, 2008: 234)

Therefore, when looking for evidence of the process of dialogue in the data, I am seeking to identify examples of the above. Perhaps the clearest example of some sort of transformation is the following summary statement by Antonia:

Overall, I have learnt a lot from this research and it has changed me in a positive way. We will speak more to native speakers and do more practice at home to improve my English in the future.

(Antonia, FReport18)

This transformation suggests both cognitive and emotional aspects: she has learnt a lot and this has had a positive effect on her. Antonia’s final reflections speak of her growing confidence in speaking, the general improvement of her language skills, the opportunity that articulating and inquiring into her puzzle had given her to understand more about her weak points, and the importance of talking to others. This transformation also has a practical outcome: the outworking of her understandings in her praxis1.

An example of an apparent attempt to move beyond mere conversation about the puzzle to something that will facilitate greater insight is given by Orlan:

I tried to get good answer students who participated my own puzzles. Sometimes they gave a short answer to me but I asked why and I got better information than before.

(Orlan, ID1)

Whether this information has been used reflexively to help him construct (or deconstruct) his understanding is not clear from this reflection, but it does suggest an attempt to move forward.

Perhaps a contrary example would be that of Monzer, who after the same experience wrote:

18 FReport: Final Research Report (8.7)
I feel like I am not moving forward and the question I have asked was not useful in getting data.

(Monzer, ID1)

His questioning had not produced anything of value to further his personal understanding of his puzzle or his practice as a language learner, and as we know from Monzer’s story (6.4), he terminated his inquiry at this point, so dialogue was curtailed and understanding (*theoria*) did not develop.

Vesper focuses on the role that working with others has had in developing her understanding of what dialogue is, how it works and how she can engage in it with others.

Firstly, through the teamwork helps me how to discussion and conversation with partners.

(Vesper, FR2)

Perhaps this also indicates that dialogue is not a skill that can be assumed, but as a *praxis* also needs practice, training and reflection to develop.

Part of dialogue then is articulating the *hows, whys* and *whats* of our individual and collective practice. This construction of developing understandings is present in much of the data to a greater or lesser degree. For example, Bena, in her exploration of why people use wrong grammar, outlines which situations exacerbate this, and why:

I had learnt from this result that grammar mistakes in academic situation may cause by the pressure and stress because they worried about the academic words and complex sentences which they had to use in classroom or in exam. Many students believe that they can speak better in another situations, for example, talking to their friends.

(Bena, FReport)

Spring summarises the three key findings of her group’s work:

In response to why people feel nervous – they cannot understand others speaking. Other students cannot organize sentences that led to have grammatical mistakes in speaking. The majority of students cannot speaking fluently [which] cause that cannot express right information.

(Spring, FReport)
This summary expresses the *whats* of their practice as language learners: they cannot understand what people say to them; they find it hard to organise their sentences; and they cannot speak fluently. The consequence of the first is a feeling of nervousness, the second, grammatical mistakes, and the third, a lack of ability to express themselves clearly. These articulations bring together the affective and cognitive aspects of language learning, reflecting different features of a language learner’s topography. In 2.3.3, I explained what Eikeland (2008: 270) calls ‘mapping the topographies’, understanding the personal, intellectual, cultural, emotional, social, and practical landscapes of our practitioner lives and how they interconnect. These reflections exemplify this.

Vesper, who was in the same group as Spring, and therefore is commenting on the same data, focuses on the *hows*. She divides the participants into two groups: those who lack confidence when speaking and those who have confidence. She concludes that

> it is clearly visible that the students who are more likely to use and enjoy communicate with native speakers are better speaking skills; by contrast, the students who were reluctant to use spoken English are become worse and worse in speaking.

(Vesper, FReport)

Vesper articulates a clear link between attitude and performance. How does one move towards being an expert language speaker and to becoming a better language learner? By practising and enjoying that practice.

10.2.4 Praxis

*Praxis* can be both the source of developing *theoria* through dialogue, and also the outworking of those insights and understandings, although we must remember that action is not the principal aim of *theoria*. While *theoria* about practice cannot be developed separately and independently from *praxis* (it moves up from our experience through dialogue), *praxis* is not necessarily dependent on understanding or dialogue, and much practice goes on without ever being subjected to any serious inquiry process.

Much of what I have categorised as *praxis* does not, I believe, qualify as the outworking of a developing understanding (i.e. the moving down from *theoria* to *praxis*), rather it emphasises the ongoing training, rehearsal and practice aspect of *praxis*, which enables us to gradually move from novice to expert. Examples of this include: ‘I learnt a new vocabularies and the
structure of building report or research’ (Eshrag, FR2); ‘during the puzzle work I have been learned lots of vocabulary and tenses’ (Mason, FR3). Perhaps Antonia’s final reflection is a good summary of what the majority of the students talked about at this stage:

It helped me learn more vocabulary through the conversation with interview. Furthermore, my speaking has been improved by doing a presentation. Next, my writing skills have been enriched because of the report. Overall it helped me a lot in my English study.

(Antonia, FR3)

Again, it is important to note that the development of skills and language that Antonia refers to were not dependent on the process of inquiry itself: we could have done presentations and written reports on many other topics that did not involve a close look at their own language learning lives, but might equally have helped them develop their vocabulary, grammar and so on. So, are there any examples of the enactment of understandings that appear to be a more direct result of the inquiry process? Perhaps the following is one example of this:

Our puzzle is about grammar. It is really helpful for me. When I am speaking now, I pay more attention on the grammar. If I made a mistake, I will correct it. Now I have made less grammar mistakes when I am speaking than before.

(Bert, FR3)

Although this statement appears to contradict Bert’s retrospective analysis of the puzzle work (9.2), he seems to imply an increased awareness of his grammar usage (theoria), a new approach to his ongoing practice (habitually correcting mistakes, praxis), as well as a growing competence in his speaking (praxis).

Although I am not sure that the following is a direct consequence of the puzzle work, it does illustrate quite clearly the ‘doing as training and practice’ element of praxis.

These days were invaluable for me. I have made a rigorous timetable for ten weeks and I have not gave up yet. My belief is ‘if you hate it, just do it; if you feel tired, just continue’. Just keep doing day by day, step by step. In some day you will start to enjoy it. Now, I am really pleased to do everything with English and I am looking forward to my English life next year.

(Kan, FR3)

Kan’s attitude is one of dogged determination and perseverance; keep going no matter how you feel, and one day you will reap the rewards. Kan suggests that he has come to enjoy using
English and doing things in English. He is now living well (*eudaimonia*), and full of expectations as regards his future.

Building confidence was also a regular feature of many of the reflections. They do not yet claim to have reached the point where they always perform confidently (*praxis*₂), but they are developing that ability (*praxis*₁):

> I feel more confident than before especially talk in front of most people. (Pete, FR3)
> I feel more confident when speak with others. (Bena, ID2)
> The puzzle work improved my confidence to speak by doing the presentation to students from other classes. (Antonia, FR1)

10.3 *Techne* (or a means to an end)

*Techne* is concerned with a specific end goal, manipulating, creating, changing, using a specific object (or a person), for the knower’s own ends. It is about efficiency, about the application of things that we presume will have the desired effect and so produce the outcome we want: it is an instrumental means to an end. In some ways, it is the application of *episteme* in its *theoresis* form. It does not seek to engage in dialogue with the thing (or person) it is seeking to influence and change, but rather calculates the effect of applying a certain kind of stimulus to the end result. An example used by Aristotle of *techne* is medicine: the doctor (at least in ancient Greece) did not include the patient in the discussions about what medicine or treatment was best, but rather, based on their *theoresis* knowledge of the effects of specific medicines/treatments on certain diseases, would prescribe the course of treatment that would best serve their purpose, presumably to cure and relieve suffering. In fact, it is this very example, among others, that leads Kristjánsson (2005: 463-464) to question the purely ‘technical’ nature of *techne*. There is also a place for deliberation, but it is deliberation of an instrumental kind: what action will achieve the best results.

My understanding of *techne* in my data has shifted over time. Initially, I believed that everything related to learning strategies was a form of *techne*, in the sense that a learning strategy is an instrument or technique (often taught) that is applied to learning to achieve a specific end goal: more efficient recording of vocabulary (and ultimately better learning) or exam techniques for the reading test (and ultimately a higher score). It is about training learners to become better at learning (Barjesteh, Mukundan, & Vaseghi, 2014: 68). However, I have come to see that it is not
the strategy itself that is necessarily technē, but how it is implemented and used. A strategy may be used with a calculated effect to achieve a specific end result (techne), or it might become gradually embodied and enacted as part of our practice, as part of the move from novice to expert (praxis).

Here then, I look at what I consider to be examples of technē, the clearest of which comes from Kan’s reflections on the interview with the Int. Dip. students:

One advise from Minho, (S.Korean). If anyone wants to speak use the own language, he/she should fine around 1 pound. The fine will but [buy] the gifts to the classmates. 

(Kan, ID2)

The end goal here is to stop people speaking their own language in class, and the means to achieve that is through fining the guilty party. Presumably this idea would need to be agreed by all class members and so even with technē there is the need for some sort of deliberation in deciding whether this is the best way to achieve the end goal or not (Eikeland, 2008: 99). However, once decided, the way to achieve the desired effect is to implement the (in this case) punishment for deviant behaviour: it is what we might term a technical solution to the problem.

Other examples of technē are clearly related to achievement in the IELTS exam. Orlan perhaps demonstrates this in the following reflection after speaking to the Int. Dip. students:

I haven’t never got this type of experience. Therefore, this was interesting for me. It improved my speaking and listening that I need improving my results. 

(Orlan, ID2)

Although the experience was new and interesting, Orlan’s ultimate assessment seems to be related to its effectiveness in helping him improve his IELTS score. His focus and energy are orientated towards his end goal, rather than understanding his practice.

Perhaps another aspect of techne refers to the idea of imitation, of copying, of learning from someone who is more skilled than you. However, the idea here of imitation needs to be carefully unpacked. Vesper says ‘we can imitate others best ways to study English’ (Vesper, ID2). This seems to imply that by implementing what works for others, you will achieve similar results. If this is done merely as a means to an end, without being subject to dialogue and reflection, then I
believe this is techne. There is no personal transformation in techne, no personal development, rather the implementation of a strategy to achieve a specific goal. This might not be Vesper’s intention (and certainly her final reflections and report as described above would imply it is not), and yet it helps us to distinguish between strategies that are unthinkingly copied and implemented hoping they will achieve the same success for us as for others, and those which are subject to dialogue, reflection, becoming part of our practice through praxis.

10.4 Phronesis and praxis (or making wise decisions)

Phronesis is about living wisely and cultivating the ability to make good and wise decisions and choices in our professional practices, lives and relationships, and is thus ethically motivated and bound. Unwise decisions and choices (for example acting unjustly) are not phronesis and so to act phronetically one needs to have a clear understanding of what justice looks like, so that one can make a wise decision about how to act justly in this situation. Phronesis does not start with experience as theoria and dialogue do, but starts with principles or virtues (what justice looks like), moving down into praxis (the outworking of justice now). Phronesis and praxis are interdependent and phronesis is always worked out in practice, because without acting justly we can never really know what justice looks like in various situations. Phronesis deliberates, analysing and interpreting what is happening, deliberating over which decision to make and action to take, but may need the theoretical understandings of theoria to establish a full picture of the principles to begin with (2.3.5).

There are few explicit examples of phronesis and praxis in the learner data, although there are examples in my own data, particularly around ‘crunch point’, of the outworking of phronesis and praxis (7.1 for example). This gap in the learner data may be partly due to the focus of the EP work on understanding, which more closely equates to theoria than phronesis. Perhaps also the prompts I used to promote reflection did not encourage the recording of situations where the learners had to deliberate over different choices.

Several learners spoke of fear (see for example Pete 6.2.2; Leo 8.6.2). Fear is the opposite of courage and phronesis is concerned with performing the ethical excellence of courage. Choosing to act bravely, without fear, is to act phronetically. In Spring’s reflections, we have evidence of how over the period of the puzzle work, she has gradually overcome her fear of speaking to English people. Although she did not write an initial reflection on why she chose her puzzle, her
final report affirms that she chose this puzzle ‘because I also felt nervous when I speaking with native English people’. Following the interviews with the Int. Dip. students, she said that the experience had enabled her to be ‘brave to communicate with strangers’ (Spring, ID2). Her final reflection stated that the puzzle work had given her the ‘opportunity to overcome [her] fear to talk to others’, and she picked up on this idea again in her final report:

Nowadays, I have already overcome any fear when I speak English with native speakers. And I try to be patient with myself.

(Spring FReport)

Spring’s assessment of her situation is that in situations where she needs to speak to native speakers, she can now do so without fear. In this sense, she has reached a level of virtuoso performance. However, she refers to patience, another excellence, and hints that she is still in the process of perfecting this (praxis).

Spring’s reflections do not explicitly identify a greater sense of self-fulfilment or QoL (eudaimonia), but this link is made very clear in another example of phronesis and praxis. Kan’s final reflections declare that when doing presentations he ‘learnt keeping smile to audiences even though I feel tired or nervous’ (Kan FR2). Despite his feelings, Kan chooses an appropriate behaviour; to keep smiling. This is virtuoso performance; his praxis in evidence, and also demonstrates how phronesis and praxis work together, and are also informed by theoria. This is also evident in the following:

I have learnt making an active eye contact with them so that I were able to perceive their feeling, emotion. It made me happy and let me enjoy the presentations (individual and group presentation).

(Kan, FR1)

Through the various individual and group presentations done in class, through praxis, dialogue and theoria, Kan has established principles (phronesis) that are important in presentations: smiling and maintaining active eye contact. These principles are then acted on, and he uses them to perceive the emotions of the audience and respond appropriately; another clear example of virtuoso performance. This ability clearly and explicitly contributes to his quality of life, his happiness (eudaimonia); enjoying his work as he performs it well. Kan is perhaps the only student who seems to be actively seeking to develop what Aristotle terms the ethical excellences in his life and work, saying in this same reflection that he has ‘tried to make [himself]
more self-motivated and self-regulated’, although perhaps he is still working out what these principles look like. I suggested above that perhaps the wording and focus of the reflection prompts had resulted in a lack of evidence of phronesis. Kan took a broader interpretation of these prompts, referring to the whole course (he speaks of websites I referred them to, and the way he organised himself over the 10 weeks; 10.2.4) rather than the puzzle work specifically, and perhaps this is why we have clearer examples in his data.

10.5 Experience (empeiria) and quality of life (eudaimonia)

Although neither empeiria nor eudaimonia are knowledge forms or ways of knowing per se, they are included in the gnoseology framework, as both the starting point and end point of our inquiries. Just as happiness (one common translation of eudaimonia) is not just a feeling, but the act of living well (as exemplified by Kan above), so experience (empeiria) for Aristotle is not mere sense perception, but ‘results from repeated practice and accumulated, common knowledge’ (Papastephanou, 2013: 110). Thus all inquiry for Aristotle ‘should contribute to making it possible to live well and in a noble way’ (Eikeland 2008: 75; EE I,3; EN I,1).

I explored the influence of experience in the context of the formation and choice of puzzles in Chapter 6. I have also referred throughout to issues related to quality of life, particularly in the context of ‘crunch point’ in Chapter 9, and I do not wish to revisit these in detail at this point. However, in 2.2.2, I looked at some of the outworkings of QoL, of being (the state of living well) and doing (the practice of living well) in the EP literature noting that QoL was often spoken of in terms of heightened engagement, and increased trust and mutual respect between teacher and learners. In the case of EUS9, there were moments of heightened engagement (particularly while doing the interviews with the Int. Dip. students, 6.2), and glimpses of trust and respect from the learners towards myself as Kan and Zeno suggested (9.3) when referencing my views on how to improve their IELTS score.

Yet there were also moments during the EP work where there was a distinct lack of engagement and I think perhaps they found it hard to trust that I had their best interests at heart: Jake’s outburst about poster making is an example (8.2). Perhaps this serves to illustrate that teaching and learning are very real human experiences (Freire & Shor, 1987: 3), that our practice is a living practice (Kemmis, 2012: 893), and that hostility, rejection, anger and anxiety are as much a part of that human experience as joy, acceptance, trust and respect. Maybe it also exemplifies
the power issues I alluded to in 2.6. Even though EP seeks to liberate learners, giving them control over their learning, as teacher I chose the way to work towards that autonomy.

However, I do think there was evidence of a growth in mutual respect and trust among the learners themselves (EP Principles 3-5), as they discovered how much they could learn from their peers through teamwork, and from conversations with other students surrounding their puzzles. The following are just two examples:

I learnt who [how] can I make different kind of survey such as questionnaires and interviews also I can deal with other students and know about their problems.

(Eshrag, FR1)

I’ve got many different answer from another class-mate. Some of the answer is really good a solution from my puzzle.

(Jake, ID1)

10.6  Blurred and fuzzy boundaries

In the sections above, I have attempted to illustrate from the data relatively clear examples of the different categories. However, as I have occasionally hinted (10.3, for example), drawing the boundaries between the different categories of knowing and ways of knowing is never as simple in practice as it might appear on paper, especially when we are dealing with real lives; lives that are idiosyncratic, often contradictory and ambiguous in thought, word and deed.

This section attempts to deal with this reality by looking at excerpts from the data that seem to illustrate a shift from one category to another, or suggest different categories working simultaneously.

10.6.1  Moving between theoresis and theoria

Initially, I classified the following reflection by Bena as theoresis, a feasible interpretation if taken out of the context of the other two reflections she wrote at this time.

I have learned that, people in each country have a different problem in speaking English because their own language is different with English language. Some of them have problem about pronunciation which can mistake about understanding, but some of
them have a problem with grammar structure because their own language structure is completely different.

(Bena, ID3)

Bena, as we saw in 8.7.1, was fascinated by the influence of time, ability and L1 on language learning. She seems to be moving from concerns about her own accuracy (she was exploring the grammar puzzle) to questions that go beyond her practice and language learning to speculating about the effect of individual differences on language learning in general. She appears to reposition herself as an interested spectator (theories) wishing to understand more about language learning per se than her own practice, and is beginning to discover for herself, through her own inquiries, something that applied linguists have been puzzling over for years: the role of the mother tongue in second language acquisition (Butzkamm, 2003).

However, in her response to the other two prompts, Bena makes it clear that she ‘got many useful information’ (ID2) which ‘can help me understand my problem more’ (ID1). The information she is gleaning through dialogue with her fellow practitioners is enabling her to build her own theoria about language learning, and I suggest she is doing this not as an interested spectator, but as a member of the language learning community, seeking to understand her own praxis within the praxis of the community itself. This seems to be confirmed by her stated understandings in her final report (8.7.1), noting that for her, practice seems key to improving grammatical accuracy because that is how a first language is learnt.

10.6.2 Moving between theories and praxis

Perhaps theories then, is as much about the positioning of the researcher as it is about the subject being studied, and I believe Vivi exemplifies this idea. The only student with a research background, she challenged the validity of our research methodology, and always wrote about the puzzle itself as a detached observer (4.7.1). Her final report contained no personal reflection on her understanding of the puzzle in relation to her own practice (8.7.9). With regards to the puzzle work then, she seemed to position herself very much as an ‘off-stage’ spectator (theories).

However, she did reflect at various stages on how the activity of doing research (the pedagogical process) had impacted her language skills and her communicative abilities, the development of her praxis₁:
Funny. Firstly you can get more information to support your research. Secondly, improving your English skills. We need to talk to others and explain their purpose if they unable to understand. Thirdly making friends with other people who are studying at college.

(Vivi, ID2)

Vivi seems to be moving around the practice arena, sometimes observing from the stalls, sometimes performing ‘on-stage’ and occasionally (as we will see in the next section) reflecting ‘back-stage’.

10.6.3 Moving between techne and theoria

While techne is concerned with an end goal and with producing something or having an effect on something, theoria is about understanding our practices and how things fit together within them. The doing element of theoria is praxis, the outworking of our understandings as well as the starting point of our inquiries. The following examples show how sometimes we might move between these things, while at other times, both may happen simultaneously.

In Vivi’s case, there is evidence of a shift from seeing something purely as a means to an end (techne), to understanding it as part of her practice and as part of academic writing discourse. I cited Vivi’s revelation in 8.6.2 that IELTS task 1 writing actually held direct relevance to her studies, in particular the report writing. She now sees this particular IELTS task as related to her practice, as part of her praxis, as an academic writer. This was confirmed in more detail in the follow-up conversations I had with her:

Because sometimes we don’t know how to use the task, why we need to write the task 1, in the IELTS, but when you told us all the things, we know we need to use, the task 1 to the real writing.

IELTS task 1 had no relevance for her beyond the exam itself, and yet through using it as part of her report writing she has come to articulate an alternative perspective (theoria).

Other examples show how both techne and theoria can be operating concurrently. In this reflection, Jake seems to separate knowing what to do to achieve a good score in his speaking test from knowing how he can generally become better at speaking English:
From others answer I know what should I do for my IELTS speaking test. Also, I know how I can improve my speaking that is good activity for learn English.

(Jake, ID3)

This contrast between moving from novice to expert and achieving his end goal are also present in his final reflection:

I learn how two [to] use the words in more accuracy way while I know how to make more ideas during the IELTS exams.

(Jake, FR2)

Here there is evidence of Jake’s developing praxis, as his use of the language improves, here specifically referring to his increasingly accurate use of different vocabulary items. At the same time, he believes he now knows what to do to generate more ideas within the context of the speaking exam (his theoria).

Another, perhaps more ambiguous example of this, comes from Leo’s final reflection:

It help me a lot. My listening is improved a lot and I got 6 in my IELTS listening test. It give me a big help.

(Leo, FR3)

Leo here judges his improvement by his IELTS test score. The puzzle work has been a means to an end in that it has helped him increase that score. It seems to be a clear example of techne and could suggest that Leo approached his learning in the seemingly instrumental way of Orlan above, seeing improvement in terms of what it would achieve for him. However, there seems to be a hint of praxis, here too, of general and helpful movement in his listening ability, not just in terms of his exam result. Improvement is not necessarily a means to an end, but a gradual growth in competence.

10.6.4 Moving between techne and phronesis

Techne and phronesis are both action orientated. However, whereas techne calculates effects and imposes its will, phronesis deliberates with others, never imposing, but listening and weighing opinions and ideas.
The following reflection from Pete illustrates what movement between these two might look like:

Yes, I think it really help me to understand our learning. Although we have not got some solutions to solve the problems, we know that when we need to pay attention to our grammar problems.

(Pete, FR1)

Pete was looking for a techne solution to his problem, a means to an end, something that he could impose on his grammar issues that would cure it, but he did not find it. However, what he has acquired, through the revealing process of dialogue, is an understanding of when it is important to focus on grammatical accuracy and when it is less important. In other words, he has developed the knowledge he needs to make the right choice in each situation (phronesis). His language suggests that this is not something he is still rehearsing (praxis\textsubscript{1}), but something that he has already achieved proficiency in (praxis\textsubscript{2}).

However, sometimes the same understanding is both a means and an end, as in the example from Bert below:

Everyone agrees that speaking correct grammar is quite important. It will make us get a better IELTS score and will make others understand us better. And also it is helpful for our future studies.

(Bert, ID3)

Speaking correct grammar has a technical end: a better IELTS score. However, it also facilitates and enables relationships with others, where the means and ends are one and the same (praxis). The reference to future studies is non-specific in that good grammar could refer to better integration into the community of fellow students (similar to building good relationships) or a necessary element to demonstrate academic competence. Eshrag, who was in the same group as Bert, identifies similar multiple means and ends when reporting on their work:

All the answers were identical without exception, yes. They said that the good grammar is important in speaking because its foundation of any language. Also, to get better IELTS score. As well to understand other people and renew our daily communication with new people.

(Eshrag, FReport)

She begins by pointing out that grammar is foundational to all languages, and thus an increased understanding of how the language works and fits together is an integral part of growing in
competence (*theoria* worked out in *praxis*). Then, as well as identifying the technical end of good grammar as a higher IELTS score (*techne*), she too picks up and elaborates on its role in developing relationships and in expanding her circle of acquaintances and friendships. For Eshrag, grammar is a key part of her *doing* and *being* in the world, of both *praxis* (growing in competence) and general *praxis* (*; and *; regulating relationships with others*) (Eikeland, 2007: 351).

10.6.5 Moving between *theoria* and *phronesis*

*Theoria* is not action focused in the same way that *phronesis* is; it is about understanding first and foremost, rather than deciding what to do in any particular situation. However, as we have seen, it stems from experience and may move back down into practice as we gradually move from novice to expert, from tacit to articulated understandings. However, we do not necessarily go through long periods of training before we need to make choices about how to act. One could argue that as a language learner on a full-time course, one is in an intense training environment (*praxis*), and yet to develop autonomy and the ability to direct your own learning, *phronesis* is also necessary. However, that ability to choose might not yet be perfected (*praxis*), and there is a need to continue rehearsing and training (*praxis*). There is a sense in which during our ‘practical deliberation about “what-to-do” (*phronesis*), we need to stop and ask more theoretical questions (*theoria*) ‘about “what-this-is”, or “how-is-this-rightly-understood”’ (Eikeland, 2008: 362).

Vesper’s reflection following the time spent with the Int. Dip. class illustrates some of this:

> Our group research 10 person to answer the questionnaire. Through the research I found almost of people think the grammar and vocabulary are most biggest problem in speaking. For overseas students how to improve English level, I think is have more communicate with native people and create chances to chats with others. Through the communication we can find our problem and weakness in speaking. Then find best way for ours to cope with that.

(Vesper, ID1)

She begins by articulating her understanding (*theoria*): grammar and vocabulary are generally considered the biggest hurdles for language learners, and she suggests ways to increase competence (*praxis*). Then, she seems to suggest the efficacy of dialogue in revealing and bringing to consciousness their weak points (*theoria*), followed by the need to deliberate and choose the best way forward (*phronesis*).
Another example that suggests these movements between *theoria* and *phronesis* comes from the reflections of Mason. The first stems from the same experience as Vesper’s above. He wrote:

> To be honest, today is funny day for me. I have practised my listening and speaking with them. In addition, I found out my problem during the learning of speaking. I have to positive in communication.

*(Mason, ID2)*

Mason begins by saying that the reciprocal interviews gave him an opportunity to practise his language (*praxis*₁), while also trying to understand his puzzle (dialogue). He then articulates his burgeoning awareness of his need to be positive in his communications with others, his *theoria*. This *theoria* however, is not sufficient in itself. He has to choose whether to act positively or not. The implication is he has not yet reached the point of virtuoso performance (*praxis*₂), and therefore needs training to develop this ‘virtue’ (positiveness) through *praxis*₁. His final reflection a few weeks later, shows how this has been developing and how new points of inquiry have arisen for him:

> During the puzzle work I have been learned lots of vocabulary and tenses. Also I could talk to another confidently. Although it is difficult for me follow the puzzle work, I am try to enjoy the teamwork with my classmates.

*(Mason, FR3)*

Again, he begins by referring to his developing *praxis*₁, this time more specifically in terms of his vocabulary and verb tenses. However, he then seems to suggest that he has moved towards *praxis*₂ with regards to his confidence (positiveness). He then says that he is trying to enjoy the teamwork despite its difficulties (8.6.3). The use of ‘trying’ here suggests that he has not got to the point of always choosing enjoyment (*praxis*₂), but is aware that he needs to build that ability (*praxis*₁).

### 10.6.6 Moving between dialogue and deliberation

We have said that dialogue is concerned with uncovering, defining, comparing and contrasting, whereas deliberation analyses and interprets, weighs possibilities and chooses the best (most ethical) way forward in any situation.

In a few cases, there is some evidence in the data to suggest a sequential move from dialogue to deliberation. I reiterate here that I am drawing these conclusions from the recorded result of the
learners’ reflections rather than evidence of the thought processes or the conversations that inspired them.

In conclusion, there are many advices that help me to improve my speaking skills through this report. And I have already use these suggest to improve my speaking skill.

(Spring, FReport)

Spring does not specify which advice she has acted on, and the implication might be that she has acted on everything she has learnt. What is clear is she has made choices based on her understanding and then acted on those choices.

Another possible example comes from Annie:

For essay, I ask my sister, who has graduated from the University of Manchester, many questions about how to finish the good essay.

(Annie, FR3)

Annie has gone to her sister to find out what a good essay looks like in the UK. We saw in 10.2.1 that she had discovered the differences between essays in the UK and China. Perhaps this has come through talking to her sister and the ‘many questions’ she asked her. However, Annie would then need to deliberate about what advice to follow in terms of the report I had asked them to write; how to apply what she had discovered to the task at hand.

10.6.7 Moving between praxis₁ and praxis₂ (or techne)

Both praxis₁ and praxis₂ are ‘doing’ action, and yet we have seen that they relate to different types of knowledge: episteme (theoria) and phronesis. In terms of language learning, I would distinguish between moving from novice to expert in terms of language use (praxis₁), and making choices about using language in different social contexts (praxis₂). However, there is also the possibility that language could be used to create (poesis) an external product (techne). Although the following has a clear example of what I would term praxis₁, I have found it more difficult to distinguish between techne and praxis₂.

By this puzzle, I think my listening, speaking and writing skills improve a lot. And I know how to write a report and what kind of language we can use in report.

(Pete, FR2)
Firstly, Pete refers to a growing competence in his language skills. This is praxis\textsubscript{1}, training and practice that moves him towards becoming an expert language user. He then states that he now knows how to write a report. A report, as an external object, distinct from the person who creates it, would seem to be an example of techne. However, he then says that he is also aware of the type of language necessary to write an academic report, and here I see a need to choose what type of language is applicable and acceptable within academic discourse. So is this choice a means to an end; what language do I use to produce an academic report (techne)? Or, is it about understanding the relationship between language and context and making wise choices about how the language we use might affect others (phronesis and praxis\textsubscript{2}); in this case, how the teacher might understand and react to his report? The lines between these categories seem very fuzzy.

10.7 One learner’s ‘gnoseology’

Although there are theoretical differences between all the knowledge types, there are also many overlaps as we have seen. I suggested in 2.3.1 that all knowledge is relational, in the sense that there is always a relationship between the knower and the known. However, I would extend this to say that there is also a relationship between the different knowledge types and ways of knowing; they do not operate in splendid isolation from each other, but act in a complementary way. Within our practice contexts, the likelihood is that we will rehearse (praxis\textsubscript{1}) and perform (praxis\textsubscript{2}) at the same time (Eikeland, 2008: 276). We might also move to techne as we identify a clear goal that can be achieved through the use or application of a particular strategy, technique, or method. Whether we find the time and space (skhole) to engage in serious dialogue and reflection about our praxis and thus develop our theoria and articulate our tacit understandings, is probably more dependent on our context and perhaps also, I would suggest, our will.

To understand more fully how these interconnections might work, I wish to look at one learner’s gnoseology. Although I am focusing on an individual, there are also hints at the collaborative nature of knowledge production. The learner I have chosen is Zeno. This is not because he was more eloquent in his reflections than the others, or that his reflections were longer providing me with more raw material. I have chosen him because I believe his story illustrates why a broader gnoseology is so important when it comes to understanding ‘understanding’. Perhaps I have also chosen him because of the influence that interacting with his data has had on my own developing thinking about what it means to understand and how we come to understand.
Zeno was concerned about his listening skills and in particular his inability to concentrate in listening tasks (4.6.1). From the very beginning of the puzzle work, he seemed more interested in finding solutions than understanding, and he and Leo soon changed the title of their puzzle to ‘How to improve …’. However, as I have intimated at various moments throughout Part II and in this chapter, the distinction between problem solving and understanding is not necessarily clear-cut, and different ways, forms and outcomes of knowledge production might be in operation simultaneously.

After the interview with the Int. Dip. students, Zeno listed various approaches to succeeding at the listening task. These seem mainly related to exam techniques and strategies, such as the need to understand what the task is asking; the need to keep taking notes throughout; the need to practise exam tasks more; the need to listen for key words:

Today, Leo and me interviewed six people to help us find the better solution for our puzzle. We found that different people have different ways to improve their listening skills, such as do more exercise in listening tasks, lay a solid number of vocabulary and do your best to find the key words, understand the meaning of the task and keep noting. All of the answers were good for us overcome problem in listening. (Zeno, ID1)

Is Zeno’s understanding then basically a techne one? Is he concerned purely with finding the best means to increase his score? I believe this is a key motivational factor in his inquiry (as it was for so many of the learners) and yet it is not the only sort of knowledge being generated here. Zeno states something quite profound in recognising that different practitioners have different ways of tackling the same issue. He implies there is not just one way to reach the goal, nor does the same way suit everyone. This moves him away from a purely techne approach, to articulate a truth about the shared practice of language learners (theoria). However, as yet he has not moved to deliberating about these different approaches to see which ones might be the best for him; they are all seen as helpful. Neither has he integrated these suggestions into his praxis.

He continues his reflection by reiterating the fact that he gained many suggestions, but there are also some additional insights:
I feel that was a valued experience, the people who we interviewed gave us many ways to improve our listening skills and help us practise our speaking. It is a better way to do the interview to find the answers.

(Zeno, ID2)

The data collection part of the inquiry process had furnished him with opportunities for praxis$_1$ (valuable ‘on-stage’ rehearsal time), while also giving him a chance to reflect (‘back-stage’) on the value of talking to others and what can be achieved through that. He concludes that dialogue is ‘a better way’, although he does not specify what it is better than. Perhaps his third reflection throws some light on this:

If we have the same puzzles in our life, we can ask other people for help, they can always help us to find the better solution. Moreover, we can absorb lots useful information.

(Zeno, ID3)

In 6.3.4, I looked at this reflection in the broader context of Zeno’s life as based on evidence from his learning logs. It seems to me that Zeno is discovering the possibilities of working collegially rather than working alone. I believe this is a clear step towards phronesis and praxis$_2$, towards making wise decisions, towards living wisely, well-being and quality of life (eudaimonia).

The juxtaposition and interplay of different ways of knowing, of different forms of knowing and of different ways of acting in relation to that knowledge are refined and developed by Zeno as he moves towards the end of the course. The conclusion of his final report reads as follows:

The research about puzzle is really very helpful for us, because during the process of data collection we can get lots of ways to improve our listening skills, after that I can choose the better one which is quite convenient for myself. At the same time, it also contribute a lot for my writing, such as the thesis structure.

(Zeno, FReport)

Zeno has moved on from thinking that all the solutions are ‘good’ (Zeno, ID1) to working out (perhaps purely through deliberation, but perhaps also through praxis$_1$) which ones work for him. Both his final report (as discussed in 8.7.8) and his final reflection (which I present here) detail this choice:

It gave me lots of ways to improve my listening skills, and shows me the important things in listening task. For example, the best way for me to improve my listening is watching the foreign TV programs, which means the first time I watching programs with
the subtitle and the second time I enjoy it without words. The other things I will do is pay more attention on the key words instead of the whole sentence, such as some special words or numbers.

(Zeno, FR1)

There is both a present and a future element in this statement. Watching foreign TV programmes appears to be something that Zeno is already doing, that has become part of his praxis. He also seems to have worked out the way to derive maximum benefit from the activity. I find it interesting that he uses the word ‘enjoy’ (an addition to the similar statement in his final report) to describe the second stage of his listening. Perhaps this explains in part why he describes this as the ‘best’ way (phronesis); working in this way increases his sense of eudaimonia. He contrasts this present activity with other things that he will do. These intentions do not yet seem to have worked their way into his praxis.

Again, I find an interesting link here between what I would categorise as Zeno’s general move from novice to expert language listener, his praxis (exemplified by his approach to watching TV programmes), and his approach to listening as an exam task, a techne (the ability to achieve a specific end goal). In terms of the latter, he believes he has now identified both the crucial elements of the task and the prime strategy for succeeding in the exam (paying attention to key words), but interestingly, he also links his general listening competence to the exam.

Perhaps one thing we can conclude from this is that what might initially have seemed like a quite crude, technicist, problem-solving approach (how can I improve my listening score), is actually undeniably complex. My own reaction to Zeno and Leo’s inquiry throughout the course was one of frustration. There seemed almost an unwillingness to understand ‘understanding’ and their approach seemed to contradict the very nature of the more open-ended and ambivalent approach embedded in the EP principles that I was attempting to foster. However, as I also commented in 4.6.1, I think Zeno’s story exemplifies the fact that a dynamic, multifaceted, complex and interrelated conceptualisation of knowing and understanding (as conceived in my own gnoseology framework), is not helpfully served by one approach alone. What initially seems like a technicist (techne) approach, might on further investigation include other elements of the gnoseology. All of these might work together in such a way to produce deeper understandings than a focus say on phronesis to the exclusion of episteme and techne, or a focus on episteme to the exclusion of phronesis and techne and so on. Zeno’s reflections illustrate that he is grappling with many different aspects of his practice, and that there is far more going on in his (language
learning) life than merely discovering and implementing the optimum solution to his problem. I believe this illustrates not only the dynamic nature of understanding, but also how different aspects of knowledge and practice are interrelated and mutually constitutive, and that we cannot reduce our understanding of knowledge, theory or practice to one particular dimension to the exclusion of others.

10.8 Problematising the gnoseology framework

This chapter so far then has attempted to map the data onto the framework and the framework onto the data in a reciprocal, iterative and reflective process. I have tried to illustrate each category using examples from the data and in doing so have also been forced to revisit the categories themselves and clarify my own understanding of what each means. I have also shown how many of these categories are operating simultaneously and how all work together to contribute to the whole. However, the very act of attempting to map delineated categories onto the data of practice raises its own questions, and suggests its own limitations. In the last part of this chapter, I wish to explore some of these questions by problematising the framework before attempting to draw some conclusions.

I do not presume to have all the answers and nor do I presume to know all the questions that need to be asked, but here are some that I believe are important at this point: How useful are the categories as a way of understanding the different types of knowledge and ways of knowing produced through practitioner research? How much explanatory power do they have? What do they not account for? Some of the grey and fuzzy areas that persist in my view are concerned with the relationships between the different types of praxis; the true nature of techne; the difference between things that are stable ‘for the most part’ and things that are not; and the concept and role of change across the framework. In the following, I attempt to explore some of these areas more fully.

10.8.1 Praxis and techne

I begin by taking a closer look at the concept of praxis. We saw in 2.3.3 that Eikeland identifies two different dimensions of praxis that correspond to two different ways of knowing: theoria (praxis1) and phronesis (praxis2). Praxis1 is concerned with both the enactment of our tacit knowledge, and the training, development, and rehearsal aspects of our practice, that which moves us from novice to expert (10.2.4). Praxis2 is about the virtuoso performance of the ethical
and intellectual virtues, virtue being 'what makes any thing or activity work at its best' (Eikeland, 2006: 20) and is what enables us individually and collectively to make good and wise decisions in the various situations that are thrown at us (10.4). However, I believe these two dimensions of practice complement each other. To achieve virtuoso performance ($praxis_2$), training and practice are necessary ($praxis_1$), but to understand the virtues, we need both $praxis_2$ and also dialogue (2.3.5). Dialogue itself is a $praxis$ because it is what enables us as thinking and communicating beings to start from where we are (our individual and collective experience) and critically examine what we do by inquiring, scrutinising, examining and questioning (Eikeland, 2008: 240).

However, we also said that $techne$, which like $phronesis$ seeks excellence, necessitates practice (Eikeland, 2008: 62); it has to be developed and learnt. So, is the practice associated with $techne$ also a $praxis$? $Praxis$ regulates the relationships between people (ethics), seeking shared understandings and always taking the opinions, emotions, thoughts and attitudes of others into account (Eikeland, 2006: 34). $Techne$, when dealing with people, does not respect the autonomy and will of the person it is seeking to manipulate or influence in the same way as $phronesis$ does (Eikeland, 2006: 34). Therefore, $techne$ is not a $praxis$ in the same sense as $praxis_1$ and $praxis_2$, but it still has a practical base.

However, does this mean that $techne$, because it is not a $praxis$ in the same sense as $praxis_1$ and $praxis_2$, has no place in our professional practice? I would argue that it does, but we need to recognise it for what it is and understand what it can offer rather than embrace it fully as the answer to all our educational ills and classroom problems, or reject it because it only offers ‘technical’ solutions to things. Sometimes a technical solution or the use of a strategy to achieve a specific end goal that is external to the person using it is necessary: the case of IELTS in this study for example, and possibly also the need to produce a report and give a presentation. In fact, as Kristjánsson (2005: 41) provocatively argues, in many ways the activity of teaching is more $techne$ than $phronesis$, since the end goal or product of teaching is to produce learning in the student, something external to the teacher herself, and to the activity of teaching. Maybe this is true of much of our teaching, the imposition of methods and ways of teaching to produce a calculated result in our students, but it is certainly not the whole story.

While it is not always easy to identify the boundaries between the different types of $praxis$, what is clear is that they help us to understand the different dimensions and scope of our teaching
and learning practices. Perhaps they also help illuminate the web of relationships between practice, theory, knowledge and quality of life, and how different dimensions of *praxis*, knowledge and theory work together to enhance (or possibly undermine) our quality of life together as practitioners.

### 10.8.2 Stability and change in gnoseology

Another question I asked at the beginning of this section relates to change and stability in this framework. *Theoria* (and *theoresis*) deal with things that are ‘for the most part’ stable (Eikeland, 2006: 39), but is there such a thing as stability in the classroom? There is an increasing body of literature that deals with the messy, non-linear, situated and complex nature of teaching and learning (see Schön, 1992; Tudor, 2001, 2003; van Lier, 2010 for example), which might seem to directly contradict this idea of stability. And yet, as Schön (1983) points out, for the more experienced practitioner, much of our practice is routine; we develop ‘a repertoire of expectations, images, and techniques… [learning] what to look for and how to respond to what [we] find’ (p.60), our *praxis*. If everything about our classrooms was constantly changing, I suggest little teaching and learning would take place there. However, ‘for the most part’ suggests that there might also be times of instability and change. Perhaps one way of beginning to understand what ‘stable for the most part’ might mean, is to look at the concepts around dynamical thinking found in the complex systems literature (1.3).

In 1.3, I stated that one of the assumptions that I brought to this work was the dynamic and complex nature of the language classroom and of teaching and learning. Although a complex system is in a state of constant flux, resulting both in changes within the system and the way the different components interact with each other, it is also adept at adapting, and this ability to adapt results in a kind of ‘dynamic stability’ (Mercer, 2011: 429). This sort of stability is not static, unchanging or petrified; rather any change is gradual and continuous over time (Mercer, 2011: 429). I believe it is this sort of ‘dynamic stability’ that is meant by ‘stable for the most part’, and which dialogue and *theoria* seek to understand from inside the system itself. It is when these changes are bigger, unexpected and rock the stability of our practice that we need *phronesis* to help us know the best way to respond.

In looking at the puzzles that the EUS9 learners chose to investigate, I would suggest that most were to do with things that ‘are stable for the most part’. They were concerned with the learners’ ongoing experience of using the language rather than dilemmas about how to act in a
particular situation they had encountered. So they puzzled about their perceived inability to ‘perform’ their grammar knowledge, their tendency to lose concentration when listening, and to feel nervous when speaking to others. Perhaps one example that might initially be classed as less stable was ‘team 3’ speaking Chinese, although through their investigations, it became clear that this was also ‘for the most part stable’ as it was a common occurrence in all classes.

10.8.3 Exploratory Practice and gnoseology

We said that EP was perhaps unique in including the learners as key developing practitioners in their own right (1.2), setting their own agenda, exploring the questions that arise from their experience as language learners, and seeking understanding of those questions. Developing praxis requires that all be involved, that there is no division of labour between ‘knower-researchers and the known-researched’ (Eikeland, 2012: 9). This is at the ethical heart of EP, of including all in the work for understanding, and making sure that everyone has the opportunity to learn and develop their own praxis. Here then, I wish to explore ways in which EP might be both challenged by and challenge my framework.

The first two principles of EP (1.1.2) are about understanding the quality of classroom life. I unpacked and developed those terms in Chapter 2, traced them throughout Part II and have exemplified them with specific instances from the data in the first part of this chapter; there is a direct link between the first two principles of EP and my gnoseology framework. But does EP’s notion of understanding sit comfortably within the whole framework, or does it foreground one particular way of knowing over the others? In 2.3.2, I suggested that a better translation of the Greek word episteme was understanding, and the emphasis in EP is certainly on prioritising understanding over unintelligent change (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 282-283; Allwright, 2003: 129), which would also seem to be borne out by my data which is primarily theoria orientated (10.2). EP, like all the ways of knowing in the framework, begins in our experience (the EUS9 learners’ puzzles), and then engages in inquiry and dialogue together to come to a shared understanding of our praxis (theoria). EP then, like theoria and dialogue is not action focused, but rather offers the opportunity for skhole within the practice setting itself; the chance to go ‘back-stage’, removed from the pressure to perform, and reflect on our ‘on-stage’ performance as language learners and teachers. Just as theoria might then move back down into praxis, so might the understanding that comes through engaging in EP filter into our practice, changing the way we think and act. As Hanks (2013: 218) says about her own explorations of using EP in an EAP setting, ‘change was, in fact, an inevitable part of the process’. My data seems to confirm
this: doing learner-research changed the way the learners thought about themselves (Antonia, 10.2.3; Annie, 8.7.11; Mason, 8.6.3); about performing (Kan, 10.4); about others (Eshrag, 10.5); about teaching and learning (Vesper, 9.3; Kan, Zeno and Bert 9.3); and about IELTS (Vivi, 8.6.2).

It seems to me then that EP finds its greatest synergy in episteme through praxis, dialogue and theoria. And yet, it is here that the link to QoL within the framework is more tenuous. Yes, all inquiry is about learning how to live well, and yet it is in phronesis, in the act of living well, that it is fully manifested. EP is not primarily concerned with ‘practical deliberation about “what-to-do”’ although that is sometimes an offshoot of the EP work, but in asking questions about “what-this-is”, or “how-is-this-rightly-understood” (Eikeland, 2008: 362), without pressure or even intention to act. It is more concerned with episteme than phronesis.

This begs questions about the relationship between EP and theory. We have said many times that episteme is concerned with things that are for the most part stable, things which through dialogue we can articulate as understandings (theoria). But how permanent are these understandings? Allwright and Hanks (2009: 153) suggest that because ‘life is continuous and dynamic [,] our understandings are therefore always going to be provisional, at best, and valid only briefly, if at all’. This statement seems to reflect the data presented in this thesis; Chapter 9 described how few of the ‘understandings’ about the puzzle itself had stayed with the learners. Can theoria then be a temporary and fleeting understanding, or is it by necessity something more concrete, albeit one that can then be subjected to further inquiry and dialogue?

Perhaps it is both. We need to remember that in theoria, there is no distance between the knower and the known. In this sense, our theories are embodied and enacted by us as individuals and/or a collective. As we build our understandings, as they move back down into our praxis and become part of our habitus (habitual practice), they become integral to our being and doing. The things that stayed with the learners (more confidence in speaking, better writing skills and so on) had in a sense all become part of their praxis as language learners and were consequently more enduring. However, I believe there is the possibility that when understandings are opened up to further dialogue with other members of the practice community (for example the learner conference), theoria might be challenged, rethought, or temporarily abandoned, and thus appear more temporary. There are hints of this in some of the final reflections that refer to the learner conference (Jake 8.6.3).
Key to building *theoria* is dialogue (2.3.3, 10.2.3). Dialogue begins in our experience, as we bring those things that puzzle us from our *praxis* and explore the what, how and why of things, individually and collectively. I suggested earlier in this chapter (10.2.3) that dialogue itself is a synonym for the inquiry process, and I see a strong resemblance between dialogue and the work for understanding in EP. Throughout Part II and the first part of this chapter, we have seen examples of how dialogue works: distinguishing similarities and differences (10.2.1); revealing the unknown (10.2.2); making the tacit explicit (Bert’s tendency to revert to the familiar, 7.3.3; Monzer’s attitudes to reading, 6.4); challenging assumptions and beliefs about learning (Vesper, 9.3), about thinking (Jake, 8.6.3); about isolation in learning (Bert, Pete and Boris, 6.3.1); reflecting (whole class after ‘crunch point’ 7.1); sorting and sifting (patterns of language use, 6.3.5; Jake’s habits in learning and life, 8.2); defining excellences (Kan’s approach to presentations, 10.4). Dialogue is key to understanding and I wonder whether this might be a helpful way of conceiving what it means to work for understanding in EP for reasons I explain below.

One of the recurring challenges of doing EP with learners, as evident in this thesis, my own previous work (Dawson, 2012) and in much of the EP literature (see 2.4 for examples), is the insidious pull towards finding solutions, and the concern that this reflects a technical, problem-solving approach or perhaps inhibits the search for deeper understanding. While I believe the pull towards solutions did to a certain extent curtail deep understanding among the EUS9 learners (4.6.1 for example), I have also been pleasantly surprised by how few examples of pure *techne* I could actually find in my data. However, the challenge is very real and Hanks (2013: 111) suggests that to combat that one needs

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\text{to successfully convey the difference between problem-posing and puzzling, and to give enough time for a problem to transmute into puzzlement.}
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I would suggest that one practical way to do that would be to focus on dialogue, on what dialogue does and how; the ways in which it looks for similarities and differences, defines, reveals underlying assumptions and beliefs, and so on. I did not explicitly focus on dialogue in my approach to the EP work with EUS9, but having seen some of the latent ways in which dialogue is at work in my data, I suggest that a clearer emphasis on dialogue might be helpful.
However, I also see two sticking points with regards to this suggestion. The first is to do with EP’s preference for ‘why’ formulated puzzles. While I agree, for reasons given in 2.4.1, that an initial use of ‘why’ questions is a pragmatic choice for language learners, it is certainly true that other formulations also engage with curiosity and puzzlement (2.4.1). This is perhaps most apparent in the further puzzlement suggested by Bena (‘what is the main factor that enable people to pick up language really easily?’), and Antonia (‘how should students allocate their time for class and practice?’), and yet even where the puzzles became framed as ‘How can we improve …?’ (Figures 22 & 24), we have seen that the understandings generated were not pure technē. Dialogue does not only ask why, but also asks what things mean and what things are, what is similar and what is different, as well as how things work, how they interact, how different actions are understood by different people. Perhaps encouraging the learners to explore what dialogue does and how they might engage in that sort of dialogue in their inquiries would help promote a genuine attitude of curiosity, which according to Hanks (2013: 238) is the most important thing.

The second has to do with understanding that is ‘too deep for words’ (Allwright, 2005a: 359). Dialogue is very much about articulating our insights and reifying our understandings through ‘naming’ (Wu, 2004: 318). Yet both Wu and Allwright suggest that some understandings cannot be articulated, even though they might be the most profound understandings of all, understandings that can be lived (Allwright, 2005a: 359; Wu, 2004: 322). There is no area of Aristotle’s gnoseology that seems to explicitly invite this sort of understanding, and here EP challenges the framework, underlining a potential limitation, which I discuss further in 11.4.

Another possible limitation, or aspect that to my mind remains fuzzy, relates to QoL, and here I believe both EP and my framework are challenged. QoL as conceptualised in the current EP literature seems to be concerned with the here and now, and this certainly resonates with Aristotle’s definition of eudaimonia as being (the state of living well) and doing (the practice of living well). QoL is not something we work towards and hope to achieve in the future but something we live in the present through being and doing; the end is also the means. Yet the data suggests that we do not always see the ‘results’ of our work in terms of enhanced QoL until later. This is a longer-term vision of QoL, one I believe Chapter 9 testifies to. It is true that we need ‘understandings now’ (Allwright, 2005b: 27), but it is also true that the seeds planted through the work for understanding may take time to grow and flourish (Dawson, forthcoming). There seems to be an embedded tension here between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’; QoL as
present experience and QoL as future possibility. I believe the potential implications of this view require further perusal and exploration.

Before I leave this section, a brief note on the relational nature of knowledge and the EP principles, especially those referring to collegiality (Principles 3-5). In Chapter 2, I proposed that all knowledge is relational: there is a relationship between the knower and the known, between the person doing the activity and the activity itself. The EP principles are also relational, grounded in a belief that ‘learners [and teachers] are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 5). Hence, it is not just the relationship between the knower and known that is important, nor the relationship between the different forms and ways of knowing, but also the relationship between all those seeking to understand. This is highlighted in my second RQ that speaks of individually, collaboratively and collectively generated understandings. As we have seen in the data, these categories are not mutually exclusive. The individual understandings as expressed in the individual reflections and final reports were influenced by collaboration within the groups. In turn, those individual and collaborative understandings were built on information gleaned from other learners during the period of data collection and the final presentations; understandings derived from the collective of language learners (and teachers). The collaborative understandings seen in the group reflections and poster presentations represent a process of discussion, agreement and possibly compromise (seen when comparing group and individual understandings, for example Bena, 8.7.1) on group priorities. The collective understandings of the EUS9 learners, both individual and collaborative, are depicted by myself in this thesis. Thus, there is a relational underpinning to all the work represented here.

However, as the data illustrates (8.6.3 for example), working together for mutual development and understanding is not necessarily straightforward, especially when it involves group work, which is so much a part of EP. In fact, for Hanks (2013) and the teachers in her study, collegiality equated to working in groups and pursuing shared puzzles, and yet she asks whether group work is a necessary part of the process. Are there ways of being collegial that do not involve working in groups?

(Hanks, 2013: 252).
She is referring to the practices of EP, and group work was a significant part of the process with the EUS9 learners too. However, if the understandings generated are individual and collective as well as collaborative, then perhaps the focus on collegiality as collaboration through group work becomes less significant. I suggest the important thing is that time and space are provided for individual and collective dialogue.

10.9 Concluding remarks

What is clear I believe from the exposition above, especially when read in conjunction with the account of Part II, is that both knowing and understanding are multidimensional, dynamic and fluid, as is the way we practise and use those understandings. We can’t reduce teaching and learning to a set of skills or transference of knowledge (Kristjánsson, 2005: 469) for a specific end (techne), but I would contend that neither can we reduce every decision made in teaching and learning to phronesis as some would argue (D. Carr, 1995a: 323-324), not least because the ability to act phronetically is in part developed through dialogue, theoria and praxis. I believe that my gnoseology framework provides a potentially useful tool for exploring the knowledge generated through practitioner research and I expand on that more fully in the final chapter.
Chapter 11  Final concluding remarks and contributions

This final chapter builds on Chapter 10 as it offers a discussion of my third research question, showing how the insights gained from the process of learner-research and the understandings generated contribute to our understandings of the way EAP learners on a high-stakes course make meaning of their language learning lives. It also complements Chapter 10 as an exposition of the contributions I believe this thesis makes to knowledge and serves as a conclusion of the main findings and remaining questions.

11.1  Learners as ‘key developing practitioners’

One of the key propositions in this thesis is that learners be viewed as ‘key developing practitioners’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 2) in their own right. In 1.2.1, I argued for that view in the context of today’s globalised society alongside both a right and responsibility for learners to become transformative individuals (Johnson, 2006: 248), and suggested that the activity of research might be one way of enabling this. These views raise questions that need to be addressed in the light of the evidence presented in this thesis: Did engaging in learner-research through EP facilitate any form of transformation in the learners of EUS9, and if so what did that transformation consist of? How do we understand the activity of research as undertaken by the learners in this context? What limitations, if any, are there to that view?

To attempt to answer these questions, I return to my conceptualisation of the learner-research hyphen space (1.4.2). By hyphenating the person (learner) and the process (research), I intended to create a dynamic and creative space where the possibilities for learners engaging in research could be explored. I now wish to take a closer look at those possibilities, but firstly, a few words about the activity of research as undertaken by the EUS9 learners.

In section 1.4.2, I defined the process of research for the purposes of this thesis as ‘systematic (i.e. planned rather than spontaneous) inquiry (in the Deweyian sense of thinking with a purpose that originates in perplexity or puzzlement) that seeks to understand and then disseminate (tell others) what has been discovered’. The focus of the research from the learners’ perspective was their puzzles about their language learning lives. Having decided what they wished to inquire into, planned how they would do that, collected and analysed the data that would help them
understand, and then presented their findings to others through the group presentation and to a lesser extent, the final report, they carried out research activity as defined above. It was not Research as defined and validated by the academy, but nonetheless, I would argue it was research. I do not argue this on the basis that the activity undertaken by the students complies with my definition of research (although I believe it does): that would be insufficient in itself. Neither do I argue on the basis that it conforms to the varied and disputed criteria present in the literature to authenticate and validate practitioner research (see for example Anderson & Herr, 1999; Furlong & Oancea, 2008; Mockler, 2014; Nunan, 1997); the processes of data collection, analysis and reporting by the learners presented in Part II of this thesis do not comply with the standards of ‘quality’ as defined by any or all of these authors (see also 5.8.1). Rather, I argue for it as research as understood through a transformative and ethical lens.

In Chapter 1, I cited Appadurai’s (2006) radical call for research to be seen as a right of democratic citizenship. He argues that research needs to be deparochialised; rather than be confined to certain privileged groups, it should be made available to more people. Appadurai (2006: 167) himself defines research as:

a specialised name for a generalised capacity, the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet.

He also links this to the demands of an increasingly globalised economy and the importance of research as ‘part of everyday life in the contemporary world’ (p.176). The purpose is not to generate new knowledge but to develop the understandings and necessary knowledge to live well and function as democratic citizens in the world: it is a call for all to develop their own praxis with the aim of enhancing the quality of life of their own lives and the lives of those around them (eudaimonia). In this sense, it is transformative.

In 1.2.1, I distinguished between a teacher’s personal and professional transformation, citing Johnson’s (2006) belief that it is through developing a culture of inquiry that teachers can begin to question their own beliefs, assumptions and practices, as well as the social and political contexts in which those practices are situated. I also suggested that we might want to consider learners as ‘transformative individuals’, again linking this to Appadurai’s (2006: 176) view that research can give learners the ‘capacity to aspire’. In this sense, I believe the success or otherwise of this research for the EUS9 learners should be judged by the extent to which it was personally and collectively transformative. Perhaps a note of clarification is necessary here:
transformation is not necessarily radical and obvious, but rather evidenced by ‘small and subtle shifts in perception or understanding that in themselves signal change’ (Benesch, 2012: 52), or the ‘little shift ... from the fragile security of given knowledge to the robust uncertainty of emergent awareness’ (Edge, 2001: 4).

What transformations then are evident in the data? Both collectively and individually, perhaps the most obvious was an increased confidence in their willingness and ability to communicate with others. In their words, these ‘others’ included students, strangers, foreigners and native speakers. Self-confidence is one of many variables said to contribute to a second language learner’s ‘willingness to communicate’ (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998). In the data, lack of self-confidence is linked to both anxiety (Boris 4.3.3; Mason 4.4.2), and perceived language competence (Bert 4.3.1; Vesper 4.4.1). The research activity encouraged social interactions (6.2.1) and they began to lose their fear, gaining in confidence (8.6.1), perhaps also enhanced by a growing sense of solidarity within the community of language learners (Bert, 8.6.3; also 6.3.1). Additionally, it showed them the importance and benefit of sharing their struggles with others and receiving help and support (6.3.4), a concept so central to EP’s principles relating to collegiality:

Principle 3 Involve everybody
Principle 4 Work to bring people together
Principle 5 Work also for mutual development

(Allwright, 2005a: 360)

There is evidence in the sequel (9.2) to suggest that this was not just a one-off, situated confidence boost, but comprised a longer-term increase in confidence. This is quality of life that extends beyond the present classroom setting enabling the learners to continue as being doing (and knowing) practitioners within the wider context of their lives, social interactions and learning. Quality of life is not just about how we are living now, but about our development as ‘beings of the praxis’ (Freire, 1970/1996: 106).

However, this was not a ‘success story’ for all students. Engaging in learner-research, as is abundantly clear from Part II, not only opens portals of possibility, but also sites of contestation. What is also clear is that these spaces shift and change as what it means to be a learner who does research is negotiated and renegotiated between learners, between teacher and learners, and by each individual learner. What is contested territory for one person might be a portal to
new possibilities for another. Similarly, an initial site of contestation might over time metamorphose into one of growth and expansion (for example, Bert and Bena 9.3). In this sense, the observations made in this section cannot be taken as blanket applications applicable to all the EUS9 learners and therefore generalisable to all other such learners. Rather, they should be seen as snapshots of both the potential and difficulties for learners of engaging in inquiry in such a high-stakes EAP course.

Recognising learners as practitioners and asking them to set the agenda by deciding what puzzled them and which puzzle they would like to explore, challenged the more traditional role of both teacher and learners. I needed to make a subtle shift from a position of apparent control, to one in which the learners themselves would take the lead (Hanks, 2015a). The learners in turn were asked to step out of their comfort zone, out of a ‘normal class’, and explore different ways of learning and being in the classroom. This was not always easy, and as we have seen, was not embraced by all learners at all times. Some of the learners, notably Vivi, Orlan, and Monzer, and others to a lesser degree, seemed reluctant at times to accept the autonomy and responsibility necessary for the activity of learner-generated inquiry, although their relationship with the puzzle work was never simple or unambiguous, but rather complex and full of contradictions. Perhaps what I was asking of the learners through the puzzle work, involved too much change too quickly for some destabilising their (usual) way of being and doing in the classroom; their taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about how to teach or learn successfully.

(Jin & Cortazzi, 2006: 9)

There is maybe a sense of ‘security in conformity’ (Freire, 1970/1996: 30); of continuing in the beliefs and practices borne from our experiences (Borg, 2003). Perhaps too, our willingness to explore new ways of being and doing is not only conditioned by our past, but also resides in our future and the extent to which our present experiences are perceived as contributing to our imagined and desired futures (Norton, 1995). This perspective may explain why some, such as Eshrag, Kan, Bena, Spring and Zeno, seemed to progressively thrive on the puzzle work, growing as independent, flexible and reflective learners, able to question their own actions and ways of thinking, plan for their own learning, and see benefits for their future careers. For yet others, like Jake, Mason, Annie, Leo and Bert, it seemed to be a rocky journey towards self-discovery, of a latent awareness of their own habits, weaknesses and preferred ways of doing things. Some,
notably Vesper and Kan, noted either retrospectively or at the time how it had expanded their understanding of the different ways in which learning can take place. I believe all these examples are evidence of small shifts in perception and understanding, signifying some transformation and justifying the view that learners can and should be taken seriously as practitioners of their own learning.

Are there any limitations to this view? I do not believe that the contested areas that emerged during the course of EUS9 warrant either a total or partial rejection of the idea of learners as practitioners. Even in the midst of doubt and tension, there was evidence of assumptions and beliefs being challenged: Jake’s growing awareness of his attitudes to life not just learning (8.2), Vivi’s shifting beliefs about the purposefulness of IELTS writing task 1 (8.6.2), and so on. However, there were two major, but related challenges that I have referred to consistently throughout Part II: the challenges of relevance and expectations. I wish to expand on these now from the perspective of Exploratory Practice as both pedagogy and methodology.

### 11.2 Exploratory Practice

In the work described in Part II, the learners’ need for the EP work to contribute to their immediate goals seemed to take precedence over working for understanding. While I agree with Hanks (2013: 225), that relevance should be accounted for within the EP principles, possibly as part of a central web alongside understanding and quality of life, it also seems to me a trickily subjective notion. Based on the evidence presented in this thesis, I believe it is intrinsically related to expectations, and that means that both learner and teacher expectations will play a large part in the perceived relevance of the EP work; and ‘expectations are a powerful force’ (Bennett, 2003).

My own expectation of the EP work, based on previous experience and examples of similar work in the literature (Dawson, 2012; Hanks, 2013; Salvi, 2012) was that it would be thought-provoking, challenging and beneficial for the learners in terms of both their language and general development. My journal had many references, even around ‘crunch point’, to my deep-seated belief that the EP work was worthwhile, and I exercised my judgment (phronesis) as an experienced professional about what I believed was best for them (Widdowson, 1987: 86). However, the learners’ expectations, which I have referred to repeatedly through Part II (see for example 4.8.1; 9.4), did not always coincide with mine. Perhaps I was too focused on my own
objectives, which included the need to get data for this thesis, rather than fully empathising with the expectations of the students. Perhaps I was guilty of ‘being trapped in my own theories of action’ (Eraut, 1995: 20, citing Argyris & Schön, 1974). Perceiving one’s blind spots and fathoming one’s own motivation and actions is a difficult process, one where dialogue is crucial, and yet at the time I believed I was making wise decisions (phronesis), based on my understanding of the situation.

The learners too arrived in class with expectations of what the EAP classes, living in the UK, and later the puzzle work could do for them. I noted that some wanted a ‘magic solution’ to their perceived problems in English (for example Bert, 4.3.1), and at ‘crunch point’ they vocalised their dislike and disappointment that neither the classes nor the puzzle work were fulfilling their expectations and were not relevant to their goals, which were clearly stated as being their improved IELTS score (7.1). From the LLAs and self-introductions in the wiki, through the reasons given for choosing their puzzle, reflections on the puzzle work, and their weekly learning logs, IELTS seemed ever present. It seemed to inspire often negative emotions and beliefs: fear (Leo, 8.6.2); frustration and despondency (Jake, 4.5.2; Bena, 4.3.4; Pete, 4.3.5); lack of self-esteem and self-belief (Antonia, 4.5.1; Bena, 4.3.4); nervousness (Leo, 4.6.2); desperation (Orlan, 8.7.4); parental disappointment (Boris, 8.1). Yet it also held promises of happiness and success as the means by which they could enter the British academic community, perhaps their ‘imagined community’ that was as yet inaccessible (Kanno & Norton, 2003: 241), and achieve their goals. IELTS was a ‘sticky object’ around which both ‘good and bad feelings accumulate’ (Ahmed, 2010: 44), drawing learners towards it because of the promises it held, yet also provoking many negative emotions.

The high-stakes nature of the course, the external and self-imposed time pressures, the power of IELTS and the complex emotions circulating it, all influenced learner expectations. Norton (2001: 170) contends that if there is a disjuncture between teacher and learner expectations, the learner may choose the route of non-participation. I believe there were various instances of non-participation in the nine weeks I spent with EUS9, some overt and others more covert; an attempt by the learners to ‘keep alive [their own] vision of possibilities’ (Canagarajah, 2004: 134), when they questioned the ability of the teachers to help fulfil them. These included missing class when they had an approaching IELTS exam, doing their own IELTS study in class (7.1.3), and not completing the final report. Perhaps there is a danger inherent in the classroom for both teachers and learners that expectations and goals are so set (consciously or
unconsciously), that they are not completely open to negotiation. However, an acknowledgement of this possibility, an awareness of the different power relations at play, and how the open-endedness and ambiguity which is so much a part of EP might challenge that, is crucial when encouraging learner-research within the EP principles in a course such as EUS9. It would seem then that expectations and relevance go hand in hand, and both need to be accounted for within the EP principles or the wider EP framework.

Also, enmeshed in this discussion of expectations and relevance, was the clash between the perceived need for quick and substantial improvement in the EUS9 learners and the nature of puzzlement in EP as a curiosity-driven search for understanding. What felt like a constant battle to get them to focus on understanding from my perspective became the focus of my own puzzles: ‘why is the pull of solutions so attractive to learners? and ‘why do they insist on using problem as a synonym for puzzle?’ The rest of this section concerns issues connected to these two puzzles.

The first puzzle relates to the different understandings of relevance (Hammersley, 2004) that I suggested in 2.2.3, where I distinguished between intrinsic relevance, resulting from a genuine curiosity about why something is, which seems more closely aligned to the EP notion of puzzlement and puzzling, and imposed relevance, which seems more concerned with the immediate and urgent. I believe many of the initial puzzles in this study reveal an imposed relevance rather than an intrinsic one, undoubtedly intensified by the pressures of the forthcoming IELTS exam and the possible consequences of failure, and this is one possible explanation of why the pull towards solutions was so strong. However, this is not unique to this study as I noted in 2.4.1 (see also Hanks, 2013; Salvi, 2012), and seems to be something of an elephant in the room for EP, raising questions about the relationship between understanding and problem-solving.

Throughout Part II, we saw how readily the learners moved towards a problem-solution framework. However, the analysis and discussions of Chapter 10 show that the understandings developed by the learners were much broader, and more multifaceted and interrelated than I had expected. Perhaps then, the problem-solution language, which the learners used to describe the process, masked the reality. Although I would still hold to the ideal of encouraging, enabling and persuading students to refrain from jumping to quick solutions, perhaps a broader view of understanding as conceptualised in my gnoseology framework helps to explore the depth and
breadth of the understandings produced through practitioner inquiry, even when they do appear to be more problem-solution orientated.

I believe there are two implications to this idea. Firstly, it challenges our definitions of improvement, which in the EP literature is often collocated with measurable (Allwright, 2005a: 353; 2005b: 25) and has connotations of techne and problem-solving. There is certainly an expectation in the EP literature that puzzlement produces deeper understanding than problem-setting (Allwright, 2005a; Hanks, 2013: 202). If improvement is understood purely as a means to an end, as a way to increase the efficiency of our teaching and learning, then perhaps these explanations hold. However, if improvement is understood in terms of *praxis*, of moving from novice to expert, as a way of generally developing and becoming better at what we do as individuals and as a collective through submitting every aspect of our practices to dialogue for the development of insight and understanding, then I advocate it is as something to be embraced, perhaps even desired.

The second implication then relates to the role of dialogue in EP. I discussed this within the context of the frequent framing of puzzles as ‘problems-to-be-solved’ by the EUS9 learners (10.8.3), and referenced examples in my data of what dialogue does. There I suggested that seeing the work for understanding as one of dialogue might help foment the genuine attitude of curiosity that EP seeks. The question then is whether this suggestion might sharpen our thinking around what it means to work for understanding in EP. The role of dialogue in inquiry is not confined to Aristotle. For Freire (1970/1996: 69), dialogue is ‘an existential necessity’ for transformation, and like Wu (2004), ‘naming’ is a key part of this process as ‘the language that brings understanding into interpretation and manifestation’ (Wu, 2004: 309). For Farrell (2015: 123), dialogue is a key part of his definition of reflective practice. Many of the examples from the EP literature cited in this thesis suggest that dialogue between teachers and learners, between teachers, or between learners themselves has been key to the work of understanding. In this thesis, the ‘answers and solutions’ that many claimed to have found, came through the process of individual and collective dialogue. I believe dialogue is already part of much EP work, and I suggest that by foregrounding the role of dialogue, by focusing on a *theoria*-orientated and *praxis*-rooted notion of working for understanding we might move some way towards a more robust conceptualisation of what it means to work for understanding in EP.
With regards to my second puzzle above, which concerns the use of the word ‘puzzle’ and its associated connotation with solution, I offer a pedagogical possibility. Despite toying with various alternatives, such as ‘curiosities’ (Hanks, with Fay & Dawson, forthcoming), or ‘puzzlement’ (Hanks, 2015b), I made the pragmatic decision to stick with ‘puzzle’ and explain its EP meaning rather than use what I considered a less accessible word for A2/B1 level learners (2.4.1). However, the learners - as I have often noted (see also Kuschnir & Dos Santos Machado, 2003) - have a tendency to translate all words even when they apparently understand the meaning. To understand more fully what sort of translation the students would find if they put this in a bilingual dictionary, I spoke to a Chinese colleague at the university (given that the majority of the class was Chinese). She confirmed the connotation of the word puzzle as something to be solved and made the following very helpful pedagogic suggestion:

If you want to emphasize the understanding dimension of it, how about use the Chinese word 疑惑 (yi huo) which means questioning and trying to understand something which is difficult to understand.

The dictionary translation of 疑惑 in English is 'doubt'. But 疑惑 carries less negative implications than 'doubt' (that’s what I [Zhuomin Huang] feel) and gives more emphasizes on the unsure and uncertain sense of understanding something. If you search for 'puzzled face' on google image, you will see pictures like the example below. If you google the Chinese word 疑惑, you will also find similar pictures. So I guess 疑惑 is close to what you mean by 'puzzle' in English and may hopefully enable your students to pay more attention on the understanding aspect rather than the problem-solving one.

(Personal email correspondence with Zhuomin Huang, used with permission)

I would certainly adopt this strategy in future, and it would be interesting to see if this helped mitigate against the use of problem as a synonym for puzzle, an interesting area for further inquiry. However, as I intimated above, perhaps the linguistic terminology is the presenting issue only and what is needed is a firmer theoretical grasp of the nature of understanding, a broader view of how developing understandings are interrelated, a more robust conceptualisation of the process of working for understanding, and an acute awareness of the relationship between learner relevance and learner and teacher expectations.

11.3 Gnoseology in practitioner research

I have devoted much space in this thesis to the development of my gnoseology framework. In this section, I wish to summarise some of these conclusions, clarifying what I believe are its contributions to understanding ‘understanding’, and its usefulness for analysing, examining and describing not only different types of knowledge and ways of knowing generated through
practitioner research, but also the interconnections and relationships between them. I also look for connections between my framework and current conceptualisations of knowledge in the wider practitioner research literature as expounded in Chapter 1.

My contention throughout has been that a more nuanced understanding of knowledge is necessary and I have challenged both traditional and postmodern views of knowledge by illustrating through my data the interrelated and relational aspects of different ways of knowing. Rather than some ways of knowing and understanding being ‘better’ than others, or conversely, all having equal value, I believe, as illustrated by the developing understandings of the EUS9 learners, they are mutually dependant. Each has its role to play, at times sequentially, at other times concurrently. Their boundaries are fluid rather than fixed, and movement in and between them is likewise fluid. This is the interconnectedness of things, and it is this interconnectedness that produces contradictions, ambiguities, and uncertainties as well as revealing links, associations and consistencies. Aristotle’s work itself is not free of contradictions and ambiguities, as he sought to describe and define the various types of knowledge.

Although I believe my presentation of Aristotle’s gnoseology as presented in my framework and expounded throughout this thesis is new, the ideas it contains are not. I believe it judicious at this point then to clarify how my gnoseology framework builds upon, fits within, and thus potentially contributes to, the wider practitioner research literature. Action Research itself (and thus practitioner research) can be traced back to Aristotle, with its modern articulations stemming from the philosophy of John Dewey (Burns, 2005: 57). I believe Dewey’s ‘reflective thought’, which was then taken up and reinvented by Schön (1992: 123) in his idea of ‘reflective practice’, resonate with aspects of the gnoseology as discussed above. Although Dewey was no fan of Aristotle, accusing him of foisting on us an elevated view of science over human action (Dewey, 1967: 48), his theory of inquiry is actually remarkably similar to moving up from praxis, through dialogue to theoria. Reflective thinking begins in our experience, in our praxis, when we begin to doubt, hesitate, feel perplexed or unsure (Dewey, 1933: 12). This is followed by ‘an act of searching, hunting, inquiring’ (p. 12), of ‘active, persistent and careful consideration’ (p.9) of what we think we know, in other words, a process similar to dialogue. The goal is to unravel and sort out (p.5), to articulate what we know, a form of theoria.

Schön’s (1983) reflective practice also shares some similarities with Aristotle’s gnoseology as described above and in Chapter 2. He describes the everyday, intuitive and spontaneous practice
of a professional as a ‘tacit knowing-in-action’ (p.49), which in the gnoseology framework would correspond to praxis. He then speaks of how reflection enables the practitioner to ‘surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of specialized practice’ (p.61). This too is one of the roles of dialogue; to help move us away from uncritical acceptance of the way we do things (Eikeland, 2008: 241). Schön (1982: 62) terms this ‘reflection-in-action’, which is stimulated by divergence from the more normal and stable practice of the practitioner, causing him to question assumptions and beliefs apparent in certain types of behaviour; question his understanding of a situation; reframe a problem and so on. In other words, although never explicitly stated by Schön, he is engaging in dialogue (and perhaps deliberation) with himself about his praxis. Whether this leads to theoria is uncertain, as Schön sees reflection-in-action as ‘an ephemeral episode of inquiry that arises momentarily in the midst of the flow of action and then disappears’ (Schön, 1992).

We also see these ideas coalesce in the work of another educational philosopher, Paulo Freire. In 1.2.1, I cited Freire’s (1970/1996: 106) declaration that humans are ‘beings of the praxis’ because:

human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it.

Although Freire takes a more Marxist than Aristotelian interpretation of praxis as “‘history-making action”, that is, as action with moral, social and political consequences—good or bad—for those involved in and affected by it’ (Kemmis, 2012: 894), what is interesting is that he too highlights the role of theory and reflection in praxis. Freire (1970/1996) also speaks of the nature of dialogue, saying that a ‘true word’ needs to contain both reflection and action, because a word that does not include reflection is activism, and a word that does not include action is verbalism: ‘an alienated and alienating blah’ (p. 68). Although Freire’s dialogue is more action orientated than Aristotle’s, which stems from action rather than moves towards it, it does illustrate the importance of moving down again into praxis, from theoria. It seems to me that like my gnoseology framework, Freire brings together being, doing and knowing.

I believe there are also links between my framework and the different approaches to Action Research as classified by Burns (2005: 58) and which I referred to in 1.1.1. According to Burns’ description of each type, I would associate what she terms ‘technical’ AR as a type of theoresis...
applied through *techne*: knowledge is produced deductively using scientific techniques, with the aim of discovering laws which can then be applied to practical problems to gain the desired effect. ‘Practical’ AR seems to be more aligned to a *theoria* and *praxis*, view of knowledge, where theory is produced inductively, and aims to discover the meanings people make of their individual and collective actions. ‘Critical’ AR also seeks to produce theory inductively, engage in critical dialogue and understand the economic, social and political constraints to more democratic and equal practices, and thus also falls under a *theoria* and *praxis* view of knowledge. Yet it also seeks to perform virtuously in the contexts and situations in which it finds itself, a *phronesis*-related approach. The different approaches to AR reflect different views of knowledge, and perhaps it is interesting to note that unlike the PPP proponents, not one of these could be considered purely phronetic. *Phronesis* needs other ways including *praxis*, *theoria*, dialogue and *praxis*, to develop the necessary habits and abilities to act phronetically (Eikeland, 2008: 464).

I have established then that different aspects of my framework are already present in much thinking around practitioner research, and I would suggest it offers another possible way (if deemed necessary19) of distinguishing the similarities and differences between different approaches, by examining the types of knowledge each seeks to generate, how, and to what purpose. I now return to the different knowledge types, which while having different roles and purposes, have the same start and end point. The following diagram (Figure 27), attempts to represent some of the possible movement between the (theoretical) relationships, which should be seen as complementing my framework (Table 4).

All knowledge begins in experience (*empeiria*), and all knowledge is ultimately concerned with well-being, happiness, quality of life (*eudaimonia*). Our tacit and lived understandings in *praxis* are brought to consciousness and are subjected to inquiry through dialogue, which we then articulate as epistemic *theoria*. These understandings might then move back down into our *praxis*, becoming part of our habitual practice. *Phronesis* begins with virtues/principles and moves down through deliberation to *praxis*, the ethical outworking of the principles in our relationships with each other, which in turn feeds back into our understanding of these principles (the intellectual and ethical virtues). These may also be informed by a more theoretical understanding (*theoria*) of what these principles are generally like. As we move from

19 For a recent discussion on the necessity or otherwise of distinguishing between EP and AR see Wyatt et al. (2016).
novice to expert in the performance of our understandings, we also move from the practice arena to virtuoso performance, from \( \text{praxis}_1 \) to \( \text{praxis}_2 \). Time and space \((\text{skhole})\) to explore and engage in dialogue away from the immediate pressures of our practice settings are key to developing all forms of knowledge. \( \text{Techne} \) stands alone as a knowledge form, because it is not a \( \text{praxis} \) in the same sense as \( \text{praxis}_1 \) and \( \text{praxis}_2 \), and yet I believe the data has shown that there are links (as illustrated by the tentative arrow between \( \text{episteme} \) and \( \text{techne} \)), links which need further exploration.

These categories are theoretical ones, and yet our lives are not lived theoretically and we do not move neatly and seamlessly between categories. We do not spend the first half of our (professional) lives ‘mapping the topography’ \((\text{theoria})\) so that we can then know how to move around it \((\text{phronesis})\). Rather we live complex and interconnected lives, mapping and moving simultaneously, and therefore we also need ways of conceptualising the different types of knowledge and ways of understanding that arise from that. I believe my gnoseology framework

Figure 27. The connections and interrelatedness of knowledge
is one possible way of doing that and yet it can never explain every nuance, relationship, contradiction or ambiguity of how and what we know in real life.

However, I believe it does offer a starting point. Perhaps, also, by integrating praxis with both episteme (in theoria) and phronesis, it helps clarify the relationship between theory and practice. Praxis has long been seen as a way of bridging the so called theory-practice divide, particularly in practitioner research because ‘it captures how theory and practice inform one another’ (Johnson, 2006: 240); how they come together ‘as mindful, committed activity’ (Edge, 2011: 17).

I believe my framework offers a potential way to theorise the relationships not just between theory and practice, but between experience (empeiria), episteme, phronesis, techne, praxis, and quality of life (eudaimonia) as mediated by dialogue and deliberation. Perhaps too, this framework offers an alternative to other qualitative ways of understanding the knowledge claims of practitioners, for example narrative knowing (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Johnson & Golombek, 2011), as well as challenging others; the proponents of a praxis-phronesis only approach to research (Carr, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2001), for example.

Gnoseology is developed individually, collaboratively and collectively, in different practice settings (ranging from local to global) aiming to build the capacity and wisdom to live well and act well (EN1, 4). A gnoseology approach encourages us to bring all aspects of our experiences, all areas of our practices, from the national and institutional to the personal, cultural and relational (the ‘topography’ of our practices) and subject them to critical dialogue, dialogue that as I have reiterated many times, sifts and sorts, reveals, defines and challenges our assumptions and beliefs, our ways of being and doing.

This thesis in and of itself also represents different types of knowledge and knowledge-making between various groups of practitioners. During the main period of data collection, narrated in Part II, I engaged with the learners in ongoing dialogue, praxis, deliberation and phronesis in the practice setting of the language school, and the theoria generated in the classroom was disseminated through the learner conference (8.4) and through a teacher development session I led for our department (Dawson, 2015a). However, while the principal focus has been the learners, the thesis itself has not been co-constructed with them, and whilst I have attempted to allow their voices to be heard, it is my own authorial voice that dominates throughout in the selection, interpretation and presentation of events.
The construction of the thesis itself has taken place within different, but complementary practice settings; primarily the university, but also within the broader context of the worldwide community of TESOL practitioners, as the PhD has furnished me with time and space (skhole) to step away from one practice setting (teaching) into alternative ones. This has opened the door to a different ‘on-stage’ and ‘back-stage’ setting, where dialogue and praxis have occurred with those removed from the original context: book editors; conference attendees; supervisors; other academics; and the literature, much of which has had a theoresis orientation. Through this process more theoria has been generated and disseminated: within the wider community of language learners and TESOL practitioners the classroom generated theoria has been presented at IATEFL (Dawson, 2015a), and as a book chapter in collaboration with two of the learners (Dawson, forthcoming). In these cases, as in the language school, the theoria will be judged on its ability to resonate and engage with the experience of the practitioners who were present, or who read it (Richards, 2003: 289). This thesis is the product of theoria in the academy, although firmly grounded in the theoria of the practice setting, and will be judged by the academic community of practice on its contribution to knowledge among other things both in the examination process and as its findings are disseminated through journals and conferences. It will also be judged by the EP community as they weigh its claims and proposals against the principles. In this sense, it enters into the ‘continuously cyclical process of global and local thought and action’ (Allwright, 2003: 114) as part of the dialogue that informs the ongoing development of the EP principles.

11.4 Remaining questions

The questions that remain relate primarily to my gnoseology framework and also its relationship with EP. There are several as yet unexplored areas, and others that are underexplored. I will begin with the latter.

I have already referred to some of these underexplored areas in 10.8, and although I attempted to give some answers there, I believe there is still work to be done. There is need for further examination of the nature and practice of techne in relation to the other knowledge forms, in particular how the different actions associated with techne, poiesis (making action) and khresis (using action), work within techne, which I have not specified in my data analysis. An exploration of the possible tension between the ‘now’ and ‘not yet’ aspect of QoL might also be helpful. Likewise, an in-depth examination of how dialogue develops theoria, and how it might move
towards *techne* and *phronesis* would be helpful. This highlights too one of the limitations of the data in this study (10.2.3), which did not include recordings of the developing dialogues around the puzzle work, and which might be necessary for this type of work.

Although I have examined my data in terms of the different knowledge categories in my framework and spoken of mapping those knowledge landscapes, I have not fully explored how they might interact within what Eikeland (2008) terms the topographies of our (practitioner) lives. One way to do this, potentially providing another perspective on how these different categories of knowledge work together and/or a fruitful area for further research, would be to examine the data in terms of the different individual and collective landscapes we move in:

> the personal, practical, cultural, social, relational, emotional, institutional, intellectual, economic and other kinds of interconnected landscapes, or ‘topographies’ that we live. (Eikeland, 2008: 270)

This might involve using the concept of dialogue to uncover, define and sort the knowledge types and ways of knowing manifest in, for example, the emotional landscapes of the EUS9 learners, or their cognitive landscapes, or personal, relational and so on. Interconnections and relationships might then be revealed. Such an approach might serve to complement other areas of current research, for example an ecological or complexity perspective on language learning and teaching (Mercer, 2013; Tudor, 2003; van Lier, 2010, 2011), or that of the relationship between beliefs, emotions and identities (Barcelos, 2015). It might also contribute towards what I have highlighted as a gap in the research: the few studies that deal with identity, emotions and beliefs in relation to grammar (5.3.2) or IELTS.

With regards to gnoseology and EP, one matter that has repeatedly surfaced is the language used to express what working for understanding means in the classroom, especially the persistent use by learners in many EP studies of ‘solutions’, and connected to this, the concept of improvement. I have dealt with these issues in detail above (11.2), highlighting what I believe is the potential of conceiving the work for understanding as one of dialogue, so I merely reiterate here the need for these ideas to be further explored and tested by the EP and academic community.

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20 For more commonly researched areas in IELTS see for example, Elder & O’Loughlin, 2003; Green, 2005; Allami & Aghajari, 2014; Bozorgian, 2012.
In terms of the unexplored areas, I have not really probed the relationship between theoresis and theoria and how they work together, if at all. For example, research that is produced by ‘spectators’ would mostly be classed as theoresis, but if the product of that research then becomes part of the dialogue between practitioners that helps define, sift similarities and differences, uncover assumptions that arise from their experience and so on, then maybe it enters the realm of theoria and praxis, (as in the case of this thesis for example). Perhaps the challenge, which is not a new one for practitioner research (see for example, Borg, 2010), is how to enable that interaction on a more regular and productive basis.

While I have examined in some detail the role of dialogue in developing understanding and insight, and have proposed that it might helpfully contribute to how we conceptualise working for understanding in EP, I have not done the same for deliberation. This is partly due to the lack of data available, but how deliberation analyses and interprets, how it works alongside dialogue, and therefore how it too might contribute to understanding and QoL in EP, and practitioner research more generally, is a key area for further research. I have also dedicated relatively little space to the principles of collegiality (Principles 3-5) and issues of sustainability (Principles 6-7), although I did comment on the former in 10.8.3 in terms of the relational nature of knowledge. How sustainability might be accounted for, if at all, is as yet unexplored.

Another area is how we account for ‘understandings too deep for words’ (Allwright, 2005a: 309). In 10.8.3, I suggested there was no room to explicitly account for them in my framework. Praxis does allow for our articulated insights and understandings to move back down into and become part of our habitual practices. Yet praxis also concerns those areas of our practice that have not yet been subjected to questioning or reflection: our entrenched habits and ways of doing things, our tacit understandings. Perhaps implicitly, there is room in praxis to enact understandings that have not been articulated, but at present this view has not been substantiated, and requires further probing. Perhaps it also begs the question of what we mean by ‘understandings too deep for words’, how we know if these sorts of understandings are being developed or not, and whether those questions are even important ones to ask.
Epilogue

As I draw the thesis to a close, this epilogue takes a brief look at where we have been and where we have come to. In the prologue, I set out the personal motivations and questions which initially drove this thesis. Although none have disappeared, two have perhaps taken centre stage: questions relating to the learner as a developing practitioner and how engaging in learner-research might facilitate that development, and those relating to the nature of knowledge and its relationship with theory, research and practice in inclusive practitioner research.

Part I broadly positioned the study theoretically, conceptually and methodologically within the practitioner research literature, and more specifically in EP, taking an in-depth look at the first two principles and their relationship to gnoseology as developed in the philosophy of Aristotle. It showed how I conceived EP as both research methodology and classroom pedagogy in the context of an intensive, high-stakes EAP class. By bringing together Exploratory Practice with my gnoseology framework I united the two areas of interest above: learners engaging in the activity of research and the knowledge that is generated from that. Part II answered RQ 1 as it traced the outworking of EP in the practice of an EAP classroom highlighting both the tensions and possibilities that arose as the learners engaged in learner-research. However, answers to RQs 2 and 3 also began to surface throughout that account. Part III built on the account of Part II, taking an in-depth look at the data through my gnoseology framework, concluding that it offers a fresh and potentially powerful way of understanding the relationships between different types of knowledge (gnoseology), theory (theoria), practice (praxis) and research (dialogue) which begin in our experience (empeiria) and enable us to live wisely (phronesis) enhancing our quality of life (eudaimonia) as being doing (and knowing) practitioners of teaching and learning.

I finish with a quote by Davis and Sumara (2006: 135) who poignantly remind us of the ethical and transformative goal of our practitioner lives:

Education – and, by implication, educational research – conceived in terms of expanding the space of the possible rather than perpetuating entrenched habits of interpretation, then, must be principally concerned with ensuring the conditions for the emergence of the as-yet unimagined.
My hope is that this piece of educational research, through both its pedagogical process in the classroom and its academic product as a thesis, has in some small way facilitated the move for learners, teacher, readers and listeners into new, previously unimaginined spaces of emergent possibility.
References


Dawson, S. (2015b). *Exploratory Practice, PG Prep (EUS9), and a PhD*. Teacher development workshop, INTO Manchester, Manchester.


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doi:10.1007/978-94-007-4759-3


doi:10.1177/136216880607074613


Practitioner (definition 2) (n.d.) Oxford Online Dictionary

http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/learner/practitioner [accessed 20/10/15]


Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

The language learning lives of English for Academic Purposes learners: From puzzlement to understanding and beyond in inclusive practitioner research

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study being undertaken by a PhD student at The University of Manchester. The study aims to examine what happens when English for Academic Purposes (EAP) learners begin to investigate their puzzles about learning English.

Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

The research will be conducted by your teacher, Susan Dawson, a PhD student at the Manchester Institute of Education at The University of Manchester.

Title of the Research

The title of the research is ‘The language learning lives of English for Academic Purposes learners: From puzzlement to understanding and beyond in inclusive practitioner research’.

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of the research is to see what puzzles you have about learning English, how you investigate those puzzles and what conclusions you come to.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in the study because you are an international student who is learning English for Academic Purposes and you are in my class.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

We will do everything in class time or homework time. I will record some of our class discussions so I can use that information. I will collect some of the writing you do in class and ask if I can make a copy before I give it back to you. I will ask if I can have a copy of the recording you make of your presentation. I will ask if I can take a photo of your poster.

What happens to the data collected?

I will use the data to write my thesis. I will keep all the data safe on my computer. I will use the data to tell other people about our work at conferences and write about it in academic journals.
How is confidentiality maintained?

I will not use your name in my thesis. I will give you another name or you can choose a name you would like me to use.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part but then change your mind, you can tell me and I will not use your work in my research. If you don’t want to take part, that is no problem and you will still participate in our classes.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

No.

What is the duration of the research?

The research will begin next lesson and finish in week 9 of your course.

Where will the research be conducted?

Everything we do will take place at INTO Manchester.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

I will write about our work together for an academic journal.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions either speak to me in class or contact me by email at susan.dawson@into.uk.com. If you want to talk to someone at the university, you can talk to my supervisor, Juup Stelma: juup.stelma@manchester.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any questions about what I am doing in class, speak to me or to Diarmuid Fogarty (the Director of Studies in room 217). Again, if you would like to talk to someone from the university, you can talk to my supervisor, Juup Stelma: juup.stelma@manchester.ac.uk

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to ‘The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL’, by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.
The language learning lives of English for Academic Purposes learners: From puzzlement to understanding and beyond in inclusive practitioner research

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

1. I understand what this research is about and what data might be used. I have read the information sheet and had opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that some lessons will be audio-recorded.

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

5. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

6. I agree that my recording of my final presentation can be used in this research.

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant ____________________________________________________________________________________________ Date __________________________ Signature ____________________________________________________________________________________________

Name of person taking consent ____________________________________________________________________________________________ Date __________________________ Signature ____________________________________________________________________________________________
## Appendix 2: Data stocktake by individual and group

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<th>Antonia</th>
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(X) Present
(†) Present but withdrawn
(††) Present but retracted
(S) Present but with some reservations
(A) Present but with additional comments
(LA) Present but with less accurate data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Name</th>
<th>Puzzle</th>
<th>Expanding RQ - wiki W3 14/10</th>
<th>Designing data collection instrument and giving reasons – wiki W3 16/10</th>
<th>GR on trialling data collection instruments W4 23/10</th>
<th>Group feedback on classes W6 – 4/11</th>
<th>Group focus group feedback W6 – 6/11</th>
<th>GR on class presentations W9 25/11</th>
<th>Poster</th>
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<tr>
<td>Team Antonia and Jake</td>
<td>Why do I have so few ideas during the IELTS speaking test?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Leo and Zeno</td>
<td>How can we improve our skills in listening task?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Pete, Orlan (and Boris)</td>
<td>Why do always speak English in wrong grammar, although I know how to use grammar</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Kan, Vivi and Annie</td>
<td>Why does team 3 (which is close to the door) always speak in Chinese?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Bert, Eshrag and Bena</td>
<td>Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar, although I know how to use grammar?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Vesper, Spring and Mason</td>
<td>When I chat with foreigners, I feel more nervous and often make mistakes to organizing my sentence. Why?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X3</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Monzer</td>
<td>Why when I read a passage I understand the meaning of each words, however, I can’t understand the whole meaning?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X3</td>
<td>X3</td>
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Appendix 3: Messy, emerging lesson plans

- **Tuesday 21st**
  - HW CAE
  - write a 1 sentence summary of each paragraph
- **Wednesday 22nd**
  - Simple, complex, complex
  - count clauses
  - **PHOTOCOPY**
- **Thursday 23rd**
  - TAPE
  - Feedback
  - Learn from research
  - Own data collection instruments
  - PRINT from wiki
  - Answering questions for Julia
  - any adaptations
  - TR - make a sheet:
    - Presentation stuff if time
    - HW (trial)
    - CAE homework
    - Appendix 1 presentations
    - Feedback on trialling + formatting
    - Intro to reading a long article (check to see if I can get it with library)
  - **Reflection**
Appendix 4: Example entry from my journal in Evernote

Week 7 Day 13

Felt really nervous going into the class, as it’s not been a great few days thinking about the research and what the implications are for both me as a teacher, for them and then for the research. Get into class and they are all there. Then Viv says that I helped her with her IELTS speaking on Saturday, because she had to talk about a group work experience she had enjoyed, so she talked about their puzzle. She told them what her puzzle was, what they were doing to understand it, how it helped them by increasing their academic skills that they would need for next term etc etc!!!

So, have continued my policy today of not working on the puzzles in class, except that I left the door open to do something at the end in the LPC. So we did come, and that went well until we started listening in detail to the lecture - then half of them were falling asleep, switching off and closing their eyes. So, I decided for the last half hour that they would go and work on putting their data into some sort of visual form and treat it like an IELTS task 1 exercise and write about it. This really engaged them and I think they could have spent longer on it. Didn’t finish class till past 5.30. I did it very badly though - I need more time to talk these things through with them and we are behind schedule. One of my concerns before has been apparently superficial understandings. I wanted these students to “dig deeper”. However, all of them seem to be talking about solutions. I don’t think they listen! Actually, thinking back to last week when we were writing introductions to presentations and some of them got really confused - I think they are actually just really distracted. I think they can’t stop thinking about ELTS and are therefore not fully committed in class to what we are doing. I need them to write up their data analysis this week and then do intros and conclusions next week. I also need them to make posters and practise their presentations for the learner conference.

Monzer has also now decided that what we are doing is helpful for him! The IELTS task 1 is helpful, but because he doesn’t want to do his own puzzle, he has now asked all the groups to send him their charts etc, when they have finished and he will write about them.

I took Orlan and Pete down to speak to Dave as nobody has yet been to see him and I thought that their group particularly would find it useful. I wanted Orlan to do the taking, but apparently Pete did it.

I wonder if the students are on as much a roller coaster as I am throughout all of this?
Appendix 5: Antonia’s story in EUS9

Before you arrived in the UK ...

You grew up in North-East China and spoke non-standard Mandarin. You had no idea it was non-standard until you went to university, where you met people who spoke standard Mandarin. However, it wasn’t until you moved to Beijing and other students in your IELTS class laughed at you, that you realised how different your accent was. You tried to speak more like them, but found it very difficult.

You began to learn English in primary school and enjoyed it. You also found grammar very easy to learn in junior high school and did well in exams and at reading and writing. You got a high score in the University English test. However, these exams never tested your speaking skills and only the university exam tested your listening, so you struggled more with these skills. People laughed at your speaking when you were studying IELTS and in your first IELTS speaking test you said very little. You lacked self-confidence. This was one of the main reasons you decided to come and study in the UK, because you believed that your speaking would improve if you talked to teachers and students from other countries.

You also really like Korean as a language and culture and would have preferred to learn Korean to English, but your mother wasn’t happy with that choice, so you continued with English. You plan to study Korean in the future though. When you started this class, your main goal was to increase your confidence in speaking English.

In EUS 9 ...

I noted in my journal how you worked well in class, got on immediately with the tasks and understood quickly what you needed to do. You had a good level of English but seemed to lack confidence in speaking. You had written about this lack of self-confidence in speaking in your language learning autobiography and you also mentioned it several times in your learning logs.

When you wrote your summary of the Exploratory Practice lecture you said that it was related to the quality of language learning and that I had proposed that it was easier to understand than change language actions.

It was no surprise that you chose a speaking puzzle: “Why do I have so few ideas during IELTS speaking test? However, you recognised that having few ideas wasn’t only an issue in English, but that even in Chinese you found it hard to speak for two minutes about one thing because you felt you didn’t have enough experience or ideas. You felt that this affected your performance in the IELTS exam.

For the puzzle work, you teamed up with Jake, who also had the same puzzle. You decided to interview people, because you realised that the issue was complex as it involved both thinking and speaking elements. You asked people questions about the IELTS speaking exam; their scores, whether or not they had ideas and whether it was only the exam or generally that they found it hard to speak for a long time on one subject; which part of the exam they found the
hardest; which topics they found it most difficult to speak about; and how to solve the problem of a lack of ideas in the speaking test.

I did a tutorial with you and you said you were happy with the classes and felt you were improving. You asked if I had any advice for dry skin and I suggested you went to Boots and asked them. You did this and reported on it in your log.

After you and Jake tested your interview schedule, you decided to ask for reasons for the answers people were giving you and any evidence for their answers. You were also beginning to understand that one of the reasons you might have few ideas was because of a lack of practice.

From your weekly learning logs, you seemed to be quite relaxed. You had time to revive your old hobby of playing the guitar and were generally positive about the experiences you were having listening and speaking to local people. You were also reflecting on how you approached your learning and what you needed to change. For example, you realised you needed to research and learn vocabulary and words before you went shopping for specific products and that in reading you were slow because you often translated from Chinese to English.

You said you really enjoyed the experience of speaking to the students from the International Diploma course and were able to help them by correcting some of their questions. You enjoyed speaking to people from other countries and found that it helped your listening and speaking skills. You also began to understand more about your puzzle and what sort of practice you might need to do. People who had high IELTS speaking scores, said that they spent a lot of time chatting to people in general, particularly native speakers and that watching British or American TV programmes was also another way to help.

However, when we were doing the data analysis, I noted that you seemed bored in class and weren’t as enthusiastic as you had been. This carried on into the following week when we were doing a reading task and I wrote in my journal that you (among others) just stared at the page and didn’t seem very engaged with the learning. Was this partly because you had an IELTS exam the following week or was there some other reason?

The following week, like most of the class, you said that the puzzle work was wasting time and wasn’t helping you improve your English. In particular, it wasn’t helping you get a higher IELTS score. When I talked to the class about the feedback you had all given on the classes, you were quite vocal. You said that some of the things that had been written didn’t apply to my classes, like ‘more active and interesting’ and ‘spending too long on the same topic’. Were you just being nice? You did say you would like more games though!

That weekend you took an IELTS exam in Leeds. You were pleased with the listening part of the test, but not with the speaking. Although you felt that you managed to keep speaking (which was much better than your previous test), you didn’t think that you had answered the question very well and thought that you needed more practise on IELTS speaking topics. However, your speaking result from this test was very good. You had improved from a 4.5 to a 6.0.

Despite saying that the puzzle work wasn’t helpful, you seemed to enjoy putting your data into graph form and wrote some great descriptions of the data. When it came to making the poster
for the presentation, I think you and Jake might have disagreed a bit, but he seemed to have very strong ideas about how the poster would look and you let him get on with it.

In the reflection you wrote about writing the research report, you said that writing about the research helped you to remember not only the process of doing the research, but also it helped you to summarise what you had learnt. You also realised how it might be useful for your future university studies. The thing you found most challenging was writing the introduction and also writing in an impersonal way. In fact, you wrote your reflection in an impersonal way. I think you were practising impersonal writing! You also felt it helped you improve your academic vocabulary and accuracy in writing.

You took another IELTS exam. This time you felt both the listening and speaking went badly and you decided you needed to work harder before your next one.

In your report, you again wrote about why you had chosen the puzzle. This time, you said that you wanted to understand the reasons why this was a problem for you and also open your mind to find different solutions. You also recognised that part of the reason was the lack of opportunities to practice for everyone who is born outside of an English-speaking country. You also thought that a lack of speaking skills would stop people in general from achieving their goals.

In the discussion section of your research report, you reiterated the fact that it is difficult for those who are not brought up in an English-speaking environment, but also realised that poor vocabulary and lack of practice can affect speaking performance. You really liked the suggestions you got from teachers and you realised you needed to practice more and try and speak to native speakers. You found it very useful to think about the things that were puzzling you and have time to research them. You said that the research had changed you in a positive way. However, there was another puzzle that you now wanted to think about. If you needed to practice more and also go to class, how should you allocate your time?

In your final reflection, you said that you had developed your language and academic skills through the puzzle work, and that it had also helped you to concentrate on your main weakness and find ways to work on that. You said that doing the presentation to other classes had really helped your self-confidence and that you had also got a lot of new ideas from them about your puzzle. This was a positive finish and I think you felt as if you had improved and achieved something, even though you didn’t get the IELTS score you needed for Grad Dip.
## Appendix 6: Example data analysis for Chapter 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bert: Why I chose this puzzle...</th>
<th>Language learning autobiography</th>
<th>Listening and speaking logs</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I was talking with others I was always thinking about what to say and how to say it, I could make others understand me, but I didn’t do well in the grammar. If I wanna speak in right grammar, I may have to correct it several times. When talking, this is impossible. When I was writing, I could do better than speaking. I can find the wrong and have time to correct it. But, what can I do when I am speaking? It is hard to use the correct grammar, and there is no time to correct. How to practice this?</td>
<td>Previous learning experience</td>
<td>The way of learning was only reciting and repeating. I had to learn by this way because my teacher always gave the reciting homework to me, and I would also get a final exam. Even though learning in this way is really boring, it works.</td>
<td>Writes about speaking in social situations of mixed nationalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I am not good at speaking and writing, and my vocabulary is not enough, yet. Now, I can let others know what I wanna say, but my grammar is often wrong and the words are not exact and enough. I decide to study abroad is not only for my master, but also for the English. I wanna to speak fluent and idiomatic English in the future. So if anyone has a way of learning speaking English, please tell me. Thank you!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NB – my perception was that grammar was not the problem, but pronunciation. This is what made him difficult to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right vs wrong</td>
<td>No choice – recite and repeat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking: what and how</td>
<td>Emotion – boring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing vs speaking</td>
<td>Similar ideas expressed – although here he includes his writing as ‘not good’ lack of vocabulary and lack of grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-correction and time (lack of)</td>
<td>Vocabulary not enough and not exact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy vs fluency</td>
<td>Future imagined self as a speaker ‘fluent and idiomatic’ – linked to his reasons for studying abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs – about grammar, importance of grammar, right and wrong grammar</td>
<td>How to learn? Even though he says reciting and repeating works, he is still searching for another way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-concept as a speaker of English I’ve learnt it, but I can’t perform it – cognitive (language-as-object) and performative (language-as-performance) Benesch, p.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotions: frustration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wants practice techniques, ideas</td>
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Appendix 7: Example poster analysis

Physically largest poster – joined another piece of card, but not to double.
Perfectionists – exact colour as background to writing – also contrast colours to draw reader and delineate different sections
Lots of emailing until it was ‘perfect’ they told me
Nothing hand written
No visuals other than graphs and methodology chart

Use of original puzzle

Methodology given central space as well and logical progression to what is below

Unclear title – should be ‘where do you make the most grammatical mistakes?

Interesting choice – why this one? To show that it is a common phenomenon?

Only included response to Q2 to teachers – no response from peers.
No discussion, no ‘so what’.

Only chosen 2 questions - there were many more in the questionnaire.

Use of exclamation mark – suggests importance?
Appendix 8: Puzzles generated by EUS9

Speaking puzzles
- When I chat with foreigners, I feel more nervous and often make mistakes to organise my sentence. Why?
- Why I don’t have confidence to communicate with others?
- Why I don’t want to speak in the public?
- Why don’t I wanna talk with others in English?
- Why do Chinese people speak Chinese in class?
- Why does the team 3 (which is close the door) always speak Chinese?
- Why do students prefer speaking in their own language together?
- Why even in school of English they didn’t learn about phonetics or how to pronounce?
- Why we don’t have 30 minutes to speak with native speaker to correct language?
- Why I cannot learn the local accent?
- Why the teacher don’t correct the speaking mistake?
- Why do I sometimes speak wrong pronunciation even though I have practice many times?
- Why I cannot speak very well?
- Why my pronunciation is not good?
- Why I cannot arrange the words for speaking?
- Why do I always speak English in wrong grammar, although I know how to use grammar?
- Why do I have so few ideas during IELTS speaking test?
- Why do I speak slowly?

Writing puzzles
- Why I cannot summary the ideas in writing?
- Why my grammar for writing is not good?
- Why do I always forget some academic words in the writing exam though I know these academic words in advance?
- Why cannot I do well in the sentence of writing?

Listening puzzles
- Why I can’t pay more attention in listening course?
- Why don’t I understand meaning even if I recognise each word they’re saying during IELTS test?
- Why sometimes I didn’t distinguish some words when I listening?
- Why I feel more difficult to understand lecture or presentation?

Reading puzzles
- How can I improve my reading speed in IELTS exams?
- Why when I read a passage I understand the meaning of each words, however, I can’t understand the whole meaning?
- Why I need many time to understand reading?
Vocabulary puzzles
• Why the words are too difficult to remember?

General learning puzzles
• Why I need long time to improve my English?
• Why I feel that improving English to a higher level is too difficult?
• Why I always didn’t know how to express I think?
• Why English is really difficult for me?

Miscellaneous puzzles
• Why I don’t want to get up early in the morning?
• Why I can’t get up early?
• Why some students always want to be the winner in the games?
• Why I often have idea when I meet the problem?
• Why am I feel so hungry in the class?