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Research Article

Diversity of Intuitive Moments in L+ Practitioner Research: An Exploratory Autoethnographic Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The intuitions of teachers have been found to take a variety of forms in general education (John, 2003). However, in the field of additional language (L+) teaching, the lion's share of past work has focused on the improvisational form of intuition (e.g., Borg, 2015; Richards, 1998; Smith, 1996). Moreover, the ways in which intuition plays a role in the thinking and actions of those not only teaching but concurrently conducting classroom practitioner research remains understudied. The current paper presents an exploratory autoethnographic case study of my own cognitions across three different action research projects. An interpretive analysis retrospectively examined data from my practitioner journals written during these projects. That is, while these journals were not produced with the intention of becoming data for an investigation of practitioner researcher cognition, I anticipated that they may provide informative examples of 'intuitive moments.' By basing analysis on the different forms of intuition previously uncovered by John (2003), I was able to reconceptualize and expand the range to be pertinent to those not only teaching but also engaged in researching their own practice. In order of prevalence, six forms of intuitive moments were forthcoming: mood assessment, improvisation, problem avoidance, envisaging direction, learning opportunity creation, and student-personalized actions. In addition, my presentation of results aims to illuminate the emergence of intuitive moments as localized perceptions and adaptations situated within longer-timescale tacit understandings and experiences.

Keywords: autoethnography, intuition, journal study, practitioner research, teacher cognition

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom language teachers, let alone those concurrently engaged in practitioner research in their own educational contexts, daily encounter "a kaleidoscope of detail which may often seem confusing, contradictory, and, at times, rather trivial" (Tudor, 2001, p. 26). As teacher-researchers in Edwards and Burns' (2020) study stressed, the conduct of such research can bring overwhelming feelings of being "thrown into a tailspin" as teachers "just feel their way" after having "opened Pandora's box" (pp. 77–78). I would add the metaphor of choosing to 'juggle' two realms of education and research, but there is something insufficient in such an image. What we are 'juggling' are not inanimate balls but enterprises involving all the intricacies of human lives in development. The juggling metaphor moreover implies separation. Yet, practitioner research usually aims for a seamless interweaving of pedagogical activities with data collection opportunities (Burns, 2010; Hanks, 2017). Along with student members of the focal learning group, the practitioner researcher is also intrinsically part of the research. How is it that we navigate our way within such complex social environments, intuitively making adaptations in order to foster not only more effective educational experiences but also nuanced insights?

I have been conducting practitioner research for around 15 years, or two-thirds of my teaching career. These projects have directly concerned challenges I interpret in my teaching. In parallel, I have aimed to develop the understandings of both myself and my students about a range of psychological and social aspects of our shared context (e.g., Sampson, 2012, 2016a, 2018a, 2019a, 2019b, 2023). Particularly as regards action research, via these experiences my conception of the empirical process has evolved over time (e.g., Sampson, 2018, 2021). Although my specific research focus is more on learners than teachers, I have also occasionally reflected on the emotional and motivational terrain for myself as practitioner-researcher of being part of such projects (Sampson, 2016b, 2022). The opportunity to contribute to this special issue has thus prompted me to consider more fully the fluidity of my thinking and decision-making during the teaching-researching process.

In the current paper, I present an exploratory autoethnography looking back at practitioner journals kept during several past projects. It is my hope that by locating and sharing my interpretation of key instances of adaptive thinking, I will be able to offer some insights into the qualities and form of practitioner researcher 'intuitive moments.' Additionally, in calling for greater reflexivity in applied linguistics research, Consoli and Ganassin (2023) contend that "the 'humanness' embedded within our inquiries could be represented more fully and clearly if we openly acknowledged the complexities that characterise our research journeys from start to finish" (p. 2). While my endeavour in this paper differs from the more 'cis research' reflexivity these authors describe, I also trust that this article will illuminate the human complexity of doing practitioner research in the L+ classroom.

FLESHING OUT THE TERRAIN

Although the various approaches to practitioner research emphasize certain players, processes or aims, the teacher-as-(co)-researcher remains integral to implementing (and in some cases, steering the direction of) the inquiry. We thus need "stories of teachers proactively doing and reflecting" (Sampson, 2021, p. 415) on practitioner research – in the context of the current paper, considering thinking and decision-making over the research process. Borg's (2015) description of teacher cognition can be modified to offer a useful working-definition of practitioner researcher thinking:

> [Practitioner researcher] cognition can (…) be characterized as an often tacit, personally-held, practical system of mental constructs held by [practitioner researchers] and which are dynamic – that is, defined and refined on the basis of educational and professional [and empirical] experiences throughout [their] lives. (p. 40)

This definition appears to have much in common with Claxton's (2003) synthesis of six commonly-discussed properties of intuitive thinking. The first dimension is that it is in opposition to thinking that is abstract, logical or analytical; "a different way of knowing, one which does not rely on articulate fluency" (p. 40). This property perhaps most prominently recalls Kahneman's (2012) famous distinction between Systems 1 and 2 thinking. While both forms run in parallel, System 1 "operates automatically and quickly, with little effort and no sense of voluntary control" to "continuously generate suggestions for System 2:

impressions, intuitions, intentions, and feelings;" System 2 thinking "allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex calculations" (Kahneman, 2012, pp. 20–24). The second property is that intuitive thinking implicates a synthetic appreciation of the whole. For instance, Borg (2015) notes that as teachers gain experience, "different forms of formal and experiential knowledge function as an *integrated whole* and (…) enable such teachers to *envision* learning potential in instructional contexts, to anticipate problems and to respond (…) in ways which are both technically skilled and sensitive" (p. 328, emphasis added). Intuition also involves reframing or reconceptualization of a situation. Based on an exhaustive review of literature at the time, Borg (2015) identified improvisations in the form of departures from prepared lesson plans as a recurrent theme in teacher cognition research. The fourth aspect of intuition described by Claxton (2003) is that it is grounded in a tacit database built up via experience. With regard to language teaching in particular, Richards (1998) found that "as teachers develop their teaching skills, they are able to draw less on preactive decision-making (the type of planning that occurs prior to teaching) and make greater use of interactive decision-making as a source of their improvisational performance" (pp. 117–118). Intuitions are moreover strongly affective in tone; "trading not just in conceptual understanding, but in significance – in what matters" (Claxton, 2003, p. 41). As Tudor (2001) comments, "teachers interpret methodology and understand their own teaching situations on the basis of a variety of affective, attitudinal, and experiential factors" (p. 23). The final property is that intuitions might not be conscious but involve a feeling of rightness as a built-in confidence-rating. In this sense, intuition may be felt as "ambiguous glimmerings of understanding, not bright, well worked-out solutions" (Claxton, 2003, p. 46).

Besides such different qualities of intuition, John's (2003) study of the role that intuition plays in the thinking of novice teachers uncovered a variety of forms of practitioner intuition (Table 1).

Table 1. *Forms of Practitioner Intuition by Novice Teachers During Teaching Practicums (John, 2003)*

Form of intuition	Description
Problem avoidance	Anticipatory action such that problems themselves do not arise
Teacher interpretation	Reactive, based on teachers' personal knowledge or reading of cues from particular students and predictions of how they might react
Opportunity creation	Proactive use of situations to create opportunities for learning
Improvisation	Deliberately going off-plan and adapting reactively due to perceived failures of planned activities or challenges to learner understanding
Mood assessment	Looking for signs, such as facial expressions or movements, to judge the general class mood and adapt teaching in response

Naturally, there may be overlap between these forms. For instance, again returning to the distinct context of language teaching, Smith's (1996) seminal study of the interactions between teachers' beliefs, contextual factors and pedagogical choices revealed impromptu actions (improvisation) to be emergent from the reading of cues from learners (mood assessment, teacher interpretation). Similarly, Richards (1998) investigated language teachers' use of lesson plans and their deviations from these tools. He found that particularly experienced teachers adapted existing plans 'on-the-spot' (improvisation) to engage students and (re)gain their interest (mood assessment, problem avoidance). In a more recent autoethnographic study based on experiences teaching a specific English as a foreign language (EFL) course with undergraduates in Japan, Pinner (2019) deliberately experimented with moving away from lesson planning. He reflects that he "pushed this idea of 'flexibility versus planning' to the limit, sometimes walking into lessons with 'no idea' what he was going to teach" (p. 215). Pinner's (2019) narrative provides

a rare, very personal view of the adaptive thinking of a teacher, and indeed implicates contextualized examples of all of John's (2003) different forms of intuition.

MOVING ON TO INQUIRY

Such theorizing and empirical work reminds us that while perhaps the most recognizable form of intuition is seemingly magical, momentary improvisations, there are in tandem a variety of other forms depending on different contextual factors. Moreover, the role of experience in intuition and teacher cognition is a recurrent theme (Borg, 2015; Claxton, 2003; Richards, 1998; Smith, 1996). Indeed, as Tudor (2001) discusses, although teachers may have "certain attitudinal dispositions towards [teaching / practitioner research] and a number of behavioural preferences, these are (…) realized dynamically in response to the specifics of each situation" (p. 17 – see also particularly Pinner's 2019 study). The different forms of intuition revealed by John's (2003) work, along with one of intuition's defining properties – its underpinning by tacit understandings (Claxton, 2003) – got me to thinking: In locating such forms (and possibly others) in my own thinking and actions engaging in specific cases of practitioner research, how might their emergence be apparent via the interplay of built-up experiences and the situated moment?

METHOD

Autoethnographic Case Study

For the current inquiry, I decided to engage in an autoethnographic case study. As Stake (1995) defines it, case study can be utilized to focus on "the particularity and complexity of a single case" through which we may illuminate "its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). While such research might focus on any case of interest, autoethnographic research "provides a framework in which the researcher becomes the research subject" (Pinner, 2019, p. 63). Autoethnography explores (-graphy) experience of the self (-auto) in the context of cultural or social identity (-ethno) – in the case of the current study, my identity as a practitioner researcher. Reflection through systematic data analysis on the researcher's inner dialogue is considered a valid and valuable source to understand the particularities of lived experience (Duncan, 2004). An autoethnography is in many respects a deeply personal exploration, yet it aims to "invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 24). I thus envisaged that via unearthing the forms and qualities to intuitive moments apparent across my own projects, I might encourage other practitioner researchers to consider (and possibly share) their experiences.

Context and Data

My practitioner research journals form the data for this study. I feel that journals are suited to autoethnographic case study, for as Phelps (2005) argues:

> No-one knows the complex interplay of factors that impact on an individual, or the significance of any one factor, greater than the individual themselves. This is not to assume for a moment that the individual (…) is fully aware of all these factors, but rather that they are in a better position to understand them than anyone else. (p. 40)

I ought perhaps to provide some context about the empirical projects from which these texts were drawn. The journals were kept by myself as I conducted classroom research with non-English-major undergraduates during compulsory EFL courses in Japan. The projects were spurred by challenges I felt in my teaching, a thirst to understand more about the psychological and social experiences of my learners, and the hope that students also would be able to learn about themselves and their classmates. Table 2 presents some further basic information about each of the projects and the journals.

Table 2. *Contextual Information About the Projects via Which Data for the Current Study Were Collected*

Year	University	Students	Research focus	Journal length
2016 (full year)	Small (6,500 students), national, regional	2 classes (*n* = 47), science & tech. majors, EFL speaking & listening	L+ self & motivation, L+ study emotions	24,800 words
2019 (one semester)	Small (6,500 students), national, regional	1 class (*n* = 28), science & tech. majors, EFL speaking & listening	Humanistic education, L+ study emotions	11,000 words
2022 (one semester)	Medium (20,000 students), private, urban	1 class (*n* = 10), literature majors, EFL discussion	L+ study emotions (emotional communication with facemasks)	8,200 words

In his review of reflective writing as a source of data on language teacher cognition, Borg (2015) laments that researchers are "typically silent" in terms of explanation of the procedures via which journals are written – that is, what precisely teachers are requested to write about (p. 296). For me, practitioner research is an integral part of teaching. As a result, my practitioner journals intermesh these aspects. At times, naturally the focus shifts towards descriptions of events, thinking and emotions during the teaching of lessons in which I am also conducting research. I attempt to write directly after each lesson such that my recollections are fresh, reducing problems of recall often noted with journal studies (Hall, 2008; Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Porto, 2007). One purpose in such writing is to furnish context to data I may be concurrently collecting from learners. I generally also tend to pick up on learners who especially piqued my interest in some way during a lesson, whether directly related to my research focus, or for other potentially more mundane reasons (such as behavioral issues). At other times the focus shifts towards research, as I record incidents while conducting an intervention activity, ponderings on interpretations of data, or my questions about future directions in the research. I have no set format or length to my writing, although I make sure to record an entry after every lesson during a project.

A further, self-evident point is that my practitioner journals were not written with the explicit intention of utilizing them as research data for an autoethnography on intuition. In one sense, this post facto decision has the advantage that any intuitive moments recorded at the time were not written with cognizance of this research focus. In this way, they may be free from manipulation of content to meet a certain research purpose – writing for the researcher, so to speak (Gilmore, 2016). On the other hand, as my analysis progressed, I became aware of occasions when I noted intuitive moments but unfortunately had not provided the kind of detail that in hindsight might have added to further significant understandings.

Analysis

Criticism has been levelled at autoethnographic approaches for being used by "self-absorbed narcissists who do not fulfil scholarly obligations of hypothesising, analysing and theorising" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 37). In the current inquiry I started with the hypothesis that, in like fashion to literature focusing on teacher cognition (e.g., Borg, 2015; Claxton, 2003; John, 2003), episodes of intuition would be evident in the reflections in my journals as a practitioner researcher. That is, I considered that I would be able to uncover intuitive moments related to my identities as both teacher and researcher (although these roles would often be merged). The first stage of analysis was thus simply to read through the texts – which I had uploaded to the qualitative data management application NVivo – identifying such occasions. In doing so, I was guided by the ideas of intuition delineated by John (2003) and Claxton (2003). As I intended to investigate the forms and properties of my intuitive moments, I wrote concise definitions based on these researchers' conceptions. As I identified potential intuitive moments, I interrogated them for their consistency with the qualities of intuition from the literature. This process was iterative as I examined the journals chronologically. On occasion, I realized at a later point that a certain instance could be classified as intuitive, prompting me to go back to the start of the journals to re-read and code

similar episodes. I additionally coded reflections that I felt vital to add context to understanding moments as intuitive.

The initial coding led to just under 200 references. Guided by the definitions I had developed, I next examined these intuitive moments and classified their form and properties. Here, I made use of overlapping codes to afford exploration of patterns between ideas at a later date (Bazeley, 2013). That is, in congruence with the past literature (e.g., John, 2003; Pinner, 2019; Richards, 1998; Smith, 1996), I quickly realized that often each intuitive moment could be categorized as having a blend of forms as well as displaying numerous properties. While I started with deductively coding to the pre-defined forms and categories (Saldana, 2016), as I went through the data I also inductively developed additional codes and refined both the naming and definitions of each code.

The reader may recollect that I was also interested in understanding more about the interplay between tacit experience and intuitive moments. As I was exploring the data, I came to understand various timescales implicated in my reflections. I thus also developed a set of codes for different timescales that made sense to me as a practitioner researcher, such as short timescale processes of utterances and activities, medium timescales of lessons or a series of lessons, and longer timescales of years (for instance, my beliefs, values, and identities). The final stage of analysis for this exploratory study was thus to use the Boolean query tool of NVivo to investigate the imbricated nature of codes – which forms appeared to frequently occur together, their properties, and the interacting timescales evident in their emergence.

INTERPRETATIONS

In what follows, I divide the section around six forms of intuitive moments, ordered from most to least prevalent in my journals – see also Figure 1 for a depiction of the ratio of each form across the complete pool of data. As a reminder, my analysis was focused on classroom or research episodes as intuitive moments. Although intuition per se is the fleeting instant of decision, its qualities are defined at least in part by the situation and any action one takes or does not take. It is therefore vital to include the context, the before and the after. We cannot divorce the intuitive moment from the temporal context of action within the classroom (or research process).

I begin each description with my working definition of the form, in large part adapted from John (2003). Drawing upon extracts to exemplify the form, I add color by discussing the emergence of each in interaction with tacit understandings and some common properties revealed via analysis. In the discussion that follows, I use pseudonyms for any references to students, and at times change wording regarding contextual dimensions that might potentially allow the identification of individuals.

Mood Assessment

As Gkonou and Miller (2020) have observed, "on top of having the necessary technical methods and tools, teachers should also attend to the emotional climate of their classes, an effort which requires that they become emotionally engaged in whatever takes place" (p. 132). By far the most evident form of intuition – almost double the references of the next most prevalent – revolved around my interpretations of learner mood in the classroom. It involved mentions of behaviors such as looking for signs from students (facial expressions, attitude, body posture) to judge class mood (lethargic, receptive, engaged). In such ways, it intimated observations of what Nitta and Nakata (2021) have termed 'classroom climate,' yet additionally comprised teaching and research tactics adapted to suit these perceptions (John, 2003). As the following extract illustrates, mood assessment commonly overlapped with improvisation and problem avoidance, and dynamically evolved over the course of lessons:

> *Dead silence as students wrote their profiles individually, which I felt thoroughly uncomfortable with – and in the first lesson to boot! I may have cut things a bit short because I just felt awkward with the silence. It was with an audible sigh of relief that I changed into the teacher cloud activity. As usual, this really got their eyes sparkling, and my comments about their answers got some smiles happening. Writing it all up on the board and then going through the responses was interesting, and some of it I was able to turn into some laughs. (2019, Lesson 1)*

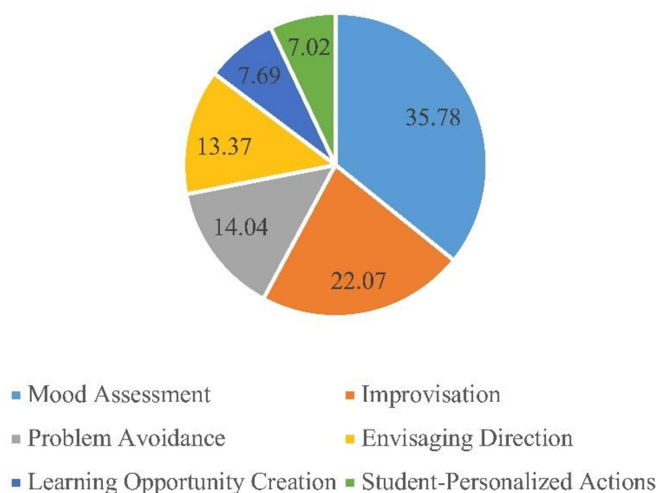
Taken from a first lesson in which I was conducting numerous ‘get to know each other’ activities, this extract reveals quite clearly a great many of the different properties associated with intuition (Claxton, 2003). My affective reactions focus overtly on a synthetic sense of the whole class (students, their). I had needed to alter my usual process of pairs writing introductory profiles together in order to save time (actually, to introduce the research at a later point in the lesson). As a result of this need, my mood assessment of the students’ “dead silence” prompted me as a teacher to feel “thoroughly uncomfortable” and “awkward.” Via this perception, I improvised in an attempt to solve the problem of such silence “in the first lesson” by cutting the amount of time I would ordinarily have spent on learners writing profiles. It seems I may have been anticipating the next activity would, “as usual,” work to create an atmosphere I felt more appropriate. In fact, my confidence in this reading – based on my tacit experiences – appears evident as I remark that “it was with an audible sigh of relief that I changed into the teacher cloud activity.” This adaptation appears to work, and my updated mood assessment that it “got their eyes sparkling” is compounded as my improvised comments on students’ responses to the activity “got some smiles happening” along with “some laughs.” In general, the extract gives a clear sense of the way in which mood assessment involved both energy-sapping and energy-giving dimensions in interaction with the dynamically co-constructed social context (Mercer & Gkonou, 2020).

As the most common form of intuition, mood assessment occurred connected with both teacher and researcher roles. It also frequently played a crucial part in my willingness to disclose more private identities:

> *Had been planning to do the second part of the messages activity, but guessed (correctly, it turns out) that there wouldn’t be enough time. After that, I went straight into LEGO. It was great again. Some students (like Rika) actually even kind of laughed in excitement when they guessed I was going to say we’d do LEGO. They looked to be having great fun, talking animatedly and laughing a lot! I let them go for a bit more time today than the previous session, so more groups also finished. It seems that this is one change-action that will be a hit! … At the end of class I had only about 2 minutes, but I explained that my children wanted me to show ‘engineers’ photos of their LEGO inventions. I guessed that this might go ok in this class, and I think the feeling I got from their reaction to the LEGO activity confirmed something. And, yes, the students were all quite kind, and smiled a lot and said “kawaii” [cute] about the models that the boys had made. Gave me a good feeling of connection with this group. (2016, Lesson 20)*

To provide some context, this extract concerns an information gap activity in which pairs or groups needed to work cooperatively to construct a simple Lego model. Once again, my writing displays a sense of wholeness connected with my perceptions of mood. Yet, in congruence with my past experiences (Sampson, 2016, 2022), it is also apparent that my noticing of the behaviors of “some students (like Rika)” has a pivotal, perhaps disproportionate impact on my mood assessment at the start of the activity. Although unclear, it seems that my observations of students’ reactions during the activity – “talking animatedly and laughing a lot” – may have played a role in encouraging me to allow the task to run longer than a previous occasion. In total, my mood assessment leads me to make a constructive prediction for one of the directions of this research: “this is one change-action that will be a hit!” It is amidst such a context – my feelings about this particular class and the fresh impressions from the Lego activity – that I decide to introduce a personal identity. Such steps have been discussed in various terms, such as the raising in talk of “transportable identities” (Zimmerman, 1998), those that would ordinarily not be invoked in a certain situation. There is also an extensive literature on teacher self-disclosure, “statements in the classroom about the self that may or may not be related to the subject content, but reveal information about the teacher that students are unlikely to learn from other sources” (Sorensen, 1989, p. 260). Research finds that such teacher self-disclosure has positive effects on teacher-student relationships, enhances student attention and understanding of content, and fosters enjoyment, interest, and engagement (see Cayanus & Martin, 2016; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2021 for overviews). Indeed, my mood assessment is once again evident as I recognize the “students were all quite kind, and smiled a lot and said *kawaii* [cute],” leading to “a good feeling of connection with this group.” (The reader might also be interested to know that after the lesson a good number of learners sent me photographs of their own Lego constructions to show my children).

Figure 1. *Percentages of Total Intuitive Moments Coded to the Different Forms*



Improvisation

As previously noted, improvisation is perhaps the most recognizable form of teacher intuition, and as such was a recurrent theme in Borg's (2015) exploration of past research into teacher cognition. In alignment with John's (2003) findings, my working understanding described moments when I deliberately moved away from my plans in a reactive fashion because the intended change-action or materials failed to work as I had been expecting. These instances additionally involved adaptations in order to better suit the needs of students as I perceived them in the moment. While I never went quite as far as Pinner (2019) in abandoning completely my teaching or research plans, the following two extracts display my instantaneous alterations to pre-planned change-action activities introduced in the same research project:

> *Finally, did a discussion activity about language learning beliefs. Students really seemed to get into this, especially when they realized, after the first iteration, that different groups had different topics about which to discuss. I changed this kind of on the fly, ending after three iterations because I judged by their faces that they'd probably had enough. I also cut it short because I wanted to have time to share ideas across the groups, so I decided to get them to summarize and do a short "presentation" of the combined opinions. Impressed with the amounts of English used here, and everyone was listening intently as each group announced their summaries. (2019, Lesson 10)*

> *I'd been wondering how to get the poster activity more interactive. I mean, a poster session is by definition at least more interactive than normal presentations, but I wanted to think of something to try to get both listeners and speakers active. This class have been great at talking with each other all semester, so I decided at the last moment to roll the dice, and instead of presenters just reporting their ideas, have listeners guess about different pictures on the presenter's poster, and then check. I think this worked pretty well, and afforded more discussion than had it just been a pure poster presentation... So, it seemed to go quite well, in the end. I was glad I tried it. (2019, Lesson 13)*

My reflections reveal another of the properties of intuition set out by Claxton (2003), a reframing or reconceptualization, most commonplace in my analysis during improvisations. Such a rethinking of my plans was partially founded in mood assessment, as in the first extract in which I "changed this kind of on the fly (…) because I judged by their faces that they'd probably had enough." Equally evident in this extract is that improvisations also intersected with problem avoidance –

I drew on my tacit experience to discern that continuing the activity further would have perhaps overdone things. One of the primary qualities of improvisations was however a sudden realization that adaptation of my plan might better create learning opportunities. In the first extract I "also cut it short because I wanted to have time to share ideas across the groups, so I decided to get them to summarize and do a short 'presentation' of the combined opinions." The second extract even more explicitly displays the emergence of such thinking: It appears that while in the lead up to the lesson I had been pondering the usefulness of making a poster presentation somehow more interactive, it was not until I was in the classroom that "I decided at the last moment to roll the dice." This decision also seems to be grounded in my understandings of and connection with this particular group of students: "This class have been great at talking with each other all semester." That is, as Tudor (2001) has poetically remarked, in teaching (and practitioner research) "local is beautiful" (p. 27), in that we make calls in the moment yet in dialogue with our localized, built-up experiences with any group of students.

Problem Avoidance

This form of intuition witnessed my noticing of signals alerting me to potential problems or challenges, and was characterized by evasive or anticipatory action so that (further) problems might not arise (John, 2003). It was far more connected with my teacher identity, and very much intersected with mood assessment. As it involved either problems or my noticing of the potential for problems, my reflections were deeply affective in nature:

> *Ugh! This week's topic is always a disaster. It's too far removed from students' lives. I really don't know why it's kept in the textbook. Or maybe other teachers have more success with it? Alas, not me. I could tell from the first round of the fluency that students were struggling – not the usual fun of telling each other aspects of their lives. So, I cut back to only one more round, and told them to choose just two of the questions on which to focus. It seemed to help somewhat, at least for that activity. (2022, Lesson 12)*

My emotional response is conspicuous as I use strongly affective language ("Ugh!;" "disaster;" "Alas") at various points when discussing the problem as I saw it – the topic focused upon in the textbook being "too far removed from students' lives." An important point of note concerns my perceiving of this problem. The moment of realization comes – "I could tell from the first round" – as I am observing learners during a fluency activity (the first in an extremely standardized set of required activities each lesson in this course). However, my reflection also provides crucial information about how this noticing is contextually founded, and the problem perhaps not totally unexpected: Firstly, my observation that "students were struggling" contrasts strongly with my regular experiences of this activity, learners' "usual fun of telling each other aspects of their lives." Furthermore, I reflect that "this week's topic is always a disaster" (emphasis added), pointing to my recollection of similar events with the same topic. That is, although my noticing and subsequent adjustment of the activity seems instantaneous, my journal writing locates it in both medium and longer timescales of tacit experiences teaching this course over many years.

Naturally, the problem avoidance form of intuition was similar to improvisation, although the key qualitative difference was in picking up on challenges and heading them off before they affected the direction of lessons too much:

> *So, back into the swing of things after a long break for the summer. And the students really did seem quite lethargic at the start. I guess you would be if you hadn't used the language at all for a couple of months! I could almost taste the apathy in the air. I wondered how on earth things would turn out if I just did what I had planned for the start (we needed to get cracking with the textbook), and I thought it wouldn't get much better, and probably worse. I decided to throw in a simple find someone who activity about their summer holidays, and they seemed really into it. A good chance to interact with classmates after such a long time, and probably a topic in which they were naturally interested anyway! (2016, Lesson 16).*

Once again, the potential problem is connected with my mood assessment of the classroom climate (Nitta &

Nakata, 2021), which I deem as "lethargic" and rather vividly state that "I could almost taste the apathy in the air." Despite it being the first lesson back after the summer break, I had planned to start working on the textbook due to the pressure it seems I felt to "get cracking" on this compulsory dimension of the course. However, my tacit understandings are evident as I show sympathy for the students not having used the target language over the summer break, and my prediction that if I had conducted the textbook exercises as planned the classroom climate "wouldn't get much better, and probably worse." The crucial contribution of my years of teaching experience to this form of intuition-based adaptation (Borg, 2015; Richards, 1998) is evident as I am able to quickly "throw in a simple find someone who activity about their summer holidays." I am able to realize that this is a case where strictly following the constraints of the course in order to progress with the textbook is likely to have more detrimental than beneficial outcomes.

Envisaging Direction

This form was the only one additional to those previously discussed in John's (2003) empirical work. These intuitive moments connected overtly with my researcher identity. The form implicated creating ideas for adaptations to the future direction of the research I was conducting or alterations to plans for change-action activities over longer timescales. As the reader may well be aware, action research involves a cyclical process in which reflection on analysis of data collected during interventions usually then prompts a further cycle of change-action (Burns, 2010). However, this form of intuition did not relate to such deeper, more time-consuming analysis. Rather, as the following extended extract illustrates, it was based on tacit, timely understandings via perceptions of students' reactions to change-action or a first pass through – simply reading – collected data:

> *What a fantastic lesson! Even though it was a test (perhaps because it was a test??), I changed something at the last minute – instead of doing two full discussions in groups, I made the first one a kind of practice in pairs. This is probably a no-no in terms of the extremely standardized requirements of this course, but I just felt that as the discussion skills were a bit more complicated this time, I really wanted to give students one final, concentrated chance to use them before the discussion test. And it seemed to work brilliantly – they really took advantage of the opportunity! And then the final discussion was great – they used the skills and supported each other wonderfully. Afterwards I even told them I had goosebumps!*
>
> *This class works so well to offer each other opportunities to use the skills and show their understanding and whatnot. And now I'm looking at their reflections, where they're praising each other and saying how grateful they are to their group members for doing such and such, or they noticed someone using an emotion strategy and it helped them. Now I think about it, this seems to be pretty common in their writing. And I feel kind of privileged to have such an insider view on how they recognize the effort of their peers, but at the same time I feel somewhat guilty? ashamed? That only I have this chance. So, I think now that we've got past this second test, I'll introduce some activity for them to show praise to each other directly in the class – it is one of our strategies, after all. But they might be hesitant to do it outright… Sticky notes after each activity? (2022, Lesson 9)*

This extract comes from the research project in which I worked with students on developing emotional communication strategies to compensate for having to wear facemasks in face-to-face EFL discussion lessons. After an improvisation to give learners more opportunity to practice before a final discussion, I am highly effusive, noting that "I even told them I had goosebumps" because the students "used the skills and supported each other wonderfully." It is in this context that I am writing my own journal "as I'm looking at their reflections." While not an in-depth analysis, this reading leads me to notice that "it seems to be pretty common" that these learners "prais[e] each other and say how grateful they are to their group members" in their journals. Practitioner researchers in Edwards and Burns' (2020) study described feeling overwhelmed or euphoric during and humble or energized at the end of classroom research. My entry adds to such insights with my sense of "feel[ing] kind of privileged to

have such an insider view (…) but at the same time I feel somewhat guilty? ashamed? That only I have this chance." This is a feeling that has often come up in my practitioner research, and I wonder if others feel similarly? Regardless, it is then the confluence of such noticing and feelings with the emotions emergent on this particular day, along with the historical timing of having "got past this second test" that prompts me to envision a new direction for change-action. In alignment with Claxton's (2003) analysis of the anatomy of intuition, it is also clear that while I have an idea for this new direction, it is not yet fully worked out, simply an intention of introducing "some activity for them to show praise to each other directly in the class." It seems that in the process of reflecting, I draw on the (perhaps overly stereotyped) notion that Japanese people are less likely to deliver overt praise to individuals (Yamada, 1997). I thus consider the possibility of using sticky-notes (indeed, in a following lesson I had students write anonymous sticky-notes praising the actions of their peers after each activity). That is, this is one case where the long-timescale of tacit experiences over my time living and teaching in Japan – my built-up beliefs about Japanese people's expression of emotions – has an evident impact on my ideas for envisioning the direction and details of implementing change-action. While this form of intuition related to my researcher identity, it also recalls Borg's (2015) review of literature into teacher cognition, in which he found that more experienced teachers were better able to envisage opportunities as they arose.

Learning Opportunity Creation

This form of intuition in some ways resembled Envisaging Direction in that it involved creative moments. However, in contrast to those researcher-focused instances of considering change-action over longer timescales, Learning Opportunity Creation revolved more around my teacher identity, was momentary and in-situ, and at times witnessed me permitting lessons or activities to move into the unknown (John, 2003):

> *Did a mingling get-to-know-each-other activity. Students did really well, and I picked up on some strategies I saw some using and told the whole class about them and praised them (mouthing names, looking at faces, using gestures, giving hints to other students...). I was interested to see if other students would then use them, so we did another round. I can't say whether I noticed even more using the strategies, but they seemed all pretty eager to get to know each other, so it was a good opportunity, I think. (2016, Lesson 1)*

This extract provides an example of how aspects of what I noticed during an activity then fed into me adjusting it slightly. As Borg (2015) points out, "experienced teachers (…) possess vast amounts of knowledge about typical classrooms and students to the extent that they often know a lot about their students even before they meet them" (p. 47). Despite being the first lesson, and indeed the very first activity with this group of students, I am able to create a learning opportunity: I observed what I considered to be some useful strategies displayed by learners, and remarked upon them in order to help students learn. While I do not refer to tacit understandings explicitly, my knowledge of archetypical students is apparent in my recognition of the strategies as something of note, prompting my on-the-spot decision that these would be valuable to share with the whole class. Even though I had not initially intended to conduct another round of the activity, the situation, along with my experience, suggests to me the potential benefits for learning of doing so.

This form of intuition aimed to afford learning, even if such learning might not be associated expressly with the course content but with change-actions for research:

> *Did the Timeline – just writing in silence, but most seemed to be quite into it, writing in quite some detail. That said, as they were writing I suddenly realized it would be a bit underwhelming just getting them to hand it in and all their ideas remaining isolated, so I asked them to quickly circle something that they thought had the most impact on their feelings/attitude towards English now, and then talk about that with a partner. Mostly some good discussion, so hopefully they could get something from it! (2016, Lesson 3)*

The 'timeline' mentioned was a change-action exercise in which learners delineated their motivations, actions, and events as they aimed to move towards their best possible L+ selves (Dörnyei, 2009). It was intended for the dual

purpose of allowing students to think more deeply about the road to this hoped-for future, while at the same time offering suggestions to me for how the course might better match their motivations. My observation of students as they are engaging in the activity is quite positive, as they were "just writing in silence, but most seemed to be quite into it, writing in quite some detail." It is therefore somewhat unclear as to why I "suddenly realized it would be a bit underwhelming just getting them to hand it in." While I do not mention it overtly in the reflection, my decision to adapt the activity is most likely situated in the context of my past research experiences, in which I found sharing of ideas to play an important role in L+ learners' motivation during action research (Sampson, 2012, 2016a) – indeed, it is surprising to me looking back on this extract that I had not included such an element from the outset.

Student-Personalized Actions

The least apparent form corresponded with what John (2003) entitled 'teacher interpretation.' However, for me, such a title seemed to apply to overly too many of the different forms. Instead, these intuitive moments concerned focused strategies selected based on my personal knowledge of specific students and how they might respond. I should perhaps note that across journals I frequently lamented not being able to have more individualized interactions with learners due to the constraints of the standardized courses I was teaching. For example, in one lesson in the 2022 study I reflected somewhat pointedly that "as they were preparing, I had some time to go around and really talk with them, and I only wish we had more time for me to interact as a person rather than a lesson manager!" (2022, Lesson 6 – emphasis in original). Previous research into teaching in general (e.g., Keller et al., 2014) and in instructed L+ education (e.g., Ma, 2012; Pinner, 2019; Sampson, 2022) has shown the development of relationships with students to be fundamental to teacher motivation and affect. In parallel, a lack of freedom is demotivating for teachers (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). The restrictions I felt may have led to the relatively small number of Student-Personalized Actions apparent in my analysis. These constraints may also have meant that when I was able to act in such individualized ways, reciprocal feelings of authenticity and positive emotion were forthcoming:

> *Arrived early, and I think this was good to be able to say hi to students as they walked in, made a somewhat friendlier atmosphere. When I saw Sachiko, I wanted to have a word in particular with her. I was concerned because her family lives in X prefecture – next to Y prefecture, where all the big earthquakes have been occurring recently. Thankfully, it seems her family and friends have all been saved any of the most damaging effects. Although I hesitated for a moment thinking it could go either way, she looked thankful I'd even remembered where she was from, so I felt pleased that I'd bothered! (2016, Lesson 2)*

Vannini and Burgess (2009) consider authenticity to be "the degree of congruence between one's actions and one's core self-conceptions – consisting of fundamental values, beliefs, and identities to which one is committed and in terms of which one defines oneself" (p. 104). Such authenticity appears in my reflections from this extract. The momentary nature of my student-personalized action is apparent as, "when I saw Sachiko," I quickly decided that I "wanted to have a word" with her about the earthquake situation. That is, my recollection that this may be an issue for her family emerged as I acted upon my value of care for the students with whom I interact in the classroom. Nevertheless, my understanding that this topic was potentially sensitive is clear as I mention "I hesitated for a moment thinking it could go either way." From the extract, it is uncertain whether the student in question appreciated my raising the topic. However, I do remark that "she looked thankful I'd even remembered where she was from," providing me feedback such that "I felt pleased that I'd bothered!"

For Pinner (2019), authenticity is "created through interactions;" it is "something socially constructed in the moment," meaning that "as language teachers, one of our jobs is perhaps to enable our students to learn how to express their authentic self through the target language" (pp. 2–3). It seems that authenticity via these kinds of intuitive moments was not reserved purely for individuals, but also extended on occasion to groups of learners about whom I had some 'insider knowledge':

> *On the spur of the moment, after students had time to match words with definitions and we*

> *checked it, I asked them to discuss some answers to questions I asked using the vocab in their groups. This was quite good! Lots of animated conversation, and mostly students then volunteered answers. (…) One particularly interesting moment was when I used the example of being devoted to a particular soccer club, and the soccer players in the class suddenly perked up, and let out an "oooh", and then we kind of joked about our favourite teams (ManU, Barca…). I felt I made a real connection! (2019, Lesson 11).*

Crossings with improvisation are clear as I altered a vocabulary exercise "on the spur of the moment." Perhaps influenced by an ongoing mood assessment that my adaptation "was quite good" and elicited "lots of animated conversation," I expressed one of my long-timescale transportable identities (Zimmerman, 1998) as a soccer player and fan. It is unclear from this reflection whether my focus on soccer was deliberate. However, analysis reveals that I was aware there were soccer players in the class – my journal entry from the previous lesson refers to me talking with students about a soccer tournament in which they were involved. Once again emblematic of the potential for teacher self-disclosure to foster authentic relationships and student interest (Cayanus & Martin, 2016; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2021), the banter in which we then engage while we "joked about our favourite teams" encourages me to express excitement that "I felt I made a real connection!" In summary, both of these extracts provide a tangible sense of the "confidence rating" property of intuitions (Claxton, 2003) – while I may not have been fully confident at the onset of my actions, the feedback I perceived quite rapidly confirms my feeling of rightness.

REFLECTIONS ON THIS REFLECTION

In closing, I would like to remind the reader that the current study was exploratory. The data employed were not produced with the explicit intention of recording my thinking and decision-making processes. Nevertheless, I was able to interpret six different forms of 'intuitive moments' during my experiences conducting practitioner research, the majority of which aligned closely with those reported in John (2003). Via analysis, in this paper I hope to have built a picture of the qualities of these different forms. Perhaps one of the most interesting realizations for me concerns my own approach to action research. Rather than purely the deeply-analytic and time-consuming process usually described (Burns, 2010), my vision of directions for a piece of research and implementation of change-action evolves via seemingly fleeting instances in the classroom and understandings of particular groups of learners. Yet, whilst my reference to intuitive moments suggests instantaneity, I trust also to have provided an interpretation of the ways in which intuition is underpinned by a variety of experiences occurring over longer timescales. My reflections imply that practitioner researchers draw on such tacit understandings to make situated appraisals and instigate (what we perceive as) context-appropriate actions.

It has indeed been a fascinating endeavor to look back at my journal entries and consider these patterns to my thinking and behaviors. However, I must remind the reader that my research specialization is not teacher cognition. It therefore goes without saying that my understanding of the existing research landscape and interpretations may be somewhat naïve. In encouraging others similarly engaged in practitioner research to likewise examine their cognitions, I would also naturally suggest some limitations to the current study – and hence suggestions for improvement. The primary limitation regards the form of data employed. Proponents of case study recommend the use of various data sources to obtain multiple perspectives on a phenomenon of interest (Duff, 2008). Similarly, while autoethnography implies a strong focus on the self, there is a need to consider the self in interaction with context (Duncan, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011; Pinner, 2019) – something again facilitated by numerous sources of data. As mentioned, there were occasions in analysis in which I noticed intuitive moments, yet, as the only data source, my writing lacked sufficient detail about my thinking, especially regarding the foundation of tacit understandings. Inclusion of other forms of data such as videorecording of one's lessons, stimulated recall, as well as contextual data from students' perspectives would most likely afford a more adequate picture of the emergence of intuition in practitioner research.

As a final note (and on quite a different tack), I would like to call for more acceptance of diversity in writing forms in education and applied linguistics academic journals. I am glad to join specific 'reflections' on

intuitions such as those included in the current collection and am confident they will resonate with other teacher-researchers. Nevertheless, in educational practitioner research, the teacher is an integral part of the research. We are active members of any class group who – along with the other, learner-members – co-form the contextual dynamics on any given day (Sampson, 2016; Tudor, 2001; Ushioda, 2015). As researchers, we moreover act as key players in determining the directions research might take. Instead of separating out the teacher/researcher/author, we ought to find a way of encouraging more narrative accounts of decision-making and our in-situ intuitive moments integrated with reports of research itself (see also Consoli & Ganassin, 2023b).

Author's Contributions

Conception or design of the work: RJS; Data collection; RJS; Data analysis and interpretation: RJS; Drafting the article: RJS; Revision of the article: RJS; Final approval of the version to be published: RJS.

Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate

At the time of implementation of two of the research projects reported herein (2016, 2019), the university that was the location for the research had no research ethics committee for non-medical research. For the 2022 study, the research was approved by the Journal and Research Committee of the Centre for Foreign Language Education and Research, Rikkyo University. This paper reports on autoethnography and all presented data are from the author himself – therefore consent is implicit.

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