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Abstract: This paper describes two parallel research programs exploring educational practice/praxis. The first, including a theory of 'practice architectures', aims to contribute to contemporary practice theory that views practice from the perspective of a spectator. The second aims to contribute to an emerging (practical philosophy) tradition of 'researching practice from within practice traditions' and views practice (and praxis) from the perspective of participants. It is argued that these particular spectator and participant perspectives are complementary. They offer a dual approach to researching educational practice and praxis and allow us (educational actors, educational researchers) to see ourselves as formed by a collective praxis, within which teacher-researchers can aspire to act educationally in the sense of acting for the good for each person and for the good for humankind.

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Researching educational praxis: Spectator and participant perspectives

Introduction

I am currently working with colleagues at Charles Sturt University and in an international research collaboration, 'Pedagogy, Education and Praxis', on two parallel research programs. The first program is intended as a contribution to the development of contemporary practice theory, and views practice from the perspective of a spectator. The second is intended as a contribution to the development of an emerging tradition of 'researching practice from within practice traditions', and views practice from the perspective of participants. In this second program, adopting the participant perspective, it is often appropriate to speak not of *practice* but rather of *praxis*. These two programs are beginning to converge in a new stereoscopic perspective for research into practice and praxis, especially in relation to the development of *professional* practice and praxis, and especially in the field of *educational* practice and praxis.

A first research program: The practice theory research program

In this first research program, colleagues and I are developing a theory of practice as embedded in '*practice architectures*' (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008), the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that prefigure and shape the conduct of practice, that is, that shape the distinctive 'sayings', 'doings' and 'relatings' characteristic of a particular practice. These practice architectures give practices like education

- their *meaning* and *comprehensibility* (in the cultural-discursive dimension, in semantic space, in the medium of language),
- their *productiveness* (in the material-economic dimension, in physical space-time, in the medium of work or activity), and

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- their value in establishing *solidarity* among the people involved in and affected by a practice of a particular kind (in the social-political dimension, in social space, in the medium of power).

As Theodore Schatzki (1996, 2001, 2002) suggests, the sayings and doings (and, I would add, the relatings) that compose a particular kind of practice, 'hang together' in a characteristic way in 'teleoaffective structures' that give a sense of purpose to practices as human-social projects of a particular kind, and that shape participants' commitments to achieving this particular kind of purpose.

Not only does our research group see practices as embedded in practice architectures, we also see them as clustered together in relationships with other practices including practices we describe as '*metapractices*'. We define 'metapractices' as practices that shape other practices (as the practice of education shapes practices of commercial and political life in a community, for example), and we are exploring a complex of metapractices in the field of education, each of which shapes and influences the others. In a current project, we are exploring how

1) the *academic and social practices* of students in a group of primary schools are shaped by and shape →
2) new and innovatory *educational practices* of the teachers in these schools, which in turn are shaped by and shape →
3) metapractices of *initial and continuing teacher education* which form and shape teachers' practices (we are focusing in particular on teachers' *formal* and *informal professional development* and *professional learning*), and how these, in turn, are shaped by and shape →
4) metapractices of *educational policy and administration* which determine the resources, infrastructure and policies that influence the conditions for educational practice (we are focusing on different participants' practices of *leadership* in the primary schools we are studying), and how all of these are shaped by and shape →
5) metapractices of *educational research and evaluation* that shape and are shaped by the practice of education and the other metapractices by suggesting how these other metapractices can be understood, and by monitoring the conduct and consequences of the other metapractices (in our study, for example, educational consultants assisting the schools have been introducing research-based ideas and practices like those of 'learning communities' and 'principles of effective practice').

In this complex of metapractices, we have begun to understand practices and metapractices as living things, connected to one another in '*ecologies of practices*'. Thus, for example, since the rise of compulsory mass schooling in the nineteenth century in the West, the complex of metapractices of education, teacher education, educational policy and administration, and educational research and evaluation have been interdependent, each influencing and being influenced by the others.

We are also collecting evidence of the ecological relationships that exist in the detailed local connections between different kinds of *subsidiary practices* below the level of large-scale practices like 'education' or 'farming' or 'history'. For example, in the large-scale practice of 'education' in the sites we are studying, there are particular kinds of interconnection and interdependence between particular subsidiary practices of 'teaching' and particular corresponding practices of 'learning'. In the schools we are studying, for example, the idea of 'learning communities' introduced through a campaign of consultancy over several years, is realised in one set of practices of 'community' and collaboration between teachers, in another similar set of collaborative academic and social practices among groups of learners, and also in changed relationships between teachers and students.

Kemmis & Mutton (2009) also reported on the way a variety of different kinds of subsidiary practices undertaken in Education for Sustainability projects in schools and other settings are arranged in ecological relationships with one another – for example, in a school-community landscape revegetation project, how different sub-projects (like building a shadehouse for growing seedlings, collecting seed, germinating seed and growing tubestock, and planting out tubestock in degraded landscapes) formed a mutually-interdependent ecology of practices in which each sub-practice contributed in its own distinctive way to the sustainability of the whole.

This first research program, then, which is developing a theory of practice, practice architectures, metapractices and ecologies of practices, is intended as a contribution to practice theory of the kind described by Schatzki (2001, 2002). Although not exclusively, this research program largely adopts a *spectator* perspective on practices as they are realised in different fields and sites of practice. Our research group aims to show how practices are shaped not solely by the intentional action and practice knowledge of participants but also by circumstances and conditions which are '*external*' to them. These conditions and circumstances include, first, *practice architectures* which prefigure and pre-form the sayings, doings and relatings of their practice; second, *metapractices* that create conditions under which participants' practices can be carried out; and, third, *ecologies of practices* in which different kinds of human-social projects and different kinds of subsidiary practices connect up with one another in ecological relationships that sustain whole complexes of practices like education in schools, for example, or different kinds of sustainable or unsustainable farming practices.

What I have just described as 'external' from the perspective of the practitioner in these webs of practice is not 'external', however, if we view practice as *situated* in the particular circumstances and conditions of particular *sites* – in what Schatzki (2003, 2005, 2006) calls *site ontologies*. What we see, instead, is that practitioners are *co-habitants* of sites along with other people, other species and other objects, and that they are in interdependent relationships with these others, not only in terms of maintaining their own being and identities, but also *in and through their practices*. Indeed, as Schatzki (2002, in the title of the book) insists, practices are 'the site of the social' – where people and other things meet and interact with one another.

A first step in the development of Schatzki's practice theory (1996) was his exploration of the intuition that practices are a kind of concrete embodiment of Wittgensteinian (1974) language-games and forms of life – that is, the notion that the 'sayings' and 'doings' (and 'relatings') that constitute practices hang together in social life in the way words and ideas hang together in language-games in different kinds of discourses. A second step, taken in *The Site of the Social* (2002), was to demonstrate the power of this insight by interpreting large tracts of practice in terms of this Wittgensteinian view, to show the way practices hang together so that they are comprehensible as practices of this or that distinctive kind.

Schatzki (2002, p.77) defines practices thus:

> … practices are organized nexuses of actions. This means that the doings and sayings composing them hang together. More specifically, the doings and sayings that compose a given practice are linked through (1) practical understandings, (2) rules, (3) a teleoaffective structure, and (4) general understandings. Together, the understandings, rules and teleoaffective structure that link the doings and sayings of a practice form its organization.

In the book, Schatzki presents philosophical arguments for his theory of practices, and he demonstrates, using the examples of Shaker herbal medicine production practices and Nasdaq day-trading, how practices hang together as "organized nexuses of actions".

He writes:

> In sum, a practice is a temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleoaffective structure and general understandings. It is important to emphasize that the organization of a practice describes the practice's frontiers: A doing or saying belongs to a given practice if it expresses components of that practice's organization. This delimitation of boundaries entails that practices can overlap (p.87).

The first research program I have been describing aims to take Schatzki's definition a small step further: to see practices like *education* and *teacher education*, or *teaching* and *learning*, not only as relatively passive 'organised nexuses of actions"

but *as living things*. Taking a lead from Schatzki's notion that practices have "frontiers" (2002, p. 87) that delimit them, we are exploring the notion that they are particular kinds of 'entities' that come into existence in particular sites at particular times, and that they exist in *ecological relationships* with one another and in whole ecosystems of interrelated practices. I am currently attempting to demonstrate that practices are in living ecological relationships with one another using a set of criteria derived from Fritjof Capra's (1997, 2004, 2005) "principles of ecology, principles of sustainability, principles of community, or even the basic facts of life" (2005, p.23) which describe ecological relationships in terms of eight key concepts. In Table 1, I use these concepts to suggest ways in which practices might be regarded as living things that enter ecological relationships with one another.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

There is not space here to detail the justification for these speculative propositions to show that practices are, or are like, living things that exist in ecological relationships with one another in ecologies of practices. But the preliminary evidence seems to show that it is so.

This first research program, then, is striving to show that practices are living things, or that they behave like living things, and that they are situated within ecologies of practices that are sustainable (or not sustainable) because of their relationships of interdependence with other practices in an ecology of practices that exists in a particular site. Although adopting a *spectator* perspective on practice – like a naturalist's interest in observing the behaviour of practices in relation to one another – it aims to show that practices are *inside* the sites in which they are situated, and that practitioners, too, are inside these sites.

Let us now look at practices from the perspective of the practitioner – the *insider* in those sites. The perspective of the insider-practitioner may give us some insight into the perspective, we might say, *of the practice itself*. Although practices appear to be unable to speak for themselves, perhaps their practitioners can, and perhaps there is a way to find, through the perspectives of the practitioners, how living practices are coherent in the sense that they relate to one another in coherent ways.

A second research program: 'researching praxis from within practice traditions'

In the second research program I am conducting with colleagues, and particularly following directions suggested by Wilfred Carr (2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007), I am exploring what it means to research praxis from within practice traditions ((Kemmis, 2010)). For example, if I see myself (as I do) as a part of a practice tradition of critical pedagogy in university education that acknowledges among its antecedents the educationists John Dewey and Paulo Freire, what do I think my pedagogical practice is and should be? How might I see myself as developing the excellence of my own practice and, at the same time, as contributing to the collective development of this tradition with others who see themselves as part of this tradition? If I am *within* this practice tradition, what form of research will allow me to form and transform *both* myself as a practitioner *and* the collectivity of people whose work constitutes the contemporary manifestation of this tradition?

One answer to these questions has been through 'educational action research', especially critical or emancipatory action research of the kind Carr & Kemmis (1986) advocated more than twenty years ago. This is research by practitioners in which they aim to transform their *practice*, their *understandings* of their practice, and the *conditions* under which their practice is carried out. There has been debate, however,

about what action research is, in education and in other fields, and the contestation continues today. To some, action research embraces any kind of research or development projects conducted by practitioners or by 'outsider'-researchers in the field, when it is aimed at changing the practice of all or some of the people involved in the practice. To others, it includes only research by practitioners into the nature, conditions and consequences of their own practices. I continue to favour the latter view. In this second research program, I therefore want to articulate in new ways what practitioner research and *only* practitioner research can do, namely:

1) to understand and develop the ways in which practices are conducted 'from within' practice traditions that inform and orient them;
2) by speaking the language, using the interpretive categories, and joining the conversations and critical debates of those whose action *constitutes* practice;
3) by participating in and developing the forms of action and kinds of interaction in which the practice is conducted;
4) by participating in and developing the communities of practice through which the practice is conducted, both in the relationships between different participants in a particular site or setting of practice, and (in the case of a professional practice) in the relationships between people who are collectively responsible for the practice (whether as members of a professional body or as professional educators or as researchers into the practice);
5) with the aim of contributing to the individual and collective transformation of the conduct and consequences of the practice to meet the needs of changing times and circumstances by confronting and overcoming
   a. irrationality, incoherence and contradiction in participants' understandings of a practice,
   b. what is ineffective, untoward or unsustainable in the activities and work of the practice, and
   c. injustice, conflict and suffering in the relationships among the people and groups involved in and affected by the practice.

This view of practitioner research, or research within practice traditions, stands in stark contrast to much conventional educational research undertaken from the perspective of the spectator. For example, Carr (2006a, 2007) has argued that, for about two hundred years, modernism in science has fostered an objectivist view of the 'objects' of research. Over a century ago, this objectivist view came over into the social sciences from the natural and physical sciences, with the consequence that

social scientists have frequently been taught to take an antiseptic, detached, 'professional view' of social life; that is, to treat it as an object of the professional researcher's gaze rather than to see it as the very stuff of which one's own life is made, whether in one's standing as a person, as a citizen, or as a researcher. This detached spectator position makes it difficult for the professional researcher to grasp the 'here-and-now-ness,' the 'happening-ness' and the 'lived-ness' of practice in real life, and to engage, subjectively and intersubjectively, with the *experience* of practice (Bradley, 2009). Given the legacy of modernism, social scientists have long acquiesced to the view that it is their duty to objectivise practice, to distance themselves from it and to want to talk about its nature in abstract and universalising terms. Given the legacy of modernism, social scientists have attempted to describe social practice as a thing external to themselves, even as they conducted their own research as a practice informed and oriented by this tradition – even, that is, as they practised within this practice tradition in and of research. On this view, to conduct research *is* to be a detached spectator.

I think that few researchers within that modernist tradition have attempted to explain their own research practice in the universalising and abstract terms in which they seek to explain the practices of others. Instead, they remained more or less silent on the formation and transformation of their own practice as researchers. A significant break from the objectivist view erupted in the 1960s and '70s, however, following the publication of Kuhn's (1962/1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and the 'progress in science' debate that followed (see for example, Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970). The debate explored how science itself was a practice, and how scientific 'progress' or the 'growth of knowledge' might itself be scientifically explained or understood. Among other consequences, the debate brought new recognition to

research approaches that we nowadays call 'qualitative', and gave renewed importance to understanding science historically (and philosophically). Further impetus was given to this re-orientation of scientific understanding of science itself by Habermas whose *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1972) and *Theory and Practice* (1974) showed how different kinds of human interests were realised by different kinds of science and research – the interests in controlling the material world in the case of the empirical-analytic sciences, in understanding and becoming educated about human experience and the social world in the case of the hermeneutic or interpretive sciences, and in critically transforming things to overcome irrationality and injustice in the case of critical social science.

This break with the tradition of positivistic empirical-analytic social science gave new impetus to interpretivist approaches in the social sciences (see, for example, Outhwaite, 1975), and also to new kinds of research aimed at understanding practice from within, particularly action research. The view of critical or emancipatory action research in education that Wilfred Carr and I championed in *Becoming Critical* (1986) was just one advocacy among many, following seminal works by Stenhouse (1975), Elliott & Adelman (1973) and Elliott (1976-7), to name just a few.

These approaches to action research understood practices to be contextualised, socially-, politically- and historically-formed, and 'situated'. While acknowledging that practices also existed against a backdrop of practice traditions, however, I do not think that they had yet embraced (except perhaps accidentally) the notion that action research aimed at developing practices might be, and might need to be understood as being, conducted *within practice traditions* (in the case of educational action research, the practice traditions of Education). The insight that action research can be conducted within practice traditions was shaped by a long tradition of understanding

action research as a form of practical science or practical philosophy championed by John Elliott (1976-7), for example. A new understanding of how practices exist within practice traditions has recently been articulated by Wilfred Carr (for example, 2006a, 2007), drawing on the advocacies of practical philosophy in the work of Gadamer (1975, 1981) and MacIntyre (1981, 1988, 1990, 1998, 1999), both of whom show how understandings and practices are shaped in and by traditions of thought and of social practice. In Carr's view, to develop a practice is not just to 'develop' it in a detached or technical sense, but to develop it in the light of the practice tradition that has shaped it. To do this, he shows, is not only to develop the practice but also to develop the tradition itself, as the collective 'property' of the community that makes up a profession (for example).

When we come to speak of, and research, our *own* practice (for example, our practice as teachers, or as researchers) we see practice from the inside. Our living practice unfolds in a continuous present, shaped by often unseen hands and habits inherited from the past. It is more or less intensely present to us in our consciousness. We 'flow' in it in ways guided by our experience, correcting an imbalance here and recovering from a hesitation or mistake there, as the action unfolds and as we ourselves unfold as living, conscious beings present in and with our practice. Moreover, and especially for practitioners of a particular profession, our practice may be a principal medium in which we realise our identities, our self-understandings and ourselves. We are conscious that our practice is not only a way of transforming the world around us, but also a way in which we ourselves are formed and transformed. As much as being a way of transforming the world around us, our practice is also a process of self-formation (Dunne, 1993), as we become 'experienced' and even wise practitioners (Kemmis, forthcoming 2011). When we speak of our own practice in

ways like this, it seems inaccessible to the language of conventional cognitive or social science. Tarred by a century of critique of introspection (Bradley, 2009), this view of practice came to be regarded as too 'raw' and too 'subjective' to qualify for inclusion under the label 'science' in much of the English-speaking world.

The 'practice' which is the object of detached observation, the one seen only by the spectator, is *not* the same 'practice' that the insider-practitioner sees. I believe that practice seen from the inside is the most important version of practice to connect with, to engage, and to develop if we are to change the world by researching educational practice or praxis. We have tried a century of changing practice from without, on the advice of spectator researchers and the educational policy makers they advise. It has not been a century of unbridled success, in which practitioners have thrived in the light of the new knowledge research has made available to them. In fact, practitioners in many fields, especially in largely public sector professions like teaching and nursing, have frequently felt themselves silenced by conventional research knowledge, and they continue to turn their back on it and on the conferences and journals in which it is reported. They turn their backs on it because is *not* research which recognises, reflects, respects and engages with their *interpretive categories*, their *lived realities*, and their *experience*. Instead, that spectator research appears to speak *about* them. It names and judges. Converted into policy and administrative regulations, the spectator view of research on practice, as a social process and as a professional research practice, offers practitioners of other practices – teachers or nurses, for example – rewards and sanctions on grounds of compliance to rules which are entirely external to the principal concerns and aims of education or health.

The living practice of education, on the other hand, is the stuff of educators' lives. It is meat and drink and earth and air to those teachers who revel in their

professionalism and the individual and collective development of their professional

practice. It is what gives them joy and pain in their work, and what keeps them

thinking deep into the night about how best to respond to tricky practical situations.

And yet conventional, spectator educational research does not speak into this

conversation space, and it demeans talk about personal and collective exploration of

such lived experience not only by withholding from it the label 'science' but also by

suggesting that the existence of this subjective and intersubjective experiential space

is *irrelevant* to the conduct of educational science as it has been conventionally

understood for a hundred years.

In this second program of research, then, my colleagues and I are attempting

to describe what a science of education and educational research might be like when

conducted within the living conversation-space of practice, consciously and

deliberately, responsively and reflectively, and in which practitioners devote their

lives to the double purpose of education: the formation and transformation of selves

and societies. Because it aims to change both practitioners' own practices and the

practice traditions within and against which the excellence of practices can be

evaluated, this kind of research is appropriately described as 'research within practice

traditions' (Kemmis, 2010).

To make clearer what this kind of research might be like, I will make some

brief comments about the particular way of understanding practice that addresses it by

the name 'praxis', and recall what 'education' itself means.

'Praxis' and 'education'
Broadly speaking, there are two views on what 'praxis' is: first, a view that reaches

back to Aristotle, according to which praxis might be understood as "action that is

morally-committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field" (Kemmis &

Smith, 2008, p.4), that is, action that aims for the good of those involved and for the good for humankind. According to the second, following the usage of Hegel and Marx, 'praxis' can be understood 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. In *The German Ideology* (1845) Marx articulated his historical materialism, arguing that social formations, ideas, theories and consciousness emerge from human and collective social praxis, and that social action (praxis) makes history. In much Anglo-American-Australian usage today, the term 'praxis' is used in the Aristotelian sense; in much of Europe, by contrast, 'praxis' is used in the post-Marxian sense.

'Educational praxis,' therefore, may be understood in two ways: first, as *educational* action that is morally-committed and informed by traditions in a field ('right conduct'), and second, as 'history-making *educational* action'.

The term 'education' also needs clarification, especially in a European context. I believe Anglo-America-Australian usage of the term 'education' is much corrupted today – that is, in Anglo-American-Australian usage we too often use the term 'education' when we really mean 'schooling' (the activities that routinely go on in different kinds of 'educational' institutions that *may or may not* be educational). Because our common usage obscures and perhaps erases the important distinction between education and schooling, the philosophical and pedagogical origins of the discipline and competing intellectual traditions of Education itself are often lost, and become invisible, to contemporary hearers.

In my view (Kemmis, 2009, p.15),

education is a process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one

another and the world, that foster individual and collective self-expression, individual

and collective self-development, and individual and collective self-determination, and

that are oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind

Figure 1 aims to depict the double purpose of education and summarises these

purposes in terms of 'living well' (in the sense of living appropriately) and helping to

create 'a world worth living in'.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1: The double purpose of education

On this view of education and its double purpose, the practice of education,

properly speaking, must always be praxis in both the neo-Aristotelian and the post-

Hegelian, post-Marxist senses. It is praxis in the neo-Aristotelian sense because it

aims to be 'right conduct' aiming at the good for persons and the good for humankind,

and it is praxis in the post-Hegelian, post-Marxian sense because it aims at the

reproduction and transformation of rising generations of children, young people and

adults into modes of personal and moral life and modes of social and political life that

are oriented towards the good for each and for all. We should note, on this view of

education, that what 'the good' consists in is *not* specified; on the contrary, to adopt

this view is to acknowledge that what counts as 'the good' is always contested, that it

must always be determined anew for changing times and circumstances, and that what

it is good for any person or group to do at any particular historical moment is always a

matter for practical deliberation.

In the light of these remarks about the necessarily contested notions of 'praxis'

and 'education', we may return to the question of researching educational praxis.

Researching educational praxis

The English language suggests certain ways of understanding what 'researching educational praxis' might mean. Is it, for example, research 'about' educational praxis, or research 'on' it, or research 'into' it, or even research 'in' educational praxis?

If what is meant is research *about* or *on* educational praxis, then the language orients me to understand educational praxis as an object to be observed, and it locates the one who is doing the observing as external to the thing being observed – in the third-person relationship to praxis of the spectator.

If what is meant is research *into* educational praxis, the language orients me to enter educational praxis, either as an observer or as a participant or potential participant, or perhaps both – perhaps in the second-person relationship of the wise interlocutor engaging in a discussion with a practitioner.

If what is meant is research *in* educational praxis, the language orients me to be an insider, the subject whose educational praxis is also, for the moment, an object of reflection or research – and thus in a first-person singular relationship to my own practice as mine, or, in the first-person plural, to our practice as ours, and in a relationship in which we practitioners are interlocutors with one another.

Historically speaking, the third-person and first-person perspectives align with '*objectivist*' and '*subjectivist*' perspectives in research custom and practice – research on The Other versus research from the perspective of the acting subject; the 'spectator' perspective versus the 'insider' perspective. The second-person perspective may switch back and forth between them – perhaps enjoining us to enter a real or imagined conversation about how we see others and how others see us. The second-person perspective is one form of the *intersubjective* perspective.

My own view is that praxis is only accessible *as such* from the first-person, participant perspective: the second and third person perspectives do not have unmediated access to the intentions and lived experience of the participant. On this view, researching praxis means *in the light of individual and collective self-reflection, to re-orient oneself in the practice of the practice, to re-orient one's understandings of the practice, and to re-orient the conditions under which one practises*. This view is rather different from the way Robin McTaggart and I defined action research in *The Action Research Planner* (1988, p.1; emphases added):

> Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational *practices*, as well as their *understanding* of these practices and the *situations* in which these practices are carried out

One thing I now believe was missing from that definition of action research is the sense that what makes a practice comprehensible, meaningful and significant is that it is oriented and justified by reference to a practice tradition. If we see our educational practice as in some way descended from the work of Dewey and Freire, for example, then it might be expected that we intend our practice to be some kind of continuation of the way they saw their practice (oriented by the tradition), and that we expect to be able to justify our practice to others inside and outside this tradition in a way that reflects (and perhaps extends) the practice tradition to which Dewey and Freire contributed.

Another thing missing from that definition of action research was a sense of the 'happening-ness' of praxis – the sense that we flow in it and live in and through it, that we are personally and collectively formed and transformed by it even as we aim to form and transform others and the world by our individual praxis and our collective

participation in praxis. In short, what was missing from that earlier definition of action research was a strong sense of practice as *praxis*.

That omission of the sense of practice as living praxis was part of the legacy of modernism. Despite the insistence on 'collective self-reflective enquiry' and the reference to people's 'own' practices, our 1988 definition still permits a kind of detachment. It still casts us as detached observers of our own practices, understandings and situations. The subject who does the reflecting, the definition seems to imply, is a different subject than the one who does the practising, and different even from the one who does the understanding of the practising: that thinking subject, the definition seems to suggest, is the object to be transcended by achieving a new form of understanding.

If, by contrast, researching praxis means in the light of individual and collective self-reflection, re-orienting oneself in the practice of the practice, re-orienting one's understandings of the practice, and re-orienting the conditions under which one practises, then the notion of 're-orienting' may be taken to imply that one already has an orientation – and orientation given, in part, by tradition and the circumstances under which one practises. It also implies that the individual and collective subjects who research their own individual and collective praxis are not detached spectators of their own practice but the ones who are responsible for it as authors and as those who must take responsibility (not solely) for the consequences of their practice – praxis in both the neo-Aristotelian sense of 'right conduct' and in the post-Marxian sense of 'history-making action'.

Conclusion: A convergence of the two programs?
For over three years, a group of colleagues in the School of Education at Charles Sturt University – the 'Teacher Talk' group – met, on average about once every six weeks,

to discuss our educational practices and our research practices, as they are shaped by the circumstances of our setting – in our particular university and in our particular location. The first convenor of our group, Ian Hardy, has recently described some of the early fruits of our research into our own practice (Hardy, 2009, 2010a, 2010b).

Hardy (2010b, for example) shows how changed circumstances have raised issues for academic staff and students in Australian higher education, including new discourses of auditing and economising academic work, changed material-economic circumstances for students (pressures of fee-paying for students, for instance) and for academic staff (like new online technologies for teaching, for example), and changed social-political relationships between governments, universities, academic staff and students when governments adopt 'user-pays' policies in higher education. These new practice architectures in some ways constrain old academic practices of teaching and research, and enable other emerging practices. Nevertheless, Teacher Talk group members found that, although they experienced new tensions and difficulties in doing their work, they also recognised that they could prioritise their various activities in ways that would maintain their valuing of excellence in teaching, in scholarly work by students, and in their own research. Creating a communicative space for thematising and exploring new and critical developments in the academic workplace allowed us to investigate ways to maintain and develop the liberal-progressive and critical practice traditions of university education that have survived through the transition from the elite liberal universities of the early and mid-twentieth century to the mass higher education universities of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As teachers in relation to our students, and as researchers in relation to our discipline and professional field, we could see our work as praxis in the Aristotelian sense of action aimed towards the (contested) good for individual persons and the good for

humankind, and as praxis in the post-Marxian sense of 'history-making action' to be judged by its moral, social and political consequences. Moreover, seeing our work as praxis in these senses necessarily gave us a longer and more encompassing view of our work: our work was not and is not just a matter of responding to immediate discursive, material or political circumstances. It enables us also to see that our work is a matter of long-duration processes of cultural, economic and social-political and reproduction and transformation by which generations of students are made into education professionals, and by which generations of researchers construct and reconstruct the ways education is understood, practised and critically evaluated. In this sense, then, our investigations helped us to see ourselves as travelling and evolving within these long-duration processes, and to see our praxis and the practice traditions which inform and orient us as evolving in a dialectic of mutual constitution in history.

The Teacher Talk group explores the possibilities of our theory of practice architectures – one of the products of the first program of research described in this paper – to help us discover how our ideas ('sayings', in the cultural-discursive dimension, in semantic space) about our work are shaped by past and contemporary discourses and the tensions between them – for example, mid-twentieth century liberal-progressive ideas about universities serving an academic and professional elite versus twenty-first century ideas about mass universities preparing a far greater proportion of the population to participate in the 'knowledge economy'. We are also using the theory of practice architectures to explore how what we do ('doings', in the material-economic dimension, in physical space-time) are shaped and re-shaped by, for example, new technologies in university education – the possibilities of online pedagogies, for example. And we are exploring the ways in which we relate

differently ('relatings', in the social-political dimension, in social space) to one another and to our students, the professions we serve, and the wider community, for example, under the new forms of university management and administration required of universities by governments that have imposed new forms of monitoring, performativity and accountability characteristic of the New Public Administration.

The theory of practice architectures, metapractices and ecologies of practices has proven helpful to us as we come to understand ourselves as shaped and changed by colliding and evolving practice traditions in higher education. Many years ago, Louis Althusser (1971) wrote about how ideology 'interpellates' or names us so we play our part within the ideology and thus reproduce, through our practices, existing social structures. The Teacher Talk group has discovered how we have been named and interpellated in new ways and in new 'games' in Australian higher education – in new discourses, in new kinds of work and activities, and in new kinds of relationships with others involved in and affected by our practice. Some of our difficulties as teachers concern coming to terms with these changing times, but our difficulties are not just a problem of conservatism or resistance to change. On the contrary, we try to move with the times – but not at any price.

On the other hand, however, we also now find ourselves in new and contradictory spaces. For example, our University urges us to strive for excellence in client service – in helping and meeting the needs of our students. At the same time, however, we have many more students, in more diverse programs, and we have many more administrative tasks to perform. So it is difficult for us to meet our students' expectations and needs. In addition to this, however, there is evidence of a change in our students' relationships with us. Unlike university students of two decades ago, Australian university students now pay much more substantial fees, and they regard

their relationship with University staff as a consumer relationship in which they are entitled not only to *tuition* and *assessment* in return for their fees, but rather that they are entitled to *success* – attaining high grades (with or without assiduous study and excellent performance). In order to pay their university fees and live while they study, moreover, most Australian university students are also working for a greater proportion of their time than formerly, and in their work roles many are also required to give excellent service to customers or clients. For most, this means delivering food or other goods and services of the quality customers are entitled to expect. They therefore expect the same of their teachers – but believe that they have purchased a guarantee of success in their studies rather than a guarantee of the opportunity to succeed.

These examples illustrate how changes in the conditions and circumstances of Australian higher education in the twenty-first century have produced contradictions for university teachers like our Teacher Talk group. Our discussions of these contradictory circumstances and tendencies have helped our group to re-orient our thinking, our actions, and our relationships in ways that we hope will cohere with the best aspects of the particular traditions of university education that we hope to sustain, but we are also finding areas in which traditions of university education are under threat. For example, an external accrediting body, the New South Wales Institute of Teachers, imposes substantial pressures on our University's teacher education curricula if they are to comply with the Institute's detailed content requirements related to performance standards for new teachers. Crudely speaking, the effect is that we are more or less obliged to teach the Institute's teacher education curriculum, regardless of the particular characteristics of our own student body, our particular strengths and weaknesses as teachers, or our opportunities to work productively with

schools in our region. Our former expectation as teacher educators that we were professionally expert and excellent in teacher education is now more or less irrelevant to the determination of the curriculum – a crucial element of our educational practice as university teacher educators. The Institute has determined what our students – and students preparing to be teachers across the state of New South Wales – must learn if they are to be registered as teachers, and in doing so they have largely prescribed and delimited our field of practice as university teacher educators. Under such circumstances, we feel very acutely the tension described by Kemmis & Smith (2008, p.5):

> What is at stake when practice becomes rule following is the *moral agency* of the educator. At some point, hemmed in by rules, the educator may become no more than the *operative* of some system …

We do indeed feel as if we are being obliged to act, to a greater degree than formerly, as operatives of our University's systems, and of the Australian higher education system as a whole. Changes to higher education arrangements in Australia have included changing relationships between the Australian federal government and the governments of the states (responsible for the Acts created for most universities in Australia) and the administration of individual universities. They have also included substantial changes in the arrangements for internal administration and management of Australian universities – changes towards systems of performativity in teaching and in research, for example. Like universities around the world, Australian universities are also being changed by the new information and communication technologies, including the new possibilities of various forms of online pedagogy, for example. And the relationships between participants in university education – teachers, students, professional accrediting agencies, industry and communities – are also changing.

These are the kinds of changes that we discuss in the Teacher Talk group, as we explore how our own individual and collective practices – and the practice traditions of university education of which we are part – are being changed by emerging practice architectures – cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political orders and arrangements – that enable and constrain us in new ways.

In some ways, our solidarity as a group gives us a sense that we can *resist* some aspects of some of the changes, not so much by direct confrontation but rather by keeping alive elements of our practice that we believe are essential to maintain despite changing circumstances – an insistence on scholarship in our students' work, for example, or sustaining a thriving research community despite the pressures of increased teaching loads and the demands of other administrative tasks 'devolved' to us by new forms of university management. Perhaps more important than the notion that our discussions give us a power to resist the erosion of the practice traditions of university education is the sense of *solidarity* formed by our inhabiting this shared communicative space (Habermas, 1987a, 1987b, 1996; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). From this solidarity, and from the communicative action that we enter when we collectively stop to think what we are doing and how it has been shaped, we develop (as Habermas, 1996 observed) a sense of the *legitimacy* of our actions – and also a sense that there is a *crisis of legitimation* for some of the structures and practices of university education in the Australian higher education sector today (as well as in our own University). Our Teacher Talk group responds to such legitimation crises, as people often do, by opening spaces for public discourse in public spheres in which we can explore the problems and issues that confront us, and explore possible ways forward for each of us individually, as well as for university teachers and researchers collectively.

We have used our theories of practice architectures, metapractices and ecologies of practices as 'probes' to understand the interdependencies, interconnections, tensions and contradictions in our working lives as university teachers and researchers. The theories have also allowed us to understand how our work has been formed in concrete historical conditions in the more remote and more recent past as well as in contemporary circumstances globally and locally, and how our practices have been shaped within practice traditions that evolved in the past and continue to evolve. I believe that the theories make us more alive and alert to the ways in which our praxis has been and is shaped in practice traditions, and also encourages us to maintain those practice traditions, even when the circumstances of our University or the Australian higher education system seem to constrain us. We find that there are spaces both within and outside the University that allow a diversity of practices to thrive. Even in the face of performance management systems that reduce the quality of our research to measures of the number and grade of our publications, for example, we still want to do the best academic work of which we are capable – work worth doing in and for the contemporary world. And we find that the University does not forbid it – and, of course, in fact values it, no matter how it is regarded in terms of the national measures of 'Excellence in Research in Australia'.

I conclude then, that the spectator perspective of the practice theory we are developing in the first of the research programs I described is not incompatible with the approach in the second program – researching praxis from within practice traditions. On the contrary, the two programs appear to be complementary, and to give a kind of stereoscopic view – the view from within and the view from without – of our practice/praxis in the University. Figure 2 presents an expanded view of the relationships between the individual and cultural-material-social purposes of

education, drawing on more of the conceptual apparatus being developed in Research

Program One as foci for collective self-reflection in our Research Program Two (the

action research of the Teacher talk group).

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]
Figure 2: The individual and collective purposes of education constituted in praxis
and practice architectures

Perhaps Figure 2 (especially the bottom row) suggests how, in the Teacher

Talk group, this stereoscopic view becomes available, so we can interrogate, on the

one hand, our own individual and collective projects as teachers and, on the other, our

efforts as the contemporary bearers of particular practice traditions (with their own

distinctive discourses, forms of activity and work, and social-political arrangements).

In doing so, the Teacher Talk project allows us to explore the extent to which we are

able, as teachers and researchers in our own University, to pursue the double purpose

of education – helping people to live well and helping to create a world worth living

in.

One of the most striking findings of my study with Rebecca Mutton (2009) of

ten Education for Sustainability initiatives in various settings in rural New South

Wales was the sense that participants developed of the cosmological significance of

what they were doing. The local picture was understood to be part of the global

picture. And this was revealed in various kinds of spirituality – religious or secular –

that seemed to make sense of how the local and finite was a moment in something

global and infinite; how the here and now, one might say, is part of the everywhere

and forever.

Many participants in these Education for Sustainability projects came to

understand themselves within a far less anthropocentric view of the world – they were

not the centre of the natural world any more than the Earth is the centre of the

universe. Instead, they came to understand themselves as co-habitants in the natural world. Many also came to understand that humankind, as a specie, is not indispensable to the natural world, and that the planet and its life processes will go on, whether or not humankind becomes extinct.

The Teacher Talk group gives us a somewhat similar sense of our own insignificance and significance. As university teachers and researchers, we are a small and somewhat insignificant part of the evolving processes and practices of higher education in Australia and the world, especially seen against the measures of historical time and unrecorded time past, present and future. On the other hand, using the theories of practice architectures, metapractices and ecologies of practices, our discussions remind us of our significance – that it is our privilege or curse to be the current generation of university teachers and researchers in our part of the world, and that our actions do indeed form future generations of teachers and future knowledge of education. So we want to continue to develop our own individual and collective praxis by researching our praxis within practice traditions.

This, I think, is another way of saying how the spectator perspective of the theory of practice architectures, metapractices and ecologies of practices, on the one hand, and, on the other, the participant perspective of researching praxis from within practice traditions are complementary. They allow us to see ourselves as formed by a social whole, by a collective, history-making human-social praxis, within that whole, as people who, by their right conduct, or at least their best efforts, as teachers and as researchers, can contribute to the good for each person and the good for humankind.

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