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# **Thinking through practice: Exploring ways of knowing, understanding and representing the complexity of teaching**

Donna Mathewson Mitchell

*Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, Australia*

Email: [dmmitchell@csu.edu.au](mailto:dmmitchell@csu.edu.au)

This study was granted approval by the University Human Ethics Committee and participants gave informed consent to participate.

In recent times there has been a cross-disciplinary amplification of interest in the concept of practice. In this context, there is a growing body of research considering how teaching and teacher education might be viewed using the conceptual lens of practice. In this paper I explore practice theories to identify common themes and principles that constitute a conceptual framework for the investigation of the lived experience of teaching. From this foundation, a methodological framework based on collaborative inquiry and postmodern emergence is derived. Examples are offered of the way the conceptual framework and methodological approach have been activated through the first stage of a research program that collaboratively engages the dual voices of academic researcher and classroom practitioners as co-researchers. Analysis of qualitative data reveals the potential and limitations of this practice-based foundation as a way to know, understand and represent the complexity of teaching. In conclusion, the paper develops a number of propositions as the basis for further research.

*Keywords: practice, teaching, teacher education*

## **Introduction**

In recent times, knowledge-based approaches to teacher education have been increasingly challenged by assertions of the need for practice to be at the core of teacher education curriculum (Grossman, Hammerness and McDonald, 2009; Grossman and MacDonald, 2008; Ball and Forzani 2009). Such assertions are underpinned by an amplification of interest in practice theory, across disciplines and particularly in relation to teaching and teacher

education. Researchers such as Green (2009), Kemmis (2009), Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) and Reid (2011) have explored education through the conceptual lens of practice. Of most significance is the ways in which they have explored how practice theory conceptualises human action as structured and produced in and by the social time space (Schatzki, 2006) in which it occurs. Thinking about practice in this way allows us to understand that “practices precede individuals, historically and logically” (Warde, 2004, p.4). and “are developed over time by groups of practitioners who are engaged in that practice” (Warde 2004, p.4)

In this paper I will present the foundations of a research program developing an understanding of teaching practice in secondary visual arts classrooms. This program is the beginning of a research agenda that will augment the limited body of literature specifically existing in relation to visual arts education and adding to a growing body of literature about education and teacher education. While the focus of the research is on visual arts education, the aim of this paper is to consider the issue of practice more broadly, and to draw out implications for teaching and teacher education. In doing this I will firstly present a conceptual framework that draws on theories of practice. From this foundation I will derive and develop a methodological framework as a basis for investigating and representing teaching practice. Following this I will discuss how the conceptual foundation has been applied in an initial study of visual arts teaching practice, drawing on qualitative data and analysis to illustrate outcomes. Finally I conclude by developing a number of theoretical propositions about teaching practice, reflecting on the value of the approach and speculating on the future exploration of these propositions through research. My focus throughout the paper will be on an establishing a practice-based approach to the investigation of teaching to inform the continuum of teacher education.

## **Theorising practice: A conceptual framework**

While practice has been investigated over a long period of time, there is recent renewed interest that reflects a re-conceptualisation of the concept to encompass more complex definitions. In talking about practice, I am particularly drawing on definitions of practice as fundamental to an understanding of life and society, as a medium through which humans relate (Schatzki, 1996) and as indeterminate, particular, embodied, situated, and socially enacted (Gherardi, 2000, 2008). In doing this I explore the work of a number of practice theorists to identify themes and principles. It is important to note that the positions these theorists take reflect different theoretical orientations. In drawing on their work in this way, I seek not to underplay differences in their particular positions but to look across those positions to find complementarity. I do this in terms of a set of binaries that regularly characterise understandings of practice in the field of education.

### ***Practice as mind and body***

Common to all definitions of practice is a focus on human activity in relation to a 'doing (ness)' that Green (2009) observes as encompassing activity, experience and context. Green goes on to explain that the three distinct categories of activity, experience and context interrelate as layerings and un-foldings that dynamically change. While the doing (ness) of practice is often thought of in opposition to theory, in reality practice brings together both bodily and mental activity (Reckwitz, 2002). In referring to practice as 'sayings' and 'doings', Schatzki (1996), acknowledges that practice is expressed through action but that the action itself is generated by thoughts, ideas, perspectives and beliefs that exist intellectually and emotionally. Thus theory is embedded in practice and is used for practice. This definition

of practice as doing(ness) challenges the traditional Cartesian mind/body dualism, suggesting that it is through practice that the mind and the body are joined (Reckwitz 2002). It further highlights practice as performance, with the enactment of performance representing the nexus between doings and sayings (Warde, 2005, p.134).

### ***Practice as material and relational***

Practice is expressed through the body, is related to the materiality of context and is carried in and realised through the action of embodied performance in relation to others and to otherness. It exists in the relations between mind, body and action, with the body enabling and constraining the possibilities of action (Schatzki, 1996). Possibilities of action are further mediated by the particularities of time and place in terms of environments, circumstances and resources. Recognition of practice as shaped, in part, by material and physical circumstances, shifts focus away from the individual and ideas of practice as determined by knowledge. Instead it suggests that practice is extra-individual (Kemmis 2009), and needs to be considered as fundamentally social and relational. This fact is emphasized by Schwandt (2005, p.327) who has observed practice to be “always other-regarding”.

### ***Practice as emergent and as living tradition***

)Practice in certain fields involves a membership in which there exists an authority of practice. Those who engage in practice are part of a larger social practice and are disciplined, to some extent, by the history of practice and the evolution of practice. The tradition provides a way of seeing and a way of doing, at both a tacit and explicit level and “a routinised way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood” (Reckwitz 2002, p.250). Thus the practitioner attends to practice, although practice pre-exists and co-exists and exists in the future.

The practitioner also develops a relationship to practice that engages their agency, in relation to the broader tradition. Importantly, the existence of emergent qualities within living traditions provides constrained opportunities for action. Schatzki (1996) refers to this situation as involving existential possibilities, which are a range of possible options, or practical ways forward. Similarly, Bourdieu (2005) talks of human behaviour as being open and diverse, but within limits.

### *Practice as cognitive and pathic*

Recognition of practice as pathic challenges the centrality of the cognitive, suggesting that a sense of being is as important as the more objectifiable cognitive thinking that is associated with activity and experience. In this sense pathic is considered in relation to van Manen's (2007) phenomenological view of pathic as mood, sensibility and a felt sense of being in the world. van Manen (2007, p.20) talks about practice as involving a different way of knowing the world. He states that "Whereas theory "thinks" the world, practice "grasps" the world- it grasps the world pathically". As van Manen goes on to outline, the foregrounding of practice as pathic recognises that practice involves a sense of the body, a personal presence, relational perceptiveness, sensitivity and sensibility, a tact for knowing what to do and say, thoughtful routines and other aspects of knowledge that are in part pre-reflective and pre-linguistic. Such aspects are sensed, felt and dynamic and are often not probed, thought about or talked about explicitly. Consequently, examining the pathic quality of practice requires a move away from assumptions that knowledge is only cognitive and reflective, to develop understandings based on sensitivity to the experiential dimensions of practice.

### **Researching practice: Developing a methodological framework**

The theories of practice discussed develop practice as a productive framework moving between the dichotomies of mind/body, material/embodied, emergence/tradition, individual/relational, routinised/dynamic and cognitive/pathic. As a conceptual lens, practice therefore offers an integrative framework that allows for the exploration of the lived experience of the everyday. However, there are questions to be asked about how such a framework can be used to know and understand practice and then represent practice. How do we come to know practice if it is individual and collective, simultaneously visible and invisible, routinised and artful and embodied and material? Such questions particularly raise issues related to the relations between the researcher and the researched. Given these questions, it is proposed that a methodological framework that involves collaborative inquiry and postmodern emergence provides a productive way forward.

While practice has tended to be viewed from a spectator standpoint, with practitioners seen as objects, and knowledge and action seen as being objectifiable, Reid and Green (2009) call for the inclusion of the practitioner voice. They suggest that it is the practitioner who is deeply implicated and invested in practice who provides an insider perspective on practice. In specifically recommending collaborative research between teachers and university-based researchers, Reid and Green (2009) cite Smagorinsky et al (2006) as suggesting the benefit of action research and co-authorship of research into practice, by practitioners, for practice. Higgs and Titchen (2001) and Cochran- Smith & Lytle (1999; 2004) similarly observe collaborative inquiry as providing a framework that supports the authentic representation of practice as experienced by practitioners. It further enables the sharing of ideas to identify individual and collective practices and the possibilities of co-authorship.

Consistent with collaborative inquiry is the notion of emergence, in the sense that the direction of research can emerge out of collaborative inquiry. Somerville's (2007) theory of postmodern emergence allows the researcher to de-authorise the research, allowing for a

space of unknowing and unfolding in which all co-researchers can contribute and all perspectives are valued. It further recognizes that becoming–other involves bodies in relation to other bodies; and the messiness of becoming-other through research engagement (Somerville, 2007, p.10).

### **Knowing practice: Applying the conceptual framework**

The approach outlined has been applied in a small scale study of teaching practice. The aims of this study were to: (1) to evaluate the efficacy of the conceptual foundation developed for investigating teaching practice; and, (2) to identify and explore specific classroom-based practices within secondary visual arts education

### ***Participants***

Four secondary visual arts teachers were involved in the study as co-researchers. Throughout this paper when referring to the participant teachers as a particular group of co-researchers, I will refer to them as teacher-researchers. The four teachers were drawn from two schools, both in the same regional area of New South Wales. Two participants were selected from each school. The teachers represented teachers at different stages of their careers, and working in different school contexts. Two teachers were from an Anglican independent school with the first teacher having 28 years of teaching experience, and the second having 10 years teaching experience. The remaining two teachers were from a public secondary school with the first teacher having three years of experience in the area of secondary visual arts. The second teacher from this school was in her first year of teaching.



As the academic researcher involved in the pilot study as a co-researcher, I also have a background in visual arts education. As a secondary teacher in NSW and in Tasmania, I have sixteen years of secondary teaching experience. *Sentence removed for review*

### ***Research process***

In this initial project the research design was guided by structures and processes to facilitate inquiry and interaction to investigate teaching practice. These structures and processes were used as a starting point for ongoing collaboration. The first structure operationalised was a Relational Framework for Investigating Teaching Practice, labelled the RFITP. The RFITP provides the opportunity to investigate selected elements of teaching practice in a systematic way. As shown in Figure 1, it takes the form of a nine-cell matrix designed to construct, observe and reflect on teaching practice. Its aim is to provide a relational, generative and dynamic representation of aspects of activity, context and experience. A matrix was judged to be an appropriate way to initially represent the complex and non-linear nature of teaching practice. The matrix structure identifies a horizontal axis and a vertical axis. The horizontal axis represents structures that impact on teaching practice, while the vertical axis represents stakeholders implicated in teaching practice. This categorization reflects the integrative nature of practice in asserting a dialectical relationship between structure and agency.

The horizontal axis defines the three educational message systems of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment (Bernstein 1971). In this application, curriculum is “the substantive content of learning and its organization, as subjects and topics” (Kalantzis and Cope, 2008, p.6). The term ‘pedagogy’ reflects a focused conception of pedagogy as the process of teaching as the art and science of teaching (van Manen, 1999). Assessment is defined as “gathering, interpreting and describing information about student achievement” (Brady & Kennedy, 2007, p.220).

The vertical axis defines key stakeholders in teaching practice as learners, teachers and community. Learners are individuals who collectively participate in schooling. Teachers are specifically acknowledged as part of teaching practice, rather than solely responsible. Community articulates the connections between teaching in schools, the multiplicity of experiences outside schools, and the people who have an interest in schooling. The inclusion of community recognises that the private, enclosed space of the classroom has become more publically visible (Kalantzis and Cope, 2008, p.225) and that learning in the classroom has a relationship to communities beyond the classroom. In this research, the term community was defined broadly. It encompassed the school community, the local community and also, in the case of one school, the home community of boarding students.

The nine content cells, numbered for ease of reference, represent the space of intersection of the vertical and horizontal axes. The focus of each cell is explained by guiding questions, derived from the elements placed along the axes of the framework and their intersection within the cell. Within the pilot study each co-researcher was provided with copies of the RFITP as shown in Figure 1 and copies of RFITP templates, with guiding questions removed. The guiding questions thus became external prompts for responses.

Each of the four teachers, as teacher-researchers engaged with the RFITP through a process involving Eisner's linked propositions of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism (2005, p.40). Educational connoisseurship involved the observation of the qualities of teaching through the consideration of examples of practice. In application, all co-researchers, including myself, identified particular lessons to be taught and independently used the framework to firstly plan and secondly, reflect on those lessons. Plans, observations and reflections were recorded on the templates.

Educational criticism as the second part of the process aimed to translate the private discernment of connoisseurship into a language that could be shared and discussed (Eisner,

2005). Educational criticism is a practice discussion that is first informed by the systematic private consideration of educational connoisseurship. In this stage of the project all co-researchers shared RFITP documents as artefacts of the connoisseurship process with the documents then being explained and elaborated on discursively during a series of focus discussions.. Semi-structured interview questions elicited data about the content of the documents, in relation to discrete cells, and the relationships between cells. Questions were structured around the elements of the framework and sought to elaborate on documentation. Applied in this way, and in relation to the RFITP, it was anticipated that the process of connoisseurship and criticism would enable investigation, representation and articulation of practice.

EDUCATIONAL MESSAGE SYSTEMS				
STAKEHOLDERS		Curriculum	Pedagogy	Assessment
	Learners	1.1 What is being taught? Who is the learner/s?	2.1 How are learners engaging with teaching processes, procedures and strategies?	3.1 How are learners demonstrating learning, achievement and efficacy ?
	Teachers	1.2 What content has the teacher presented?	2.2 What processes are used to promote learning? Who is the teacher/s?	3.2 How is the teacher gathering, describing and interpreting information about teaching and learning?
	Community	1.3 How does the curriculum connect to the broader community?	2.3 How does pedagogy connect with the community?	3.3 What assessment is being used? How is information shared with the community?

Figure 1. Nine cell relational framework for the study of teaching practice

### ***Data and data analysis***

Data was collected in the form of completed RFITP templates and transcribed group discussions. Separate RFITP's were completed for pre-and post lesson responses, and transcribed discussions were mapped onto additional RFITP documents, providing effective categorisation. Individual cells of the RFITP were able to be investigated, while rows, columns and five cell descriptive sets were also explored for connections. Ultimately the analysis looked across all of the elements, to achieve a relational rendering of the identified elements of practice.

### **Understanding practice: Results and discussion**

The analysis of data gathered in the first stage of this research program allowed for consideration of the relevance of theories of practice to understandings of teaching and ways to approach the representation of teaching. In this discussion I will consider the findings of the study in relation to this foundation. I will focus on the data gathered from the teacher-researchers as a distinct group, rather than the data I collected about my own practice.

Across the data collected from all teacher-researchers, core practices of visual arts teaching were evident, in relation to instructional methods, selection and use of resources, in the focus of programming and in approaches to relationships with colleagues and with students. In this examination I will illustrate those core practices that are most pertinent and that have a general relevance to understandings of teaching practice.

Common instructional methods included discussing artworks, listening to student ideas, questioning students about their artworks, connecting ideas and experimenting with artmaking approaches and materials. In all cases, teacher-researchers spoke of these strategies

with a focus on ‘we ‘ that illustrated the importance of relationships developed within classrooms and a consistently collaborative approach that was central to the development of those relationships. Collaboration involved both teachers with students and teachers with other teachers. This was particularly well illustrated in the following statement:

I always talk about “we could do this” & “we could do that” & “how about we do that”

Supporting these instructional methods was the consistent use of resources to present examples, ideas or objects as central to teaching practice. Resources were in the form of exemplar artworks, books, reproductions, process diaries and access to the images on the Internet. One teacher epitomised the importance of resources in stating:

I’m really lost if I do not have things to show.

In each case the ‘real thing’ in terms of exemplar artworks was prioritised if it was available. Where artworks were not available, there was a reliance on reproductions, found in books or accessed through the internet. Books were particularly important resources within the classrooms of three teacher-researchers, while for the remaining teacher-researcher, access to the internet was the focus. One teacher-researcher spoke of having nearly 100 books borrowed from the school library at any one time, for use in the classroom. Another teacher-researcher noted a personal investment with respect to books as instructional resources:

I’m lucky enough to have a bookshelf in our own room and I spend over \$1,000.00 a year on books. I keep them at school and they are there all over the place.

Dynamic qualities were also identified in each of the teacher-researcher’s practice, although the degree of dynamism and the nature of adaptations varied significantly in relation

to context, resources, physical space and teaching style. Such dynamism also developed over time, and in relation to a structure related to the core qualities of practice. For example, the more experienced teacher-researchers felt very comfortable with changing their practice as required. Interestingly, when these teacher-researchers first introduced their teaching, they did not identify change between lesson plans and implementation. They felt that because they knew their students and their subject, their practices were very predictable and relatively unchanging. However, discussion indicated that change did occur but was often not recognised as such, because adaptation had become a naturalised aspect of practice. Those with less experience were dynamic in their practice, but were more aware of differences between planning and implementation. In making the insightful observation that '*I'm still learning that they don't know*' a first year graduate teacher-researcher indicated she was still at a stage of identifying the level at which her students were operating. As she spoke it was clear that her adaptations were about getting to know her students. Another teacher-researcher, in the first three years of art teaching, noted:

It's sort of helpful also isn't it – when you begin to have the structure. I sort of feel that I can give myself permission to leave the structure because I feel confident that I can go with that.

All of the teacher-researchers tended to externalise the reasons for adaptation, rather than connecting the dynamic nature of their practice to a personal artistry. They generally viewed themselves as responding to extra-individual factors, including learners and learning environment or responding to temporal circumstances. For example, in explaining a particular change in her approach to a lesson a teacher-researcher stated:

Like you pick up on those things and you think, I'm not going to put myself through it today.

While discussions focused on ‘doing’, the associated action and activity was consistently related to the entirety of the lived experience for both the teacher-researcher and the learner. The idea of knowing was clearly articulated in relation to knowing students, knowing content and knowing the school context and the community, and these were seen to inter-relate and unfold. Interestingly, little reference was made to knowing how to be an effective teacher. However, references were made to being a particular kind of teacher, and how important it is to ‘fit’ into the school community. Conversely there was recurring reference to the performance of a particular role in the classroom for the purposes of student engagement. In one particular instance, a teacher-researcher noted that the performative aspects of practice were clearly aligned to student needs and motivation, illustrating both the embodied and other-regarding nature of practice. She explained that in order to motivate students:

I play the dumb one –I’ll say, ”if I can remember this at my age (those last 2 instructions) you can!”, and I’ll re-hash it verbally and loudly.

At one level, the embodied and pathic elements of practice were not easily captured through this initial approach to the research. Little reference was made to personal emotions or feelings or a sense of being. Rather teacher-researchers tended to focus on cognitive explanations of practice, and definitions of practice as action oriented, perhaps because of enduring perceptions of practice as cognitive or due to perceptions of academic research as being focused on intellectual knowledge. However, it was clear that in references to ‘knowing’ students, often this was at the level of the intuitive and the personal, with judgements made based on perception of students’ emotional, intellectual and physical states. For example, there was reference to the fact that *‘you just know when the kids walk in the*

*door*'. In another instance, in explaining how she decided which student to work with at a particular moment a teacher-researcher indicated that she would attend to:

the one with the greatest need & having the biggest panic attack. You judge the emotional state.

A sense of knowing the other in the absence of explicit expression, was also evident in a comment made by another teacher-researcher in relation to her students

...and they'll start off the sentence with "I don't know", but they actually do know it.

In this example, the teacher-researcher was able to talk about how students often know the answers to questions, but lack the confidence to express their knowledge clearly. In talking of the student experience, the teacher-researcher had an intuitive knowledge of what students knew and felt at an unexpressed level. This guided her practice and her relationships with those students as she attempted to meet their learning needs and move them forward.

In addition, the creation of environments that involved particular feelings of ease in relation to a sense of being was also noted as crucial to practice and a point of commonality. The creation of these environments was not related to material objects or room organisation, but rather was about feelings of safety, security and relaxation that were created through a particular approach to teaching and the development of relationships. A teacher-researcher observed:

and I think our classroom, our Department is completely different to the rest of the school...we have kids who come in the door & they will go, "oh, thank God I'm here". And it's not because we're fabulous teachers and we are wonderful to be with, it's because of the tension, I think that they can actually relax and learn.



It was clear throughout the process of working with the teachers as co-researchers that an understanding of practice was a common concern. The teacher-researchers were able to talk about what they did, and did so with a keen interest in the practice of others. At the same time they recognised a lack of regular opportunities to talk about practice. While in each case they identified constant dialogue with their immediate colleagues, they noted that focused time to investigate and talk about what they did, why they did it, and how that impacted upon their practice, was not available. While evaluation was a feature of each school, the processes surrounding evaluation were seen to be focused on accountability and institutional requirements rather than professional learning. Where professional accreditation was linked to evaluation and professional learning, the observation was made that such activities were largely text based and completed in an isolated manner. The opportunity to systematically talk through practice using a guiding, reflective structure was noted as significant as a means of framing, and possibly reframing, action, experience and context.

It was clear that while the RFITP structure and the nine discrete cells within the structure provided a starting point, teacher-researchers engaged with the structure in an integrated way, becoming more comfortable in moving across the boundaries of the cells as they gained experience. This approach also reflected the relational and integrated nature of their practice. The involvement of teacher-researchers from two schools and myself, as an external academic researcher as co-researchers in the extended and sequential discussions meant that references to context had to be explained in ways that engaged us in giving voice to what was often assumed and tacit. In doing this, the research process, in part, addressed the need to articulate implicit understandings using a common language. The elements of the RFITP provided the basis for that language. However, it is important to note that the critical

aspect of educational criticism, and the public conversation that was engaged in, developed over time. It is anticipated that rehearsal and practice of this process would enable all of us to move from what were initially cognitively-based, self aware recounts of action toward a deeper engagement with practice as a more complex concept.

In most cases, practice was viewed as being largely known, albeit implicitly, but in all cases the use of the matrix within a process of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism led to the discovery of aspects of practice the teacher-researchers had not previously thought about. In two cases this new discovery was prompted by the inclusion of community as one element of the matrix. While teacher-researchers initially found the inclusion of this element confusing and anticipated not being able to address it, in application they found community to be a crucial but unrecognised aspect of their practice. For example, one teacher-researcher noted her particular strength in connecting student learning with community:

It was only when we had that conversation that I realised that's where I have a lot of interest in making that connection to community.

Another teacher-researcher had a similar experience and noted

In working with students, I make direct connections into where they come from, who they are. But by expanding it and focusing on it, when I thought about it, it was a bit of a light bulb.

The efficacy of 'community' in prompting previously unrealised aspects of practice validated the perspective of theory within the discussion, and effectively illustrated productive collaboration and the nexus of theory and experience.

In terms of analysing the particular research design, use of the RFITP and the collaborative process of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism within a framework of collaborative inquiry authentically involved teachers as teacher-researchers. Some

movement was made toward the removal of traditional roles of researcher and participants, although further collaboration is needed to enable that repositioning to be reinforced.

Collaborative inquiry did enable the multiple voices of teachers and researcher to be heard and to be valued. This was supported by a cycle of action and reflection facilitated in this instance through the RFITP and the processes of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism. Meaning was developed inter-textually and over time, as teacher-researchers reported, listened, questioned and discussed.

### **Representing practice: Implications for teaching and teacher education**

In analysing the data that emerged from the research four propositions in relation to teaching practice in visual arts can be formulated. Firstly, there are core practices of visual arts teaching that are common to classroom sites. These practices can be investigated, articulated, taught and developed through a teacher education that is practice-focused. However, they require further examination beyond these instances. Secondly, there are dynamic approaches to teaching practice that respond to the conditions and contexts of practice. In teacher education, while this dynamic relation to practice cannot be articulated in terms of a clear process or set of strategies, it can be fostered as a teacherly disposition that expects and embraces change and adaptation. Thirdly, teaching practice is embodied and pathic. The body is implicated in practice albeit largely implicitly in relation to instructional approaches, the use of resources and the creation of learning environments. In relation to this is the importance of knowing and feeling through intuitive means and the creation and perceptions of a sense of being in the classroom. This is an aspect of teacher learning and development that is largely absent from teacher education at all levels, but should be explored in more detail. Fourthly and finally, it is proposed that knowing and understanding teaching practice requires recurrent opportunities to investigate, articulate and represent practice from

the standpoint of practitioners. Such work has the potential to both reposition existing knowledge about practice and generate knowledge from within practice, for practice development. In teacher education, this knowledge can be used to develop practice-based pedagogical approaches and curriculum that is aligned with the complexity of practice in schools.

Consideration of these propositions beyond the instances reported on in this paper requires further application of the approach and sustained investigation in a range of settings over a longer period of time than was possible in this instance. While future stages of my research will initially pursue such applications in the specific context of visual arts classrooms, it would also be valuable to extend this research into other specialist areas to examine what is common and what is different to particular teaching areas. The consideration of such research with broader programs of research investigating practice – based teacher education, may also be valuable.

### **Concluding comments**

Within this paper I have outlined the development of an approach to researching teaching for the purposes of teaching and teacher education. In doing this I have speculated on how visual arts teaching, as a specialist teaching area, might be approached using practice as a conceptual lens. From this foundation I have developed a methodological framework that seeks to know, understand and represent teaching as a particular practice. In drawing on selected qualitative data and analysis I have further reported on how these frameworks have been activated in research. In exploring implications of the research I have developed four propositions that provide the basis of a practice-based approach to teacher education. I have

recommended that these propositions be further tested through ongoing research into visual arts teaching and teaching more broadly.

Importantly, the focus on practice presented has provided epistemological, ontological and methodological structure and direction for future research. It is anticipated that sustaining collaborative inquiry to investigate teaching through practice in this way will provide more complex renderings of teaching practice at an individual and collective level. Exploring practice from these perspectives may ultimately generate accounts of teaching practice that have the potential to inform approaches to teaching and teacher education.

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