Chapter 1
Practice Theory and Education: Diversity and Contestation

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Abstract There has emerged, since the turn of the century or so, a cohesive body of work centred on theorising education as practice. These practice theories come from a range of theoretical and philosophical traditions, but collectively they draw attention to the sociality of practices, and the ontological nature of practice. A 'practice turn' also emphasises the 'happingness' of education and the need to consider teaching and learning as they unfold in particular sites within local conditions. In this chapter we provide an overview of practice theory in relation to education, and outline how these theories can provide a critical perspective of education across a range of settings and systems. We also provide an argument and illustration of how developing a communicative space is foundational to developing educational practices under diverse and contested practice arrangements.

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Practices are formed by being in and participating in the social world. Understanding thereby practices requires a theory, or suite of theories, that illuminate the socialness and sociality of practical being, action and interaction. So, understanding education practices where learning and socialisation co-occur presumes what is necessary is a social theory that makes visible the intricacies of what it means to participate in the enactment of the complex world of education practices[1]. Theories that examine and are sensitive to practices, the enactment of practices, the composition and the development of practices and the practitioners of practices can collectively be described as practice theories. Noting that because of the complexities, nuances and diversity of the scope of practice there is not a singular unified theory of practice, but rather 'a family of theoretical approaches connected by a web of historical and conceptual similarities' (Nicolini 2012, p. 1). This plurality of practice theories come from a range of scholarly traditions, fields and theoretical positions (Nicolini 2012) that, although diverse, make for richer understandings of everyday practices.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century it was suggested that the theorising of pedagogy and education required a 'practice turn' (Schatzki et al. 2001). The 'practice turn' has been a far-reaching movement taken up in a range of contexts and across a variety of educational systems, workplaces, organisations and forms. But this turn towards practice-based perspectives is not simply a trend or fashionable bandwagon (Nicolini 2012); rather it is a turn towards the recognition of the need for social theories that offer close attention to the intricate details of practical enactment in the social world. Such practice-based perspectives deepen, broaden and heighten the meanings, descriptions and reasonings offered in empirical studies focused on practice. Now, some 15 years later, it is timely to renew discussions about the developments and insights that practice theories offer education. The practice turn taken across this chapter, and indeed each of the chapters in this book, discuss the nature and relevance of practice theory, before specifically looking at it in terms of education. Primarily, in this chapter we provide a broad theoretical and philosophical foundation to ground and contextualise practice theories as interpreted in the chapters within this book.

Why Practice Theory?

Practice is a ubiquitous—and perhaps even a taken-for-granted, idiom found in descriptions of everyday social life. Its presence threads through theoretical, methodological and practice-based literature to point to both broader *and* particular

[1]Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer and Bristol in their 2014 book 'Changing Practices, Changing Education' describe the interconnected and multidimensional practices of education. They identify these education practices as being student learning, teaching, leading, professional learning and researching, pronouncing them as the 'complex of education practices' (p. 50).

acts, actors, actions and activities encountered in the practical social world. Although the heightened interest in practice theory in education is relatively recent, it is not new; and it is possible to trace theories and ideas about educational and organisational practices throughout history. Practice theorist Davide Nicolini (2012), for example, mapped out an introduction to *practice theories*[2] beginning with ancients Plato and Aristotle before traversing a range of theorists and philosophers including Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Giddens, Bourdieu, Wenger and Schatzki (just to name a few). However, the 'practice turn' noted by Schatzki et al. (2001) has been quite a contemporary phenomenon, and indeed, the seminal works of Schatzki (2001) has given impetus to and sustained this renewed emphasis on the primacy of practice as an integral dimension of understanding the everyday workings of social life (inclusive of education and work because both are habituated in the lifeworlds of individuals). The allure of a practice-based approach to understanding work, education and organisations is grounded in the range of affordances it offers including the way it embraces the ordinariness and routine nature of *lifeworlds* and *systems* (as put by theorist Jürgen Habermas, 1987):

> The great promise of the practice lens is that of explaining social phenomena in a processual way without losing touch with the mundane nature of everyday life and the concrete and material nature of the activities with which we are all involved. (Nicolini 2012, p. 9)

As suggested here by Nicolini, the feature of drawing on practice theories is that they ultimately include and, in most cases emphasise, the recursive relationship between social, structural and material conditions, and the actualities of 'living out' practices as they exist or are experienced in Habermas' terms, 'system' and 'lifeworld'. In general, practice theories argue that viewing social life as a simply quantifiable and measurable machine is deeply inadequate; rather these theories respond to, leverage out and account for the layers, levels and intricacies and situatedness of enactment. Just as practices (in their doing) are not static, practice theories do not succumb to the rigidity of measurement regimes, rather liberated from the confines of functionalist perspectives governed by tradition. In their portrayal, a practice approach is inclusive of the complex multidimensionality and dynamism of being in and participating in the social world. Schatzki (2001) extols this virtue by pointing out that as a social theory, practice theories embrace aspects 'such as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science power, language, social institutions and human transformation' (p. 2).

Another feature of practice theories is that these generally appear to work around the common tendency to see the world in terms of such as theory and action, and individual and social. As such, practice theories avoid the oppositional conceptualisation of aspects of life and work that have been seen as unresolvable, particularly in epistemological frameworks. The ontological dimension of a practice-perspective adds substance to this since foundation of practice theories

[2]Here we use the plural "theories" to denote the multiplicity of theories of practice described as a practice theory, that although distinct and distinctively different from one another have a primacy of practice.

provides a somewhat radical perspective that is more reflective of life and work as it unfolds in time-space. Specifically, rather than seeing aspects or machinations of the social world in dualistic ways, practice theories allow them to be seen as mutually constituting and sustaining, and relationally connected in complex and irreducible terms. For example, a teacher will engage in teaching practices that are idiosyncratic and specific for her particular classroom, but at the same time she is part of the particular community of teachers at her school; these practices are nuanced and unique on the one hand, yet are also nested within a broad profession of educators. In this, her individual teaching practices are simultaneously shaped by the 'traditions' of the broader practice, but at the same time the traditions of the broader practice are also made and remade by the practices of individuals – that is, these dimensions of practice action and participation are mutually constitutive. This was noted by Marx in the Third Theses on Feuerbach (1845/2002) when he said:

> The materialist doctrine that [people] are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed [people] will be the product of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is [people] who make circumstances, and that the educator must [themselves] be educated.

In the everyday conceptualisation of practices, when people think of practices they often think of the activities and the doing of things, not only of who is involved. This directs us to another characteristic of a practice-based approach to understanding and developing education is the shift of sole focus from the *practitioners* to the *practices* (Nicolini 2012). For example, in educational inquiry, rather than discussing school leaders, the focus would shift to be about school leading; or rather than investigating teachers, the research and theory about the work of teachers would centralise the practices of teaching. Thus, in this view practices have pre-eminence over practitioners, noting that the place of practitioners is one that is not overlooked nor undermined but viewed as part of the practising of practices. This shift is necessary because to understand the education that happens in a site, it is necessary to have an appreciation (both theoretically and analytically) for the *range* of interconnected practices that unfold in the day-to-day realities of particular practitioners of practices within a particular practice landscape. We argue, therefore, that the role of the individual in undertaking practices can only be understood within the arrangements and conditions that enable and constrain the practice as it is experienced among the other practices that are ecologically arranged with it in the site. As an example, Wilkinson and Kemmis (2014) explain what this means in relation to educational leading:

> …we frequently employ the verb 'leading', rather than its noun form 'leadership'. We do so as part of a site ontological approach, that is as a means of shifting attention from the notion of leadership as a taken-for-granted and fixed state or role (implied in an entity view of organisations), to the activities and practices that constitute leading and that may include encouraging and supporting others to engage in practices of leading. (p. 5)

This shift is not merely a play on words (from nouns to verbs or more specifically gerunds), but a profound change in the philosophical foundations for understanding, appreciating and developing practices. And in terms of research into

educational 'practices' it places the emphasis on the actual conduct of practices or *happenings* in the enactment of practices in sites (like leading or teaching or learning) rather than the personal qualities of the central figures in the practice. Hence, as researchers we tend to adapt, improvise, experience, but within the rules of the practice of research to justify our adaptive features and argue its validity. Nonetheless, practice theory does acknowledge that researchers as participants make praxis happen and in this way contribute to the history making.

Not only are practices ecologically arranged in the realities of their existence however; they are historically prefigured although not predetermined (Kemmis et al. 2014a, b). As Warde (2005) explains, practices 'contain the seeds of constant change… as people in myriad situations adapt, improvise and experiment' (p. 141). In this way, practices can be said to have 'trajectories' which are made up of minor modifications in past performances and the particular combination of elements at any one point in time (Warde 2005).

Finally, practice theories offer a more rounded comprehensive understanding of social phenomenon by encompassing more than is available through analyses that are solely based on one dimension alone, for instance, on discourses and language. This is not to say that discursive practices are not fundamental to a social understanding of organisations and education, but rather to highlight that alone they are inadequate.

> Practice approaches suggest that we need theories that take into account the heterogeneous nature of the world we live in, which includes an appreciation that objects and materials often bite back at us and resist our attempts to envelope them with our discourses. (Nicolini 2012, p. 8)

Thus, we argue, practice theory can be seen as a way of remediating the over simplification of education to just texts, discourses and signs by including social and material dimensions. It therefore offers a unitary understanding of education as practice.

Beyond the Practice Bandwagon: Diversity and Scope in Practice-Based Perspectives

Practice theories are fundamentally social theories bound by a core interest in the conduct and shape of practices in all dimensions of everyday social life: what they are composed of, how they are enacted, what is accomplished by them, the individuals and materials involved, what enables and constrains the doing of them, the structures and/or processes, the discourses, how they are produced and reproduced. Contemporary practice theories are anchored in philosophical traditions strongly influenced by the thinking of Marx, Heidegger and Wittgenstein (for example). Their importance to sociology recognises the sociality and situatedness of practices by availing themselves of close scrutiny of both the shape of and the shaping conditions of practice and practical action; they are built on and give rise to different

theoretical positions that form the increasingly diverse range of practice-based perspectives. These differing positions have been distinguished by Schatzki (2001), who described four main types of practice theorists:

> *philosophers* (such as Wittgenstein, Dreyfus, or Taylor), *social theorists* (Bourdieu, Giddens), *cultural theorists* (Foucault, Lyotard) and *theorists of science and technology* (Latour, Rouse, Pickering). It is also possible to distinguish two 'waves' or generations of practice theorists. Whilst the first generation, led by some of the foremost theorists of the twentieth century (e.g., Bourdieu 1977; de Certeau 1984; Foucault 1979; Giddens 1979, 1984) laid the foundations of what we now regard as practice theory, the second generation is currently testing those foundations and building new extensions to the theoretical edifice." (cited in Postill 2010, p. 4; emphasis added).

The diversity of theories illuminates different theoretical, empirical and methodological orientations of practice offering sometimes overlapping, entangled, tangential, interconnected or even discrete accounts of practice. And as Nicolini (2012) cautions, harboured in the strength of each one of these theories are comparable weaknesses which needs to be acknowledged in the adoption or argument for one theory or another. That is to say, it must be acknowledged that any theory on practice positions both the researcher and the representation of research in particular ways; positions not without limitations.

What follows in this brief section (utilising Schatzki's (2001) four broad categories as organising structures) is a modest attempt to draw out some of these various perspectives[3] which places the social *in* practices but differ in their localisation of the social and in their conceptualisation of the body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse, structure/process and the agent (Reckwitz 2002) in their accounts of the production and reproduction of practices.

Philosophers

Sensemaking, intelligibility and comprehensibility made perceptible in language in the *doing* of things form the centrepiece for philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1958) characterisation of social practice. A Wittgensteinian view asserts that practices 'are social (they help people combine as a group), are set in motion by processes of intelligibility and are given some coherence and identity by their inherent teleological nature' (Nicolini, 2012, p. 171). For Wittgenstein, intelligibility, coherence and identity are symbiotically shaped in practices constituted in, through and by language. For him, social practices are not, and cannot be reduced to discursive practices alone however. 'Actions (not thought) underlies language' (Schatzki 1996, p. 135); and so language-as-social action is given, and gives off, varying shades of meaning in practices. Thereby it is through language (as more

[3]We draw on Nicolini's comprehensive and historical account of a range of practice theories; for more detail, see Nicolini (2012).

than speech acts) that meaning enters and leaves the spatiotemporal moments of activity, as people as interlocutors in interactions come together to do things of varying kinds. This means that language is not considered simply 'as a lexicon but as an interlocutory activity of meaning making' (Kemmis et al. 2014a, b, p. 28). Coherence in practices reciprocally influences and is influenced by language. Wittgenstein places the idea of *language games* as central to understanding practices and the sociality of practices. Practices as 'a shared, collective, *intersubjective* achievement' (Kemmis et al. 2014a, b, p. 28) are made recognisable and comprehensible in, through and by language and the *games* (routines, rules, patterns and social forms) that influence or even govern its evolution and utility. As Schatzki (1996) writes 'Practices thus 'constitute worlds' in the sense of articulating the intelligibility of entities (objects, people and events), specifying their normativized interrelated meanings' (p. 115).

Social Theorists

An early proponent of a social theory of practice is Garfinkel (1967) whose work in ethnomethodology, for instance, forms an important way to 'treat practical activities, practical circumstances and practical sociological reasoning as topics of empirical study' (Garfinkel 1967, p.1). Although ethnomethodologists would not typically describe themselves as practice theorists, Garfinkel's early movement towards a focus on inquiry into everyday social phenomenon led to understanding practices as locally accomplished. This ontological position opened up other social theories of practice that give primacy to the discourses that both *flow* discursively through practices at the same time *shape* talk-in-interaction practices (or the in-the-moment accomplishment of practices). For example, although located in discipline of sociology, the work of Sacks et al. (1974) in conversation analysis, Fairclough's theoretical work (1992) on critical discourse analysis and Gee's (1992) work on 'D'/discourse analysis are not strictly theories of practice (according to Nicolini 2012), they do (although differentially) position the centrality of discourse in practices as discursively produced social action. For them the unfolding of discourse as activity in space-time—discursivity—is the core matter in the conduct and accomplishment of practice.

Conceptualisations of 'social practice' have also been offered by social theorists such as Giddens and Bourdieu to understand the nature of the dynamics between agency, structure, dispositions and context. For instance, sociologist Giddens (1984) situates practices within social structures both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of its constitution. In his view, practices are not governed by a prefigured world of objects but requires human agency, solidarity and identity produced and reproduced in social interaction and transactions. Bourdieu (1977, 1990) goes further to purport a logic of practice that emphasises the importance of the body of persons in the enactment of practices which are influenced by varying degrees of individual agency (or capitals) and

dispositions formed in and because of ones' habitus. Central to Bourdieu's thinking is the treatment of language and discourses as mechanisms of power embedded in different fields and habitus is pivotal in how participants in practices of one kind or another develop particular habitus. Habitus, according to Bourdieu (1990), is a set of unique dispositions developed by participants (as sovereign beings) enacting a particular practice in cultural, material and social fields (for example); these dispositions are what give the participant the 'feel for the game' that makes it possible for them to act accordingly in the field.

Science and Technology Theorists

According to prominent practice theorist Reckwitz (2002), materials, objects, technologies and even infrastructures are elevated in status as essential active elements that co-constitute practices with their own agentic influences that ultimately determine the enactment of practices. Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) (2005) proposes that *all* parts of the practices in social life—natural, technological, or human—are actants (parts of the natural, technological, or human network that have some role to play) to be treated equally as influential, interconnecting and active dimensions of the whole system. In this theory, every situation or practice may be referred to as a network (a group of interconnected reciprocally affectual elements), composed of actants and interconnections (ways that the parts of the networks interact).

Recent Developments in Practice Theory

In more recent developments in practice theory, work by Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) and Kemmis et al. (2014b) argue that theoretically and empirically, practices are influenced (enabled and constrained) and ecologically connected by particular cultural–discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that form historically constituted site-based conditions for the enactment of practices. Kemmis et al.'s (2014a, b) theories of practice architectures and ecologies of practices, located in the field of social theory, give rise to a new integrated view of practice that accounts for the physical space-time *and* the semantic and social spaces that mutually and simultaneously shape the conduct of practices. In these spaces, this theory gives primacy to sociality and to both subjective and intersubjective meaning making as practitioners of practices come together as interlocutors in interactions and actions in diverse sites of practices. The theory of practice architectures develops Schatzki's (2002) formulation of practice as a 'organised array or nexus of *doings* and *sayings* existing in practice arrangement bundles', to give equal attention to a third dimension *relatings*. This theory makes explicit how in practice power, solidarity and agency shape the social–political arrangements and

hang together with material-economic and social-political arrangements in a site to help hold a practice in place. According to Kemmis et al. (2014a, b):

> This quality of 'hanging together' in a project is crucial for identifying what makes particular kinds of practices distinctive. Sayings, doings and relatings, and cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements can and do exist independently of practices. All are galvanised into action in more or less coherent ways in relation to one another, however, when they hang together in the conduct of distinctive practices (even if they sometimes include contradictory ideas or contrary impulses or relationships of conflict or contestation between participants). (p.31)

That galvanising often relies on the linguistic abilities as tools to harmonise the cultural–discursive, material-economic and social–political arrangements. Kemmis et al. (2014a, b) explain further that practices of one kind or another (like teaching, hairdressing or nursing) are always ecologically arranged with other practices. Their claim is that a practice can never be completely understood as its own bounded entity. This aligns with the view offered by Røpke (2009) who asserted that practices are always interconnected with other practices (e.g., practices of hairdressing and practices of hair design and purchasing hair products) and are in a mutually constitutive relationship within wider political, economic, legal and cultural structures of varying formality. So in reality practices are never unitary, isolated or discrete, but rather are almost always found to exist within an assemblage of other practices. This means practices are always *enmeshed* with other practices. And so in education, practices are fully integrated with, interwoven into, and constituted as part of a broader contexture of practices involving leading, teaching, professional learning, student learning and researching or as they assert within the broader education complex of practices (that include policy and research). The theory of practice architectures is also differentiated from other theories of practice because of its explicit moral dimension connected to educational praxis (described in more detail in a later section).

Site Ontologies

Practices always occur somewhere in physical space-time. Practices, therefore are temporally situated, locally influenced, locally produced, locally enacted, locally accomplished and locally comprehended. As was highlighted in previous sections, one of the characteristics of a 'practice turn' in theorising pedagogy and education is an emphasis on and interest in the *sites* of practices, forming a fundamentally site ontological approach. In his theory, Schatzki (2002) brings practice, sociality and ontology together in the moment of practising in his proposal that practices are 'the site of the social' (pp. 146–147). Thus attention to the site, and the nuances of sites, is an approach different from the more idealised and generalised views of education and pedagogy that emphasise the epistemological through terms like 'best practice'. In a site-based understanding of education, the *realities*, *actualities* and *happeningness* of practices is emphasised. Furthermore, this position views practices as

only comprehensible within the sites *and* within the moments in which they actually occur. This conception has a number of implications for theorising and understanding the conduct of practices.

First, if practices unfold in particular space-time, then it is only sensible to consider practices and the arrangements that enable and constrain them simultaneously. To this end, Schatzki (2012) stated:

> Because the relationship between practices and material entities is so intimate, I believe that the notion of a bundle of practices and material arrangements is fundamental to analyzing human life. …. To say that practices and arrangements bundle is to say (1) that practices effect, use, give meaning to, and are inseparable from arrangements while (2) arrangements channel, prefigure, facilitate, and are essential to practices. (p. 16)

This notion of practice-arrangement bundles means that to understand educational practices, attention must be paid simultaneously to the practices and the practice architectures; and as we contend, to discuss educational practices outside their particular site is at best partial, and at worst, meaningless.

Second, the forms of certain practices that emerge in a particular site are shaped—enabled and constrained, by conditions that exist in that particular site at that time. This means that while we can label a certain practice as, for example teaching, it is not realised or practiced in the same way as in the next classroom, the school down the road, or the educational institution in another country. Furthermore, this view also challenges the veracity of a term like 'best practice' in anything other than a very general sense, as 'best practice' implies that there is a generalised abstracted version of teaching (or leading or any other educational practice) that is the way to practice teaching. Politically and publically these terms cause confusion and ignore site ontological perspectives, hence considerations for site by site basis is rarely if ever deliberated.

Third, in conceiving of development or reform, explicit attention needs to be given to the particularities and nuances of the sites that the 'reformed' practices are intended. A site ontological perspective sees practices and site-based arrangements as being symbiotically and intimately inter-related, with each to a large degree constituting the other. Thus, to roll out some systemic reform in any sector, requires a development in the new practices, and, the site-based conditions and arrangements that enable and constrain the desirable new forms of practice. Furthermore, this needs to be considered on a site-by-site basis, otherwise, as history will attest, the uptake of new practices will be patchy at best, and certainly limited in its scope. So while the allure of widespread systemic educational reform is often attractive (particularly when one considers economies of scale), it is unlikely to be successful without significant resourcing and attention to local sites. This makes practice theory an important vehicle for change management for policy and practice, given that the theory unveils detailed understandings of the arrangements that need attention.

Practice Theory for Education

Practice theories in education capture the diversity within and across sites and practices. The title of the book—*Practice Theory Perspectives on Pedagogy and Education*, captures the central overarching focus that underpins the chapters in this book, and so here we move from a more general discussion of practice to focus more tightly on education. Although education is a key theme across the chapters of the book, it is important to note that education is not understood as being synonymous with the concept of schooling. The authors of the various chapters traverse education in a range of contexts and sectors including Vocational Education and Training (VET), tertiary and non-formal settings. Furthermore, and more crucially, education is viewed as serving a dual purpose—the development of individuals and the betterment of societies and community. It is this conceptualisation of education is foundational to all that follows in this book. Also, the term *pedagogy* is commonly used in educational contexts, but its meaning is not universally consistent. *Pedagogy* can mean different things in different cultural contexts, and so here the related dual perspectives of pedagogy as a *teaching practice* (as understood in Anglo-Saxon countries) and pedagogy as a *practice of upbringing* (as understood in continental Europe) are both included and discussed by different authors.

Without reiterating the points made previously, here we want to highlight some features of conceiving, interrogating and understanding education using practice theories. The first is the capacity to ameliorate or sidestep unhelpful dualisms. The second is the attention it provides to the *everydayness* and situated nature of education, and finally and relatedly, the capacity it provides to consider practices in ecological ways.

While it is widely known and accepted that education is both an individual and social practice, in general the theoretical tools available to researchers have tended to favour one perspective or the other, and so understandings of education have been unbalanced. This is not to suggest that these theories are irrelevant but to say that now, with the 'practice turn', there is the possibility to consider and theorise educational practice in a more uniform yet comprehensive way. The individual learner (student or teacher) and the community of learners are considered in a symbiotic and mutually constituting manner in the classroom context. In this way, the individual is practising education within the discursive, material and social conditions of their site, but also the practice arrangements are being developed and changing as individuals collective engage in the learning and teaching practices. In the same way, the term *practice theory* unites the often dualistically considered aspects of 'theory' and 'practice'—this is not just theory informed practice or practice informed theory, but rather an indivisible theory–practice nexus.

The second feature to highlight here is the ontological perspective of education—the routineness of education as realised in classrooms and other learning environments. As was hinted at in general terms above, this means that education is considered as it happens and unfolds in the 'everydayness' of learning and teaching.

It also sees educational practice as situated in physical time-space. The implications of this are profound for education, because it means that regardless of whatever is mandated from the likes of central agencies or even school management, education actually happens in classrooms (real and virtual) and other learning sites such as workplaces, with real learners and teachers engaging in a specific curriculum or learning material. Thus, to research or develop education it must be considered in its site, and so generalised notions of 'best practice' are of limited value or relevance. Education practice is only understandable within the arrangements and conditions that enable and constrain it in its particular site. Of course, it is important to note here that the 'site' might not be just a 'bricks and mortar' building, as it could, for example, be a virtual classroom or work site.

Finally, in education it is pointless to consider particular practices in isolation from other practices. At the most obvious level, it is clear that teaching practices (inclusive of training as in VET) are intimately and ecologically related to student learning practices in classrooms or work sites. Kemmis et al. (2014a, b) identified five integrated AND interrelated educational practices that have been evident since the inception of compulsory mass schooling:

1. student learning;
2. teaching;
3. teacher professional learning;
4. educational leadership and administration; and,
5. educational research and evaluation.

Kemmis et al. (2014a, b) described these as the 'education complex' (as mentioned previously); and while these can be identified and noted at a broad level:

> On a smaller scale and in a simpler form, the way one practice shapes another and is shaped by other practices can be seen at a local level. Teachers may engage in a professional development program in response to some pedagogical need that arose in their classrooms, and they then change their pedagogy in response to their learning. In this case, the broad practices of teaching and professional development are symbiotically related, with each practice shaping and being shaped by the other; in this case, we might thus describe professional development as 'nested' within the Education Complex – the complex formed by the interdependence of these five educational practices. (Kemmis et al. 2014a, b, p. 51)

While this has a number of implications for education, perhaps the most significant is the need to consider education and educational development in more complex ways. It is an approach that does not diminish aspects of the conduct of education to unitary understandings, but renders it intricately complex, multidimensional, multifaceted and multilayered. Taking this into the realm of educational reform therefore, there is always a need for all five practices in the educational complex to be highlighted, critiqued and problematised if the development is to be effective and sustained. Often in recent educational initiatives (e.g., new curricula) emphasis is given to changing one aspect (e.g., teaching) but little attention is paid

to other related practices (e.g., teacher professional learning), and the resultant development is patchy and slow to be taken up. In this way, practice theories provide tools for the critical analysis of education, and point to considerations for change management as well as innovation arising from site specific variations to allow for local functionalities.

Educational Praxis and Practice

In contemporary understandings of educational practice, the notion of *praxis* and its connections to practice in educational institutions such as schools or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) has re-emerged as fundamental premise for theorising the formation, enactment and sustainability of quality educational practices (Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer 2015). Its origins have been traced back to Ancients such as Aristotle and have been influential in the thinking of philosophers like Hegel and Marx. A neo-Aristotelian perspective, for example, locates educational praxis within a practice-based perspective formed and differentiated by knowledges and dispositions. This perspective differentiates different classes of knowledges and dispositions (epistēmē, technē, phronésis, critical) (outlined in Table 1.1) that give rise to different kinds of actions (theoria, poiēsis, praxis, emancipatory) and ethics that have value and legitimacy in all human practices.

These differentiated knowledges and dispositions give rise to different kinds of educational actions shaped by ethics forming the theoretical, technical and practical dimensions and shape the conduct of practices as they happen in education sites like schools, TAFE and universities. Praxis grounded in an Aristotelian tradition thus understands praxis as ‘conscious action that is morally committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field’ (Kemmis and Smith 2008, p. 4); that is, practical and prudent action that– at the particular moment of enactment—aims for the good of those involved (the individual) and for the good for humankind (the collective) (Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer 2015).

It is a view also consistent with post-Hegelian/post-Marxian understandings of praxis as ‘history-making action’; that is, as action with moral, social and political consequences—good or bad—for those involved in and affected by it. In *The German Ideology* (1845) Marx and Engels articulated their historical materialism, arguing that social formations, ideas, theories and consciousness emerge from human and collective social praxis, and that social action (praxis) makes history. *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. (Kemmis et al. 2014a, b, p. 26)

Both are determined by the sociology at the time and are subject to change.

Table 1.1 Disposition–action couplings (adapted from Kemmis 2012, p. 4)

	Theoretical perspective	Technical perspective	Practical perspective	Critical–emancipatory perspective
Telos (Aim)	The attainment of knowledge or truth	The production or reproduction of something	Wise and prudent judgement activity	Overcoming irrationality, injustice, suffering, felt dissatisfactions
Disposition	Epistēmē: to seek the truth for its own sake	*Technē*: To act in a reasoned way according to the rules of a craft	*Phronēsis*: To act wisely, morally and justly	*Critical*: To act towards emancipation from irrationality, injustice, suffering, felt dissatisfactions
Action	*Theoria*: 'Contemplation', theoretical reasoning about the nature of things (justification)	*Poiētike*: 'Making' (or remaking) action, involving means-ends or instrumental reasoning to achieve a known objective or outcome	*Praxis*: 'Doing' action, morally informed action, involving practical reasoning about what it is wise, right and proper to do in a given situation	*Emancipatory*: Collective critical reflection and action to overcome irrationality, injustice, suffering, harm, unproductiveness or unsustainability

Critical Perspectives of Education and Pedagogy

Practices are never *just* practices. Practices are not neatly constructed activities, and participating in practices is never seamless or without some degree of contestation, struggle or tension. This is because those entering a practice of one kind or another (in education, in work, in organisations or in everyday social life) come to it as individuals with unique and diverse biographies. Added to this, as we suggested earlier, practices in their enactment are intricately complex, multidimensional, multifaceted and multilayered. Given these circumstances, a critical approach is needed to open up what may remain hidden, taken-for-granted or unchallenged about practices. In education and pedagogy, critical perspectives provide ways of interpreting and perhaps even untangling the everyday practical actions, discourses and relationships that otherwise might be left undiscovered. Therefore, practice theories as approaches for critical analysis of practices, recognise and account for

the diversity and contestation brought to bear in the actual realities and 'happeningness' of the enactment of practices.

The notion of criticality in education, raised by Kemmis (2012) as a key disposition for practical action in Table 1.1, concerns the centrality of exposing the uncertainty, tenuousness and 'unforeseeability' in the enactment of practices. Thus, another crucial factor in understanding practice is the uncertainty of situations, and the unknowability of outcomes before they unfold. This is not to say that individuals and groups cannot have wisdom about the possible consequences of particular practices, but rather to appreciate that the outcomes are always influenced or impinged upon by a range of factors – many of which are outside the (immediate) 'control' of the practitioners, and so the uncertainty of outcomes requires forms of practice that can only be judged in the light of history. As will be clear throughout this chapter and book, this means that notions like *best practice* are at best a misnomer, and at worst a dangerous unrealisable shaper of teaching practice. Here is one important place where practice theories serve to provide critical perspectives of education—not to just serve as a descriptive tool but to provide philosophical and practical ways to interpret and critique pedagogical practice and to understand why certain prevailing and hegemonic discourses, like *best practice*, are not rational, sustainable or just. This is a key matter for education.

Practice theorists understand education to be shaped by many different and perhaps even conflicting ideologies, intellectual traditions and taken-for-granted practices. Therefore, education practices do not simply desire critical approaches to understanding the production, reproduction and transformation of practices, it demands it. It demands it because what is at stake is education practices that promote individual *and* social formation; that is, to act towards both acceptance and emancipation from irrationality, injustice, suffering and felt dissatisfactions. Hence, such an emancipatory disposition calls for solidarity, agency and empowerment through collective critical reflection and action to overcome irrationality, injustice, suffering, harm, unproductiveness or unsustainability. In this book, the utility of practice theories acknowledges the diversity of understandings and perspectives of practices, pedagogy and education. Also, they serve as tools to critique prevailing notions about education and pedagogy, and to bring about change towards more defensible practices. This also means that each of these understandings and perspectives are not set in stone, but are contestable and ripe for further development and fine-grained critique; an enduring theme across the book.

Developing a Communicative Space Through a Symposium

This section will briefly outline the organisational details of the invited symposium that was the foundation for the development of this book. While we will provide a description of the event, the main purpose here is to outline how the symposium was established as a 'communicative space' (Habermas 1996) and understood as a form of academic practice.

The Symposium

The symposium was held in June 2015 in Brisbane, Australia over two days. It was organised and sponsored by Griffith University's *Griffith Institute of Education Research* (GIER) and supported by Charles Sturt University's *Research Institute of Professional Practice Learning and Education* (RIPPLE). It was made very clear that it was an *invited symposium*, not a conference, and so the programme required intense involvement from all the delegates in the whole programme. The 35 delegates came from across the world (from Australia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, the United Stated, New Zealand) and were invited because of their expertise and interest in practice theory and education, and the symposium deliberately and singularly focused on this topic. All of the delegates were involved in at least one of the roles of discussant, keynote paper presenter or paper presenter. The keynote papers and most paper presentations were subsequently developed as chapters for this volume.

Before the symposium all the presenters were required to provide a draft of their paper and these were distributed to all the delegates. It is important to note that this was not a small request of the writers/presenters, as they were asked to share papers that were underdeveloped and in draft form. This required a strong sense of trust and respect for the other delegates, but was also foundational to the practice of the symposium enabling genuine engagement with author's ideas. This was a key to establishing a true public sphere and open communicative space. Specifically, in each session more than 50% of the time was devoted to discussion, debate and deliberative conversations, and delegates were expected to read the draft papers before attending the presentations. In this way, the time allocated for each paper could be spent talking about the ideas and exploring the implications of practice theory in education. During each paper session, a volunteer would take notes and these were then provided to the author(s) so they could refine their writing, particularly for those becoming chapters in this book. Thus, the event was established (as a symposium, not a conference per se), and was designed as a dialogue with open unstructured space, but with faith and trust in the delegates to engage in academic practices of active listening, thoughtful reflection, and respectful discussion. Moreover, those spaces extended beyond the common venue for the symposium into social gatherings in small groups.

The symposium formed a space for communication. Although not all participants focused on education practices from the same intellectual traditions, international contexts, sites and disciplines, the symposium created spaces for dialogue, civility and action established around a common interest in *practice*. Given that from the outset members were not an established community of scholars where all shared common views, intellectual and historical traditions, beliefs or theories of practice, the symposium was designed to counter a narrow monologic professing of one's own perspective, warned against here by Murray (1960):

> Barbarism… threatens when [people] cease to talk together according to reasonable laws. There are laws of argument, the observance of which is imperative if discourse is to be civilized. Argument ceases to be civil when it is dominated by passion and prejudice; when its vocabulary becomes solipsist, premised on the theory that my insight is mine alone and cannot be shared; when dialogue gives way to a series of monologues; when the parties to the conversation cease to listen to one another, or hear only what they want to hear, or see the other's argument only through the screen of their own categories…. When things like this happen, [people] cannot be locked together in argument. Conversation becomes merely quarrelsome or querulous. Civility dies with the death of dialogue. (Murray 1960, p. 14)

Murray's caution was fundamental to the way the communicative space was framed around civility, openness, reflective and critical dialogical conversations. It was a fundamentally held belief of the organisers that from dialogue comes 'communicative action'. This happened through the 'enabling' practice arrangements that shaped the programme—that the symposium as a communicative space was non-hierarchical and an opportunity to inform our own and each other's practices. Therefore, contrary to Murray's closed representation of a monologic state, the symposium became a professional practice that invited possibility through conversation and argument, discussion and debate. So alongside practice theory, we turn to Kemmis et al. (2014a) rendering of the Jürgen Habermas's terms 'communicative action', 'communicative space' and the 'public sphere':

> *Communicative action* is what happens when people stop to consider what is happening in their situation, and strive for intersubjective agreement about the language and ideas they use, mutual understanding of one another's perspectives, and unforced consensus about what to do.Communicative action happens when a group collectively creates a *communicative space* in which all are free to express their points of view. The group also agrees to be disciplined about being inclusive in order to open up a *public sphere*.Public spheres are actual networks of communication amongst participants who volunteer to participate in changing practices that create a sense of unease – a legitimation deficit or crisis. Participants construct public spheres to create conditions to open up communicative space in order to engage in communicative action. (adapted from Kemmis et al. 2014a, pp. 34–35)

Some of the invited participants had a pre-existing sphere—the Pedagogy Education and Praxis network (PEP) which is an existing communicative space and this was extended to the symposium.

As noted previously, the intention was to create the symposium as a *communicative space* (Habermas 1996), and the structure and processes outlined above were all in line with this objective. To this end, the participants were taking leave of their normal academic work to stop for two days to focus on understanding educational practice and theory. Thus 'communicative action' was directed towards obtaining some sort of *intersubjective agreement* about our views, theories and ideas, and the language we employ. In striving for *intersubjective agreement,* four validity claims were used:

(a) Is it *comprehensible*?
(b) Is it *true* (in the sense of being accurate)?
(c) Is it *sincerely stated* (i.e., non-deceptive)? and,
(d) Is it *morally right and appropriate*?

There was also a sincere desire for *mutual understanding* about each other's perspectives and thoughts as an underpinning quality of a 'communicative space'. It is important to note that, in line with Habermas (1996), '*communicative action*' is guided by *communicative reason*—not the sort of 'argument' noted by Murray (1960) above, and this is distinct from '*strategic action*' which is guided by *functionalist reason*. Thus, the social space was created for genuine dialogue, and the end point was not predetermined or known - there was trust in the process once the practice architectures of the academic practice were established.

> Unlike success-oriented actors who mutually observe each other as one observes something in the objective world, persons acting communicatively encounter each other in a *situation* they at the same time constitute with their cooperatively negotiated interpretations. The intersubjectively shared space of a speech situation is disclosed when the participants enter interpersonal relationships by taking positions on mutual speech-act offers and assuming illocutionary obligations. Every encounter in which actors do not just observe each other but take a second-person attitude, reciprocally attributing communicative freedom to each other, unfolds in a linguistically constituted public space. This space stands open, in principle, for dialogue partners who are present as bystanders or who could come on the scene and join those present. (Habermas 1996, pp. 360–361)

Finally, because participants for the symposium were *invited* because of their interest and background in practice theory in education, the communicative space was not open to everyone and anyone (like a typical conference). Nevertheless, participation did presuppose communicative freedom to speak, to listen, to observe, and to moderate their participation vis-à-vis others in their group. This was not done by rules, but rather an expectation that their academic dialogical practices were undertaken as a form of academic praxis. That praxis was enabled by translanguaging using English as the medium of communication by native and non-English speakers to explain contextual interpretations illustrating different ways in which 'constitutional worlds' (Schatzki 1995) of the authors and normatised interrelated meanings. Translanguaging is described by Garcia (2009) as being 'multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds' (p. 45) to construct and co-construct meanings. The dialogic interactions also furnished sociological reasonings (Garfinkel 1967).

Book Overview

After the symposium, several of the participants went on to develop and refine their ideas and the results are the chapters in this book. Here we will not give a brief summary of each chapter—they all have their own abstracts, but rather we provide an overview of the foci and themes of the book in a somewhat sequential manner.

In the first part of the book, Chaps. 2–5 provide a more general discussion of educational practice and these are not as empirically based as the later chapters. These four chapters are written by authors from a range of disciplines and fields including philosophy (Schatzki), education (Kemmis, Edwards-Groves, Lloyd,

Grootenboer, Hardy and Wilkinson), and occupational and professional practice (Hopwood and Billett). Chapters by Schatzki (Chap. 2) and Kemmis et al. (Chap. 3) both differently challenge cognitive views on learning in provocative, and perhaps controversial, social accounts of learning practices, knowledge and education. Billett (Chap. 4) examines the interplay between historical, cultural and personal forces that influence occupational or workplace learning practices. Hopwood (Chap. 5) takes up the socio-material approach of 'attuning' to examine the connectivities between practice, the body, and pedagogy within the field of nursing. With this in mind, each of the chapters stands alone as a coherent and interesting exploration of educational practice, but when read together their diversity provides different but intriguing insights into the broader understanding of practice—not a recipe or unified definition, but innovative ideas about the conduct of practice that challenge the reader to more critically reconsider what it means to participate in education practices. In these chapters the authors provide some ideas that may be seen as contestable and even controversial as they challenge some of the commonly accepted views of learning and practice.

In the second part of the book, Chaps. 6–13 focus more specifically on a particular case and/or educational practice. Specifically, Kemmis and Mahon (Chap. 6) and Hardy and Garrick (Chap. 7) problematise educational practice and/or praxis in universities, and in particular the practice architectures or conditions that enable and constrain teaching and research practices. Also focussing on tertiary education, Choy and Hodge in Chap. 8 examine Vocational Education and Training (VET) teaching practices in the ever changing political arrangements of this sector. Teaching practices are also the focus of the chapters by Edwards-Groves (Chap. 9) and Blue and Grootenboer (Chap. 10). Edwards-Groves examines the situatedness and local accomplishment of teaching and learning in a school classroom by provocatively bringing together two distinct approaches to investigating the sociality of classroom interaction practices. In their chapter Blue and Grootenboer draw on the theory of practice architectures to outline and discuss financial literacy education practices in a Canadian Aboriginal community. In the next chapter (Chap. 11), Mockler and Groundwater-Smith present the case for teacher research as a practice that underpins teaching as a 'knowledge-producing profession'. Finally, Wilkinson (Chap. 12) and Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves and Rönnerman (Chap. 13) write about the educational practice of leading, and in the process they provide a solid argument for a renewed emphasis on education, as opposed to just schooling. Together, these eight chapters (along with others in the book) highlight the diversity and contestations to present an underlying social justice perspective to education and pedagogy, thus promoting and arguing for educational *praxis*.

Conclusion

To many, the terms *theory* and *practice* have been regarded in polarity with one another. Indeed, each of these concepts bring with them their own vocabularies, empirical rationales and methods. Practice theories offer insight into production, reproduction, change and transformation in education in ways that lay bare critical and site ontological dimensions of the conduct of practices.

For the authors in this book, theorising how social beings (with their diverse motives and intentions within diverse contexts shaped by diverse conditions) practically and in situ make and transform the world in which they live requires theorising the nexus between theory and practice. These fundamental educational concepts therefore cannot be reduced to singular strands of thought that sit in parallel with one another. Rather the complexity of the cultural–discursive, material-economic and social-political dimensions of practices and practical action in the social world, demands that the theories set down to explain them offers insight that attends to the dialectic betweensocial structures and human agency in education as they are intricately interconnected or entangled with one another within dynamic interrelationships. As the chapters will show, practice theories bring delicately into concert the nuances, diversity and contestation that shape education as the authors untangle and extend traditional, long held views to collectively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of pedagogy, practice and education.

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