‘Raising Reading’ in the Community: A Case Study of Praxis in Practice

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Abstract

In this article we present a case study of a school community engaging in what we describe as educational praxis – a form of committed learning to meet the needs of poor and refugee students in a disadvantaged community in Australia. The school, part of the Catholic systemic school sector in Australia, shares its site with the local Catholic parish, but serves a largely non-Catholic community with a high proportion of refugee families. In this case study, we examine and foreground what we describe as the ‘ecology of practices’ established in the site to address the learning needs of the students, (and members of the broader community). Specifically, we examine the leadership practices at a range of levels, the staff teaching practices, and the learning practices of students which arose in response to these preliminary practices. Data were collected through in-depth individual and group interviews with participants from across the school community. We focus on one particular initiative, the ‘Everyone a Reader’ program to exemplify how this array of leading and teaching practices contributed to students’ learning. The research reveals that by deliberately and strategically taking a praxis approach, and looking at the range of leadership, teaching and student learning practices, and how they inter-related, we are better able to understand the conditions conducive to meeting the specific and challenging learning needs of students and the broader community, particularly in some of the most disadvantaged communities.

Keywords: praxis; practice; ecologies of practice; teacher learning; leadership

Introduction

A significant body of literature exists which focuses on schools and

community partnerships, often highlighting the tensions and issues which characterise such associations (Crump, 1996; Leonard, 2011; Lindle, 1997). Often these centre on attempts by schools to engage with their communities in some way in order to improve the schooling of students (e.g., Naidoo, 2013; Thomson, 2006). That is, there is often an implicit perception of deficit attached to school-based conceptions of community. While we acknowledge the importance of recognising such challenges, and that to name such concerns is an important part of the process of redressing entrenched inequalities, we seek to emphasise the intimate co-connections which exist between schools and communities, and how these can enhance not simply *schooling*, but more importantly, the *education* which students receive.

Our conception of education is very specific. In understanding education, we seek to emphasise the dual purposes of education as preparing students to live a life worth living – a good life which seeks to develop the individual – and to develop societies and communities that are worth living in:

Education, properly speaking, is the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding [sayings], modes of action [doings] and ways of relating to one another and the world [relatings], that foster individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person [individually] and [collectively] the good for humankind. (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer & Bristol, 2014)

Of course, the development of individuals and the development of society are symbiotically and ecologically inter-related, meaning that the development of each is dependent and synonymous with the development of the other (Sockett & LePage, 2007). This is a broader focus than an insular perspective on schooling which perhaps seems to value schooling in and of itself, without adequate consideration of the community partnerships and associations which are so integral and fundamental to the broader project of education. Indeed, ‘community partnerships’ are often structured in terms of what the community should do for the school rather than the opposite. Importantly, how such associations come about, and the nature and complexity of such associations, and particularly the schooling practices which enable more productive school-community collaboration, is an underdeveloped area.

Unlike much of the previous literature on school-community partnerships, we take a more ecological approach in order to respect and understand the complex relationships between key practices which

help constitute educational activities more broadly. The relational nature fundamental to this view of education is critical, and understanding how such relations come about – the conditions which influence practice – is vital for understanding whether subsequent practices do indeed constitute a form of praxis.

Understanding the Conditions for Practice: Practice Architectures, and Praxisⁱ

According to Schatzki (2010), ‘a ‘social practice’ [is] an open, organized array of doings and sayings’ (p. 51). Examples of practices include cooking and playing the guitar, which have characteristic activities and language. In schooling, such practices include the practices of teaching, teacher learning (professional development), leading and administration, research and evaluation, and student learning. The nature of practices will vary from place to place and from time to time, because they are social, and as such, responsive to the particular sites in which they are located (Hardy, Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2012). Drawing on the work of MacIntyre (1983) and Schatzki (2002; 2010), Kemmis et al., (2014) define a practice as:

[A] coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings), and when this complex of sayings, doings and relatings ‘hangs together’ in a distinctive project.

While acknowledging the value of identifying the particular ‘doings’ and ‘sayings’ (*a la* Schatzki (2002) which characterise a practice, Kemmis et al., (2014) argue that relationships are also vital to the success (or otherwise) of any human endeavour.

At the same time, practices do not develop or take shape freely, but rather are enabled (or constrained) by particular conditions – what Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) refer to as ‘practice architectures’. These practice architectures are enabling/constraining conditions that shape practice in cultural-discursive dimensions (‘sayings’), material-economic dimensions (‘doings’), and social-political dimensions (‘relatings’). Importantly, these conditions do not arise in isolation, but are the product of the particular actions (doings), talk (sayings) and relationships (relatings) which characterise any given human endeavour – in this case, in relation to education. The mutually constitutive nature of these ‘doings’, ‘sayings’, and ‘relatings’ (practices), and the conditions which contribute to them (practice architectures), is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: The theory of practice and practice architectures
(Kemmis et al., 2014)

Under these circumstances, education is not a technical practice, but rather a value-laden and morally-dense practice, heavily influenced by the conditions within which it arises. In schooling settings, therefore, what is required is a conception of educational practice – praxis – which seeks to contribute to conditions (practice architectures) which would enable praxis to occur. Although praxis has been variously defined and has varied diverse cultural roots, our view is that, '*praxis* is what people do when they take into account all the circumstances and exigencies that confront them at a particular moment and then, taking the broadest view they can of what is best to do, they *act*' (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 4; emphasis original). In educational contexts, this requires consideration of both the development of individual students and the long-term interests of society. Therefore, teachers can be said to be engaged in praxis if in their everyday acting in the routine, real-time activity of the classroom, they are cognisant of the ethical implications of their work for both the individual students and society at large. Similarly, a school enacts educational praxis when it actively focuses on its community and the needs of humankind more generally, as reflected in the needs of this community, and as it engages in the more obvious goal of developing the individual students in their care.

The Ecological Arrangement of Educational Practices

While a broad understanding of the nature of educational praxis is essential, understanding how praxis is enacted in practice is an area for ongoing inquiry. The broader spatio-temporal ‘project’ (Schatzki, 2010) of education involves a number of practices which form what might be described as an ‘Educational Complex’, comprising various teaching, learning (for both students and teachers (such as during inquiry research into teachers’ practice)), and educational leadership and administration (Kemmis, et al., 2014). Importantly, these practices do not operate in isolation but instead are what we describe as ‘ecologically arranged’ (see Kemmis, Groves, Wilkinson & Hardy, 2012).

According to Capra (2005), all living systems are complex because they are non-linear and constituted in patterns of relationships. Ecological systems are not so much made up by their constituent parts, but rather the links between them; this approach requires thinking in terms of relationships, connectedness, and context. Capra (2005) noted some ecological principles or core concepts including networks, nested systems, interdependence, diversity and development. *Networks* refers to the notion that practices do not exist in isolation, but as part of an ecological inter-related complex. The concept of *nested systems* highlights the embedded nature of practices within other practices. The *interdependence* of practices is evident because the broader system is dependent on the constituent parts, and in turn the individual components are also symbiotically dependent on the system. The robustness of an ecologically arranged set of practices is also dependent on the *diversity* of the complex relationships between them, and finally *development* indicates the dynamic and learning nature of healthy systems (Barabási, 2003; 2010).

Drawing upon Capra’s (2005) conceptual apparatus, Kemmis et al., (2012) argue the broader practice of education in a particular site can be viewed as a similarly complex, living system, comprised of significant relationships between not just individuals and groups, but between the practices within the site. Kemmis and Mutton (2011) define ‘ecologies of practices’ in the following manner:

By ecologies of practice we mean distinctive interconnected webs of human social activities (characteristic arrangements of sayings, doings and relating) that are mutually-necessary to order and sustain a practice as a practice of a particular kind and complexity (e.g., a progressive educational practice) (p.10).

This also means that practices only exist in relation to one-another in their particular site, and practices can sustain or diminish other

practices within the particular site, influencing the conditions or practice architectures of the site.

Historically, formal school education has been developed around five identifiable core practices – teaching; student learning; teacher education and professional development; educational leadership and administration; and, educational research and evaluation (Kemmis et al., 2014). These practices have endured since the advent of compulsory schooling, but they do not exist in isolation but instead in combination and in relation to one another; they are ecologically arranged, influencing one another, sometimes productively, and other times less so. However, no matter the outcome, any educational enterprise is always influenced by how this array of different sets of practices sit in relation to one another. For this reason, we argue, and illustrate through the case study of a particular school-community set of inter-relations, that educational outcomes are enhanced, and can be made sense of (perhaps as a stimulus to help inform how to improve education in other sites) when these practices are considered in an ecological, rather than isolated, manner. Drawing upon Capra's (2005) research, and recent educational research by Kemmis et al (2014); and earlier work by Kemmis *et al.*, 2012; Kemmis & Mutton, 2011; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008), we refer to the field of education as a complex within which practices are ecologically arranged to help constitute the complex as a whole.

The Study

The case study reported here is part of a larger project that focused on the educational practices of leading, professional development, researching, teaching and learning across a range of school sites. The study is a *philosophical-empirical inquiry* (see Kemmis & Mutton, 2011) involving gathering and creating a rich empirical data set through a range of qualitative methods, and simultaneously engaging with practice theory and philosophy to interpret this data in order to understand the practices at hand, and to prompt further theoretical development and understandings of such practice(s).

Research Design: Data were generated and collected through interviews with a range of key stakeholders over an 18 month period from 2011-2012. The interviews were primarily conducted at the school site, although additional interviews with a former principal and systemic personnel were undertaken at or near their current work places. The details of the participants are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants

Pseudonym	Role
Miriam Allan	Previous School Principal (who was the principal at the time of the initiative)
Dylan Mossman	Community Liaison Officer based at the school
Craig Spencer	Community Liaison Officer based at the school
Chelsea Milburn	Teacher of the mothers of children attending the school
Bevan Patterson	Deputy Principal
Alison Lappin	Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teacher (LNIT)
Cynthia Sordana	ESL Teacher
Madeline Johansen	Classroom Teacher
Beverley Doughty	Classroom Teacher
Donovan Welsh	District Education Officer
Duane Travis	District Education Officer
Lillian Grossman	Member of local parish

The interviews were structured around practice-related themes – the nature of the leadership, professional development, research, teaching and student learning practices which occurred in relation to the school – but were open and conversational in nature. In general the interviews were approximately 45 minutes, but several were over an hour in duration, sometimes almost two hours; the participants seemed to enjoy the opportunity to reflect and talk about aspects of their practice. Indeed, they seemed genuinely proud of their school and the work they were doing, and during the interviews, they were often asked probing questions to delve further into the nature of this work, the responses to which seemed to further reinforce earlier evidence of the effectiveness of the work transpiring within the school. All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, and the transcripts formed the data set for this article, and subsequent publications.

To analyse the data, an emergent thematic approach was employed, informed by the theorising outlined above (the ‘philosophical’ aspect), and in relation to the practices occurring within the school site (the ‘empirical’ aspect). Transcripts were read and reread by both authors in order to identify patterns/themes within the data, and then these were consolidated further into recurring key themes (Shank, 2002). True to the theoretically/philosophically informed nature of the research, this coding was purposeful, and undertaken in light of the theoretical resources helping to inform the research. Specifically, the data were interrogated vis-à-vis the conceptual framing of practice to highlight the *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* of the practices identified, and to investigate the nature of the associations – ecological arrangements – which characterised the research site.

The Research Site: The study was undertaken at Southwood Primaryⁱⁱ, which was in a low socio-economic suburban region in Australia. The school and local church buildings were located on the same site although their buildings were quite separate. The school had about 250 students, most of whom came from diverse cultural backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, refugee families from South-East Asia and Central Africa, and the Pacific Islands. This was in addition to low SES families within the neighbourhood of the school.

In recent times, the school has been proactive in developing pedagogy and other support systems, in conjunction with the District Office, to meet the particular educational needs of their students. In many respects, these students are amongst the poorest and most educationally disadvantaged in Australia. In response to students' circumstances, the school appointed a specialist Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teacher, and two full-time Community Liaison Officers (with significant backgrounds in social work, and allied industries) who worked across the school and community. These positions, and other initiatives, were supported by funds provided above and beyond the school standard operating budget, and they are indicative of the social justice values that imbued the school, and informed the work of the church community more generally. Indeed, almost all the teachers we interviewed talked about the underpinning Josephite valuesⁱⁱⁱ, even those who did not necessarily identify themselves as Catholic, or as having detailed knowledge of the Order of St Joseph who originally operated the school. Apart from a school-community literacy programme – the *Reading in the Community* initiative – that is the focus of this article, the school also had a number of other initiatives that sought to engage the students and community in meaningful educational practices. This included a community garden that was situated on the school site and used by both the school and the local families. (For more a more full-some account of the garden project, see authors, 2014).

We now turn to the findings of the study. Firstly, we will provide a concise account of the *Everyone a Reader* program – its instigation, development, activities and outcomes. We then identify some of the key practices involved, specifically focussing on the leadership, teaching and learning practices which informed its work. We will then discuss the ecological arrangement of these practices. Finally, we show how the demands of the site required and fostered an approach to educational practice as praxis, and how this enabled the broader goals of education to be realised for *these* students and *this* community.

The *Everyone a Reader* Program

The *Everyone a Reader* program was initiated through a *Community Partnerships* project that had been established in the school, and which involved the school and community working together more closely to improve outcomes for students attending the school, and which also sought to address some of the broader needs of the community within which the school was located more generally. Donovan Welsh, a District Education Officer/Researcher, explained that in 2003 the District systemic leaders were concerned about the disadvantaged nature of many of the children in some of their school communities, and through his research, it was identified that ‘over 53% of the young people in Southwood were ... out-of-home or marginalised’. He went on to state:

I think that we need to ... have a welfare structure in our schools including a community liaison worker so that we start ... dealing with these non-educational needs of these young people so they can better perform educationally.

In response to these identified needs and issues, at a series of formal discussions (sayings) in the District Office, the decision was made that Southwood should appoint two Community Liaison Officers (who came to be known as ‘workers’) (CLWs), and establish a community centre to improve liaisons between staff at the school, and members of the community. The CLWs were located in the community centre, and the community centre was situated between the church buildings and the school buildings on their shared site. The *Everyone a Reader* program was one of the initiatives that was established (a form of ‘doing’) through the *Community Partnerships* program, and it was instigated by the CLWs and the school principal.

The initial concern came from the teachers in the early years’ classes where many students from non-English speaking backgrounds – primarily refugee families – had limited opportunities to learn to read. Specifically, the non-English speaking parents were not equipped to support their children’s learning by listening to them read at home, and neither were they able to come into class to listen to children read^{iv}. Indeed, Alison, the Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teacher noted:

A lot of our families may not have books in their homes, or even have that culture of having a book read to them, or visiting a library.

Clearly there were significant issues related to the reading capacity of the children, and their parents’ capacity to read to their children, and this had implications for the pedagogical practices of the teachers

and the learning practices of the students.

In response, and through active engagement ('relating') with parish members, volunteers from the local parish were encouraged by key members of the church, and supported by the principal and teachers, to come into the parish and school grounds to help support the students' reading in the classroom. Volunteers came in to listen to the children read and support was given to the non-English speaking parents – including many African mothers – through a weekly functional English class. This required a coordinated approach from the school, the parish, and the District Office.

In the classroom, volunteers from the local parish came into the classroom and listened to children read during their 'reading time'. This occurred between one and four days a week. Although the structure wasn't uniform across all classes, in general, the students read their home readers with the volunteer one-on-one for about 10 minutes, and the volunteer also occasionally read a story to the student. Made-line (Year 1 Teacher) commented:

I love having them come in . . . because I know there are children in my class that don't read [outside of class], so I just know it's that opportunity that that child is going to get to read a book and read to someone who is actually listening to them and pointing out things that they need to practice.

There were clear benefits for the teachers as they managed the practices related to helping all the children to read, but most importantly, the children benefitted from the program. Apart from the obvious benefits of having focused one-on-one attention upon their reading, the students were able to spend quality time with a 'reading role model' (Cynthia Sordana, ESL Teacher) and to experience the 'joy of reading' (Beverley Doughty, Classroom Teacher). Also, the teachers and leaders at the school noted the broader gains for the students by spending time with an older person (all of the volunteers were retired) from another culture. Indeed, the children valued their time with the volunteers and they became quite fond of them and would often be impatient in waiting for their turn to work with the volunteer. Lillian, one of the volunteers, recalled:

I noticed myself when I was reading with the kids how they improved throughout the year. They just love it, and they couldn't wait. I would walk into the classroom and the kids would run up and ask, 'Can I come now, can I come?' ... I didn't come across one child who didn't want to be there.

Similarly, the volunteers also gained satisfaction and enjoyment from their time working with the students in the classroom: 'They see that they are making a difference' (Alison, LNIT Teacher). Lillian, the parish member who coordinated the volunteers from the church, noted that many were initially reluctant and anxious about working in the classroom, but after a short while, they came to love the program and the children, and they would often volunteer to do more activities with the students in the classroom and around the school (e.g. grandparents' day).

At the same time, the weekly English classes for the mothers were conducted at the Community Centre on the school grounds, and involved a coordinated approach from the CLWs, the District Office, the local parish and the school. In brief, the African mothers involved needed to be transported to the school so the CLWs organised a minibus which was funded by the District Office and the local church; similarly, the venue was arranged by the CLWs and funded by the District Office; the catering was supplied by the local parish; and, the teaching was managed by the school leadership. The class was taught by Chelsea Milburn, a teacher with a background in teaching English and reading, and in general lessons focussed on functional English. Chelsea described the classes in glowing terms:

It was lovely because they'd come on with their babies on their backs, and they'd be feeding while we were learning English. Basically it was done using a lot of visual aids and trying to teach them things that they would need in the community, so vocabulary for going to the doctor and things like that.

Also, as part of the program, mothers would go and read with some of the children in the junior classes (sometimes their own children) in order to try and build a 'culture of reading' (Chelsea Milburn, English Teacher).

In reflecting on the classes, Chelsea saw a number of benefits for the mothers. Obviously there were important gains in the English and their capacity to live and work effectively in their new Australian community, but there were other social benefits, as the lessons were an opportunity for the parents to come together to share experiences. A number of people mentioned in the interviews that the African mothers^v were often isolated and lonely, and so the effort to get them all together on the minibus was as important as the language development opportunities. To this end, the class also became a 'bit of an outing . . . and they also had some morning tea' (Chelsea Morrisison). Also, the program promoted a *reading culture* in the community through the school

and family homes, and it was expected that improved reading outcomes for the students would lead to greater life opportunities for the students and their families.

The account of the *Everyone a Reader* program has to be seen as a ‘good news story’, and for this reason alone it has been worth capturing. However, what is more significant is to understand how the conditions which enabled the initiative to occur came about. In the discussion section below, we seek to analyse and discuss this educational program in terms of the ecological arrangement of leadership, teaching and student/community learning practices which made this learning possible, and how the provision of education in this way may be seen as a form of praxis.

Discussion: Understanding the Conditions for Praxis in Practice

Inherent in the case of the *Everyone a Reader* program were a number of educational practices (in a broad sense) that enabled the ‘project’ (Schatzki, 2002) of *developing the reading of refugee children*. While each of the practices played a role in enacting the broader project, each practice on its own (whether teaching, leading, or learning) was inadequate for the broader educational benefits to be realised. In short – the constituent practices were a ‘nested system’ and the ‘whole’ of their ecologically arranged practices was greater than the sum of the individual practices. In Capra’s (2005) terms, the practices were a ‘network’ where some practices were ‘nested’ within other practices, where practices were ‘interdependent’ and, where the diversity of practices and practitioners led to robust educational ‘development’. In the case presented, practices of teaching were ‘nested’ within leadership practices which enabled and supported the *Raising Reading in the Community* initiative. The teaching practices were very much interdependent upon leadership support for this teaching, and this support only made sense in light of the actual teaching (and student learning) practices which transpired.

Furthermore, the practices were ecologically situated within a particular site and indeed, an integral part of the site, and therefore, the coordinated practices were responsive to the particular needs and characteristics of that community/site. These ecological arrangements are complex, but attempts to elaborate such arrangements are important for cultivating the conditions for changed, productive practice – praxis; we acknowledge that the description provided here is necessarily somewhat linear in nature, and necessarily simplified.

It can be clearly seen that the educational practices of classroom

teaching and learning (in terms of Early Years students learning to read) gave rise to the practices of adult literacy enactment within a broad ethos of 'service' to and with the community, and stimulated leadership support for greater involvement of children, parents and community members in a broader project of fostering reading within and beyond the school. It is possible that the teachers could have managed to teach their reading program without the extra support of parents listening to children read, and similarly, the children could have engaged in their learning without the support of individual one-on-one sessions in class, and as a stimulus for reading at home. But, clearly the effectiveness of the teaching practices and learning practices as forms of 'doing' and 'saying' would have been diminished. It is also clear that the *Everyone a Reader* program through the 'relatings' which became established between parish volunteers, teachers and then students during the in-class reading support, provided a worthwhile and meaningful avenue for the local parishioners to engage in a practice of seeking to serve the needs of the community – itself a form of leadership – and this provided them with a reciprocal sense of satisfaction. A deeply symbiotic relationship between these practices of teaching, student learning and leadership were clearly evident, and all benefited as a result of this ecological arrangement of practices.

The arrangement of these practices enabled the project of developing the children's reading – a form of 'doing' – to be realised in this site. This had been achieved through ongoing discussions ('sayings') and warm and professional relationships ('relatings') amongst those involved, but the apparent educational effectiveness of the program was based on more than just particular doings, sayings and relationships between individual people. Rather, it was the arrangement of these doings, sayings and relatings into specific practices of leading (District personnel, principal, CLWs), teaching (teachers and volunteers), and learning (students, refugee parents), and oriented to an overall project of praxis for this community, which led to a successful outcome.

It can also be seen that the *Everyone a Reader* program also involved explicit practices of leading from a range of sources including the school (the principal and some teachers), the District Office, the CLWs and the local parish^{vi}. The leadership practices on the part of the individual and groups alone could not have yielded the same positive outcome, even if they all undertook their practices in an isolated manner. Rather, it was the symbiotic and, inter-related and ecologically arranged nature of these leadership practices, together with the push to focus upon literacy teaching, and students' literacy learner needs, which together gave rise to an educational project which benefited the students. The learning and leadership practices of the school alone were not ade-

quate, but through the coordinated and integrated practices of the school, church and the District Office, community learning for student learning was put into place. The leadership 'part' of the broader educational complex did not simply begin and end at the school gate, but necessarily depended upon the decisions made at the District level, and within the parish itself. Similarly, the leading practices of the local parish in this case enabled the leading practices of the school, District Office and CLWs, and so on. Significantly, these leading practices were built around positive working relationships between the people concerned, and the educational outcomes were only realised in the action of the *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* which characterised these leading practices, and how they related to processes of teaching, and student learning. It is also the case that if any set of practices operated in isolation, the initiative may have floundered or never developed at all. Leading practices, teaching practices, and student learning were 'interdependent' (Capra, 2005) within each of these practices, and *across* these practices.

Equity and Praxis: Ecological Insights

A focus upon the nature of the practice architectures – the conditions for practice – across these leading, teaching and student learning practices is worthy of further elaboration in light of concerns about equity in schooling processes. In this site, the focus was on education (as in the good for individuals and the good of society) rather than just schooling, and this gave rise to student and community learning opportunities which helped the individuals involved, and the community as a whole; these were all forms of praxis. The legislated requirement of the school was to teach these children to read (amongst other things), and the school leaders and teachers could have legitimately focussed on this technical task.

However, clearly all participants were cognisant of the broader educational action that was needed while still focusing on more localised task at hand (teaching the students to read). While the benefits for the students' reading were central, the *Everyone a Reader* initiative required a lot more work and effort than simply focusing on the classroom, and coping with the inherent difficulties of teaching reading to a more generic conception of 'students'. A 'simpler' program was not a viable option when broader educational needs of the community (stemming from the children's educational needs) were considered. Instead, the practices of the school, the District Office, the parish and the community sought to address issues of educational equity and social justice in complex and practical ways, through coordinated educational activity.

We consider the educational activity outlined here to be a form of

praxis because, after taking 'into account all the circumstances and exigencies that confront[ed] them at a particular moment ..., taking the broadest view they [could] of what is best to do, they *act*[ed]' (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 4; emphasis original). Furthermore, it appears that this praxis was only possible through a range of networked educational practices, which of course inherently makes the practices of all involved more complex and value-laden, but at least in this case – more effective and rewarding. It appears that when an educator or educational community (e.g., a school) desires to undertake their pedagogical work as a form of praxis, and is cognisant of this work as necessitating not only particular actions – 'doings' – and discussions – 'sayings' – but ongoing 'relatings' between those involved, and how these doings, sayings and relatings occur within and across a number of leadership, teaching and learning practices simultaneously, then they have a better chance of being successful. In other words, one cannot consider this myriad of practices in isolation if the object is to improve the conditions for both the individual and the collective – praxis.

Finally, it is interesting to note that since the research was conducted at the school site, the parents' English classes have now ceased, although the local parishioners still come into junior classes to listen to the students read. The ever-changing nature of the community that the school serves means that there is no longer a need for the parent English classes. This is consistent with the ecological nature of practices where they dynamically and adaptively change in response to the demands of the site (community). In this case, the practice of adult literacy teaching is no longer required as the community literacy learning needs have changed or have been met through other practices (e.g., services provided by government agencies). Also, another interesting outcome was the growth of the local parish as members of the refugee families came to see the church as a part of their community. Arguably, this was due to more than the *Everyone a Reader* program, but it is interesting to speculate on whether and how this initiative contributed to building community, at least as evident in increased participation in formal church-going. Interestingly, although the goal of the parish members' practices in the program were not at all focussed on recruiting new church members, this outcome emerged for them as they sought to work more closely and productively with members of their community.

Conclusions

In this article, we have focussed on a particular school site, and individual and group efforts to address the dual goals of education, and in particular, how a program that focussed on improving the reading capacity of students and their parents contributed to students' learn-

ing. In a substantive way, the *Everyone a Reader* program was designed to address the particular educational needs inherent in this site, and the educational practices responsive to the site-based issues within the constraints and affordances of a specific set of practice architectures which influenced the conditions of learning for the students who attended the school. A critical feature of the educational development outlined here is its responsiveness to the site. This was not a pre-packaged program that was simply implemented. Rather, we would argue that it is imperative that educational development be site-based in ways which develop particular activities (doings), discussions (sayings) and relationships (relatings) for improving students' educational opportunities. This does not rule out national or regional developmental programs, but it does require that these programs are facilitated and developed at a local level that is based on site-based data. In this way these broader initiatives are more likely to be responsive to the educational needs of the learners, teachers and the community.

The success of the program discussed in this article required a range of integrated practices of leading, teaching and learning, all characterised by particular doings, sayings and relatings, and dependent upon how these doings, sayings and relatings 'worked across' these processes of leading, teaching and learning. This multifaceted ecological complex involved district and school leaders, teachers, community members, school-based community workers and students, and these practices were optimised by the overt way in which they related to one another; they were ecologically arranged. While the schooling of these students may have been operationalized through more individualised and isolated practices, the broader educational goals outlined here seemed to be the product of the intersection of this broad array of practices in concert with one another.

The research presented in this paper seeks to provide some insights into the nature of the conditions which characterised a successful instance of educational practice – practice as praxis, praxis in practice – and the nature of the conditions which made this possible. While this particular program is unlikely to be transferable to another site – indeed that would be the antithesis of the argument we present here about the specificity of sites, and the need to be cognisant of the particular 'doings', 'sayings' and 'relatings' which constitute sites – the notions of site-based educational development and a praxis approach to education seem to be critical if education is to be realised, particularly in disadvantaged communities. By taking into account the complex array of practices which constitute current schooling settings, we are perhaps more likely to learn about the specific actions, talk and relationships likely to provide conditions most beneficial for students'

learning. This is difficult, ‘messy’ work, but, arguably, well worth it.

Notes

- ⁱ For a more fulsome account of practice, practice architectures and praxis see Kemmis et al., (2014)
- ⁱⁱ All proper names (people, places) are pseudonyms.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Josephite values, drawing on the work of the Catholic Order of St Joseph, are strongly informed by notions of social justice and equity.
- ^{iv} It is common practice in Australia for parents (often mothers) to support teachers by coming into class during reading time to listen to children read.
- ^v We were unable to interview the mothers because the program was complete.
- ^{vi} It seemed that there were also important leadership practices within the refugee community, but these were not key foci of the data collected.

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