

Praxis and the theory of practice architectures: Resources for re-envisioning English education

Christine Edwards-Groves

Charles Sturt University

Peter Grootenboer

Griffith University

ABSTRACT

This article examines practices in English education through the lens of praxis and the theory of practice architectures. Drawing on empirical material collected in two case study schools in New South Wales and Queensland, we outline a view of praxis and practice that allows English educators to re-imagine the nature of their pedagogical work. It does so, first, by reconnecting practice with individual and collective praxis as a way of expressing the double purpose of education; ‘to help people live well in a world worth living in’ (Kemmis, 2008). Second, using the theory of practice architectures, we show how different kinds of cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements make visible the dispositions and knowledges which give rise to different kinds of actions and judgments in the everyday work of teachers. By doing so, we reconnect with a lifeworld – or humanistic – perspective on English teaching practices as a human and social endeavour with indissoluble moral, political and historical dimensions.

Introduction

Educational practice, including English education, is constantly being revised in many countries and contexts across the world. In Australia, the new Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2008) and National Standards for Professional Practice (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) are guidelines directed towards securing improved educational outcomes for all Australian students, monitored via national testing of student outcomes (from primary to tertiary levels) and mechanisms like the ‘MySchools’ website. However, the push for accountability and performativity pervading the work of schools within what is described as the ‘performative audit culture’ (Comber & Nixon, 2011, p. 168), only sits loosely connected to what we describe as the double purpose of education. The double purpose of education – to help people live well in a world worth living in (Kemmis, 2008) – has often been overlooked in the frequently

contradictory debates about the nature, efficacy and sustainability of educational practice.

In our view, schooling has come to be seen as synonymous with education, and bureaucratic systems of performativity and managerialism can bear little relevance to the actual lives and educational needs of students and teachers in classrooms, and their communities. From this, a teacher’s praxis has a significant influence on understanding and enacting teaching as neo-liberal policy regimes gain momentum. At stake is educational practice connecting with a humanistic lifeworld perspective with indissoluble moral, political and historical consequences (Grootenboer, 2013). Therefore, in this article we aim to re-capture historical understandings of ‘praxis’ as a resource for understanding pedagogical work through re-igniting a sense of the *doubleness* of education as both an ethical and a practical ideal that addresses the needs and purposes of students and their communities.

As we will show, taking a praxis approach to the practices that occur in education re-professionalises teaching, as it moves beyond the epistemological and technical dimensions of the work of the teacher to account for the practical wisdom and moral judgements required (Edwards-Groves, 2008). From this, therefore, a main purpose of the article is to illustrate *praxis in practice* by examining the site-based practical wisdom of educational practices as it happened in particular empirical cases. To do this we capitalise on the resurgence of practice theories as resources for understanding individual and collective action in education. Turning to practice theory enables the examination of the distinctive architectures that constitute practices. To this end, we aim to take a ‘practice turn’ (Schatzki, 2002) in the field of English education (Green & Reid, 2004; Reid, 2011) as a central concern for any practice theory is its inherent interest in social life. Practice theories, generically assembled, represent a body of social and cultural theories related to each other by virtue of their fundamental concern with practices as they exist in particular fields of inquiry (Green, 2009). This enables us to view practice from a site-based or ontological perspective (Schatzki, 2002, 2010; Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer & Bristol, 2014).

An ontological approach emphasises that practices occur and are enmeshed with particular kinds of nuanced arrangements found at specific sites, like particular classrooms in particular schools in particular communities. This is not a new idea, but following the work of Dewey (1933) and Freire (1985) for example, it allows us first, to theorise practices as they happen in sites; and second, it enables English educators to see their professional practice as a form of praxis where they overtly consider the ethical, moral and affective dimension of their pedagogy (Grootenboer, 2013). Forming our fundamental premise therefore, is that a praxis-oriented view is vital in the current climate of educational accountability, performativity and change. The case for praxis in English education is made by drawing on classroom observation and interview data gathered in two case study schools. Initially, given the space restrictions, we outline a necessarily brief and perhaps malnourished description of praxis and practice theory, before exemplifying and developing these ideas vis-à-vis English education.

Re-capturing a ‘praxis’ orientation in educational practice

In recent years, the notion of ‘praxis’ and its connections to practice and practical action, has resurfaced as a foundation stone for thinking about the formation,

enactment and sustainability of quality educational practices in schools. It is an idea rendered in thought from the times of classic Greek philosophers such as Aristotle. It has been defined as simply as working or action knowledge that teachers apply in the moment-by-moment work in classrooms (Macken-Horarik, 2013), or accepted routine practices (Exley, 2008), or in more complex ways that reach back in history to philosophers like Aristotle, Dewey, Freire and Marx. A neo-Aristotelian perspective, for example, locates praxis within an educational paradigm formed and differentiated by knowledges and dispositions which give rise to different kinds of actions, judgements and ethics. These form the theoretical, technical and practical perspectives of teaching which simultaneously shape the language, activity and relationships in practices.

This conceptualisation of praxis, grounded in the Aristotelian tradition, operates from a premise that allowing practitioners to interrogate and transcend the limitations of their inherited traditions to ‘develop their own way of seeing and understanding the world’ enables the design of morally and historically appropriate educational practices (Freire, 1985, p. 31). Consistent with post-Marxian understandings of praxis as ‘history-making action’, this view highlights action cognisant of moral, social and political consequences – good or bad – for those involved in and affected by it. Marx and Engels (1845, in *The German Ideology*) articulated their historical materialism, arguing that social formations, ideas, theories and consciousness emerge from collective social praxis, and that social action (praxis) makes history.

‘Retrieving a sense of this intellectual history is not an antiquarian pursuit’ (Doecke, Homer & Nixon, 2003, p. 100), but rather a pursuit that offers a view of educational work that reconnects the empirical with the theoretical set against a historical backdrop. It is a way that connects the happenings in classrooms with both its history (formation) and its sociality (happeningness). This offers a meta-awareness of the kinds of dispositions, judgments and actions enacted in educational circumstances which can be evaluated only in the light of their consequences (this is, in terms of how things actually turn out) (Kemmis, et al., 2014). Such a view insists that teaching is more than knowledge and technique; it necessarily locates education as a human and therefore, social endeavour with enduring moral, political and historical dimensions and consequences.

A theory of practice and practice architectures

The term ‘practice’ is ubiquitous in education and the social sciences. By its very use (and perhaps overuse) the

term ‘practice’ in education has come to mean simply ‘what is done’ (or coined in everyday catch-all phrases like ‘best practice’ or ‘literacy practice’), and so the multidimensionality of what practices entail and what enables and constrains their enactment is sometimes lost. As Green (2009) remarks,

it is a term that circulates incessantly, and seems constantly and sometimes even compulsively in use, without always meaning much at all. Rather, it seems to float across the surface of our conversations and our debates, never really thematised and indeed basically unproblematised, a ‘stop-word’ par excellence. So it is important to be clear at the outset that practice is not simply the Other of terms and concepts such as ‘theory’ or ‘policy’, as conventional usage would have it, though it might be linked in interesting ways to them. (p. 2)

Therefore, for a contemporary view, the term ‘practice’ needs *re*clarification since it is often used when we simply mean ‘activity’.

Theorising practice has led to the emergence of different practice theories with different foci; for example, Bourdieu (1990), Latour (2005), Ingold (2011), MacIntyre (1981) and Schatzki (2002/10). These theorists, among others, draw attention to the different and distinctive ways people, objects, discourses, relationships, activities and circumstances are entangled or enmeshed in the doing of a practice. Their views

position practice to be intrinsically social and locally enacted; and as suggested by Goodwin and Heritage (1990), it is through processes of social interaction, shared meaning, mutual understanding, relationships and the coordination of human conduct in activities are achieved.

To make sense of sociality in the conduct of practices, Schatzki (2002), for example, argued that practices are comprised of distinctive characteristic actions or ‘doings’ and discourse or ‘sayings’. His view, however, leaves implicit the ways people relate to one another in practices. To explicate the particular nature of relationships, power, agency and solidarity in the enactment of practices Kemmis and colleagues (2008, 2014) developed the theory of practice architectures to account not only for *sayings* and *doings* in practices, but also for *relatings* (see Figure 1) and the ways these three dimensions of practice simultaneously shape and are shaped by one another and the practice architectures that enable and constrain interaction.

The theory of practice architectures emerged by problematising practice theory. It suggests that practices in the social world *hang together* in three ever present dimensions; specifically, in ‘three dimensions of intersubjectivity’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 23) formed in semantic space, in physical-space time and in social space. Kemmis et al., (2014), explain that

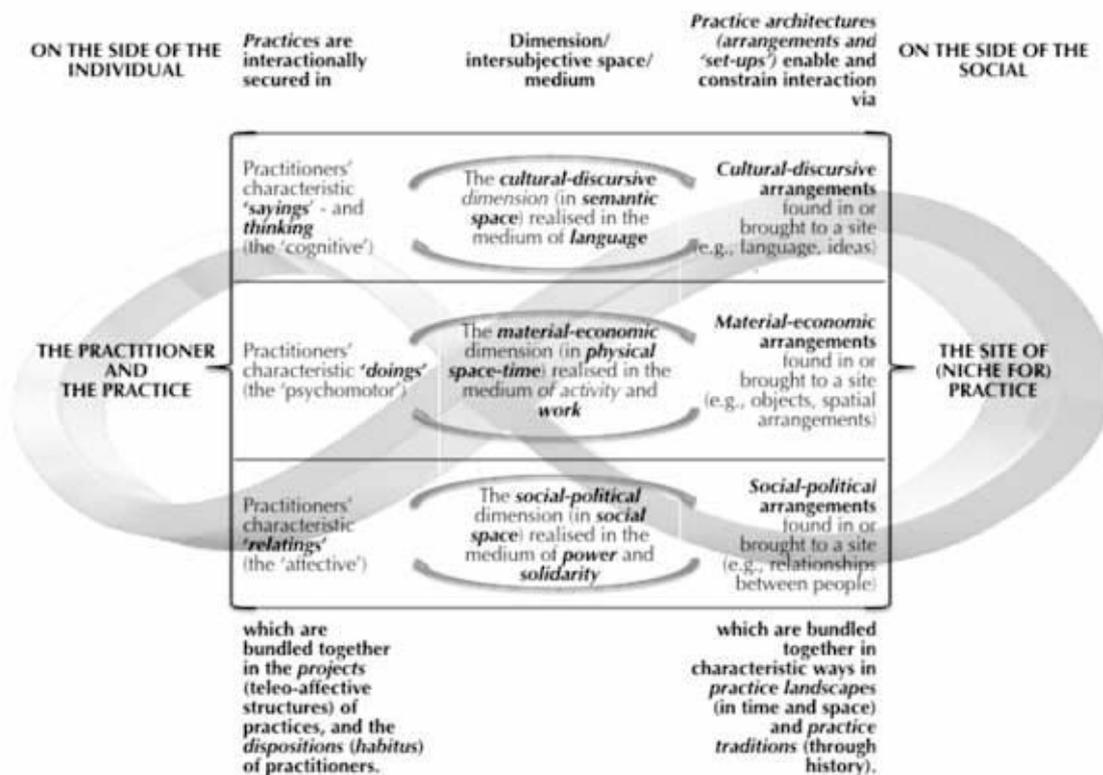


Figure 1. The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014)

in these three dimensions, cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements do not occur separately from one another; they are always bundled together in practice and in places. Bundled together, they give social life – and our consciousness of it – its apparent solidity, its palpability, its reality and its actuality (p. 5).

In our view, the theory of practice architectures, offers a way to theorise practices and the interconnectedness between the *cultural-discursive*, *material-economic* and *social-political* arrangements which embody the types of practices (or actions comprised of interconnected ‘sayings’, ‘doings’ and ‘relatings’) that happen in schools and classrooms.

As the diagram shows, people in practices encounter one another intersubjectively in semantic space, in physical space-time and in social space. These intersubjective spaces form places for English teaching to be understood and enacted; and, as pointed out by Unsworth and colleagues (2007), understanding place and its inextricable connection to literacies and literacy practices provides us with ‘a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world’ (Cresswell, 2004, p. 11). It is at the site of the multiplicity of individual innovations and actions enacted by teachers that we can begin to ‘trace’ out the social and how individuals ‘conspire’ with each other to produce the order of things (Latour, 2010, p. 148).

From a praxis stance, place matters (Harvey, 1996; Ingold, 2011). It directs us to the everyday circumstances of practices as they are conducted (after Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Luke, 1995). Underneath this is an ontological approach (Schatzki, 2002, 2010) which emphasises that practices do not occur in a vacuum but occur in local sites of human co-existence as people meet one another in activities in interactions. This view is consistent with researchers in the area of English education such as Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn (1995) who conceptualised the situatedness and happeningness of English teachers’ practices as ‘everyday’ practices and what ‘counts’ as practices are enacted (Heap, 1991).

What happens in these local sites – as practices unfold in ‘everyday’ actions, interactions and language – is shaped (or enabled and constrained) by specific practice architectures or the *cultural-discursive*, *material-economic* and *social-political* arrangements which exist or enter there. To illustrate simply, practice architectures of teaching reading in primary classrooms involves social interactions utilising:

- certain *sayings* – the words and language particular to reading pedagogy (like phonics, semiotic systems, comprehension, multiliteracies);

- certain *doings* – the activities (like guided reading, reciprocal teaching, CLOZE), the resources (like big books, desks, computers), and the physical set-ups for arranging students to ‘do’ reading (like whole class sitting on the floor facing the whiteboard, small groups sitting at desks, students interacting in pairs sitting knee-to-knee); and
- certain *relatings* – the relationships and ways students and teachers relate to one another in reading lessons or activities (like as peers, teacher-student, child-adult).

Each of these practices is distinctive and characteristic of teaching and learning reading; they simultaneously hang together in the doing of the practice. Each is enabled and constrained by the other, and in their conduct, these dimensions of practice are interdependent and intertwined always forming, reforming and transforming each other. People’s capacities, commitments and dispositions are made visible in the *situatedness* and *happeningness* of these practices as they are enacted (at the time) by saying and doing particular things, and by relating to others and the world in particular ways. Given this, sayings, doings and relatings form resources for participation in practices, since participating in practices in particular ways in particular sites simultaneously always produces, reproduces and transforms participants’ dispositions, practices and the sites in which they are practising.

Praxis and practice in English education: orienting to the double purpose

In English education theoretical, technical and practical perspectives and their interrelationships become visible as they are played out in everyday teaching and learning. Equally, teaching English requires knowledge of curriculum and learning theory, pedagogical skills and practical wisdom for effective teaching. While we acknowledge that each of these aspects is necessary; in this article we want to emphasise its enactment and what is made visible in the practice architectures (or sayings, doings and relatings) that prefigure different kinds of practices of teaching English. This aligns with the work of Street (1984) who examined the empirical connections between theory and practice in the field of literacy teaching.

Taking account of local sites and circumstances (Barton & Hamilton, 1998), situated practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and the situatedness of literacy and English education (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) has grounded the study of English education for many researchers. Taken together, the existing body of work advocates ethically motivated literacy teaching that responds

explicitly to students' knowledge, needs, circumstances and culture. From this, what teachers take into account as they respond and make judgments in the moments of teaching connects to their praxis orientation; it is this that reveals the values, dispositions, the intellectual traditions which influence 'everyday' situated teaching practices.

Through a praxis lens, English teaching practices are not only responsive to the students in the school and classroom, but also the *cultural-discursive*, *material-economic*, and *social-political arrangements* (or sayings, doings and relatings) in the classroom, school, community and the broader system. Understanding these arrangements and how they influence teaching has been a focus of research in English education for decades. For instance, Gee's (1990) work on discourses and culture; Barnes, Britton and Torbe's (1990) focus on language and learning; Clay's (1979) work on the activities or doing of reading and writing; and Baker's (1991) research into social relations in classroom reading events, have ascribed the value of many of the ideas suggested in this article.

The value of the work of these theorists, among others, have sensitised the profession to examining and developing fundamental and insights into the distinctiveness of particular aspects of practice; rather than view them more holistically. However, we argue that the theory of practice architectures provides a mechanism for developing a more holistic view about practices; a view that accounts for but also assembles and extends other renderings of educational practice. It does this by taking the position that understanding practices cannot be reduced to any one of these actions or dimensions on its own. But to understand practices, requires accounting for the ways cultural-discursive, material-economic *and* social-political arrangements always hang together in practices (Edwards-Groves et al., 2014).

Therefore, what this article aims to contribute to this building tradition in English education is an examination of how the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political dimensions of practice work together as interconnected, inextricably linked influences; each shaping and being shaped by the other. From this the theory of practice architectures is useful as an analytic tool for firstly, allowing us grasp the interconnected dimensions of practice (often studied as separate entities); secondly, enabling the particularity of the local to be revealed; and thirdly, allowing us to view practices from a praxis stance that considers both how individual teachers and groups of teachers and others respond to the places, circumstances and students they teach. Through empirical material from

two case studies, this article aims to show what praxis means for English education in the here and now of contemporary teaching.

Background to the study

This paper draws on a broader four-year study investigating issues in educational practices (Kemmis, et al., 2014) as they happen in schools (Schatzki, 2010). The study focused chiefly on six purposively selected schools in two regions of Australia in New South Wales and Queensland, and how various kinds of practices in these schools were shaped by particular cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that existed within and beyond them, and how these related to one another in 'ecologies of practices' (Kemmis, Edwards-Groves, Wilkinson & Hardy, 2012). Schools implementing interesting or innovative programs were invited to participate in the study based on recommendations from district office personnel. To this end, researchers were not involved in the development or evaluation of these programs, but rather aimed to investigate how these programs and practices evolved and are enacted. The empirical work was conducted employing a multiple case study approach (Stake, 1995).

The study: design and method

Empirical data for this article, drawn from the larger corpus, includes a range of qualitative methods gathered in two case study schools. It includes six lesson observations and follow-up debriefing interviews; six student focus group interviews (involving 30 students); interviews with three principals, 11 teachers, two Community Liaison Officers, one reading specialist and district personnel. All were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data, reports and other published material were presented back to informants involved (the district offices and schools) for comment and critique.

After an initial, independent examination of the corpus, a detailed examination of emerging categories to discern relevant themes was conducted. Specifically, as an analytical frame, analysis was guided by the three dimensions of practice ascribed by the theory of practice architectures to distil the interconnectivities between the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political dimensions of the practices reported and observed at each site (Kemmis, et al., 2014). This involved looking at each case and drawing meaning from it using categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995). A collection of instances from across the corpus of data was sought with the view that issue-relevant meaning would emerge as they recurred in the data (Creswell, 1998).

Findings: case studies, analysis and discussion

The findings presented reflect cases of ordinary school-based projects that influenced the everyday teaching and learning episodes in each site because these formed the very fabric of students' experiences in their English education. The data and examples are not necessarily ground-breaking or new; the purpose here is to view regular ordinary practices and accounts of teaching through a 'praxis lens' and the theory of practice architectures to highlight the significance of this taken-for-granted aspect of pedagogical decision-making. Their accounts are critical as it is their practice-in-action that make visible how 'praxis is the action of people who act in the knowledge that their actions will have good or ill consequences for which they have sole or shared responsibility, and who, in that knowledge want to act for the good' (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 8).

Empirical cases

The two case study sites are contextualised by presenting descriptions of the particular whole-school teaching and learning projects designed by teachers, community members, district personnel and students. This is followed by participant accounts that show the ways individuals responded to the local needs and circumstances needs they were faced with in their day-to-day teaching. Note: all names of programs, schools, teachers and students are pseudonyms; informed consent was gained through appropriate ethical procedures.

Case 1 – Pinepark Primary School – *Reading-for-all Community project*

Pinepark Primary School is geographically situated in urban SE QLD, Australia. It is a small-medium sized school and its 280 students were from mainly low socio-economic refugee and non-English speaking migrant backgrounds. The project stemmed from an initial concern raised by early years teachers whose students, primarily from non-English speaking refugee families, had limited English language usage and limited opportunities to read for practice. Understandably, the student's families (parents and extended family members) also had limited experiences with English language and reading. To respond to these particularities the school community, teaching staff, the local minister and community members (with input from refugee persons) designed the *Reading-for-all Community project*. The project was multilayered and involved the development of a locally-designed reading program (*Reading-for-all*) which aimed to support young refugee children develop reading confidence through regular practice. It was based on establishing authentic learning experiences

(English language through speaking and reading) and relationships between the refugee students, their parents and community members.

One layer of the project involved the classroom-based initiative. The purpose was for community volunteers to support the students in the classroom setting 'gain reading mileage' (through practising reading and speaking English). Local community volunteers would engage students in conversations about books, read them stories so they could hear the sound of reading, support students to practise speaking and listening to English language and support students practise reading (to improve fluency, confidence, use of reading strategies and vocabulary recognition). From between one and four days a week, the volunteers in a one-on-one partnership would spend about 10 minutes. In this excerpt, Marissa (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.

The project enabled students to spend focused time with a 'reading role model' (Cathy, ESL Teacher) to experience the 'joy of reading' (Beth, Year 1 Teacher). These reading experiences simultaneously reconfigured the types of relationships the students experienced as they learned to use English (through speaking and reading). Over time, these learning partnerships influenced both the social-political (or relational) dimension of their everyday activities as students and volunteers became 'quite fond of each other' and 'looked forward to the visit' (Jane, Teacher). This was recognised by both the teachers, 'They see that they are making a difference' (Amy, Literacy Support Teacher), and the volunteers; as noted by Lillith in this interview excerpt:

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. (Lillith, volunteer)

These practices also changed other practices in the school; for example, many of the volunteers would often offer to do more activities with the students in the classroom and around the school (e.g. grandparents' day). For the teachers and community members at Pinepark, there was more at stake than 'doing school'; their response reflected a broader social educational commitment and action, as suggested here by classroom teacher, Marissa: '[it helped us all] to take on local responsibilities and face up to the situation of

families at risk and young people at risk in our local community’.

A second layer of the *Reading-for-all Community project* involved supporting non-English speaking parents – including many African refugee mothers – through a weekly ‘functional’ English class to provide supported opportunities for practising English language use and reading. The English classes were conducted at the Community Centre on the school grounds, and involved a coordinated approach from the ESL and Literacy teachers, the District Office personnel, the local community and the school staff. As a first step, the African mothers involved were transported to the school on a minibus funded by the District Office. The District Office also funded the venue and catering was supplied by the community; and, the teaching organised by the school leadership. The class was taught by Charlie, a teacher with a background in teaching English and reading. In this excerpt, Charlie described the classes:

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.

Then, as an extended part of the program, the mothers were also supported to go back into the classrooms to read with some of the children (sometimes their own) in order to try and build a ‘culture of reading’ (Charlie, English language Teacher). It is important to note that this type of home-community approach to developing social capital and literacy development is not new, and like-programs elsewhere report to have a positive and powerful impact on teachers, parents and students in schools such as Pinepark Primary (see for example, research conducted in the UK by Wells (1986) and Hannon and Nutbrown (1997, 2001), who studied the impact of the ORIM framework and the REAL project; and research on various family-community literacy projects conducted in the US by Heath (1983), Michaels (1986), and Hymes (1996).

The *Reading-for-all* project offered significant individual and collective social opportunities for the participating African mothers who often expressed isolation and loneliness; that is, the language development opportunities (on the side of the individual) emerged to be as equally as important as the social practice of coming together to share experiences (on the side of the collective). The project enabled new ways of relating to others in their new Australian community, as the African mothers experienced a ‘bit of an outing ... with some morning tea’ (Cassie, classroom teacher) while

promoting a reading culture in the school, the community and in the refugee family homes. On this, Amy the Literacy 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.

The *Reading-for-all Community project* was distinguishable by its core orientation towards school-community partnership, about responding to the social circumstances and needs of the site. The limited English language use and reading capacities of the refugee children, along with their parents’ limited capacity to support their children enter and exist within the culture of their new Australian school had implications for the pedagogical practices of the teachers and the learning practices of the students. These site-based issues set in chain the creation of new practices and new practice architectures at Pinepark Primary School which were not simply about practices, but about praxis; it was about education not simply schooling.

Case 2 – Plainsville Primary School – *Leading digital literacies in learning partnerships project*

The second school, Plainsville Primary, is a very small remote school within a small farming community in NSW, Australia. Its 24 students mainly travel to school by bus from the surrounding farm district. In this school, the two teachers with support from the district personnel, parents and the Grade 5 and 6 students developed the *Leading digital literacies in learning partnerships* project. To assist in development of development of digital literacies, the project aimed to support students support themselves (as individuals) and other students (as a collective) through learning partnerships. Initially here, we draw on interview data from Terri, the school principal. First, she described the dimensions of the project (below):

To understand how digital learning partnerships work you need to understand the way leadership and learning work *here* ... *Because* we are such a remote school, leadership and learning is everybody’s responsibility, for everyone here it is both about self responsibility and shared responsibility, the children as well. With the limited numbers *we have to do something different* so that the children can get the best out of their learning experiences. *So*, we have developed what we call learning partnerships and mostly, it’s the older children working with and leading learning with the younger ones ... and the children learn that from a young age, *so learning well is always about reaching outside ourselves and our school into the community.*

From a very early stage we expect that all children will learn to be self responsible, and everybody is aware that this is the expectation ... *they learn the language of*

leadership, partnership and responsibility as we set up expectations of ourselves and of one another to learn about how to use technology to enhance our learning for instance. So, *leading learning partnerships sort of naturally becomes part of routine way of working and talking from Kindergarten, the students just grow in that atmosphere.*

In these excerpts, Terri oriented to the notions of both the individual (self-responsibility) and collective (shared responsibility) as she described the underpinning role of learning partnerships in this school site. Her statement, ‘to understand how the digital learning partnerships work requires understanding the way leadership and learning work *here*’, directly considered the circumstances, needs and particularity of her site. Later in the excerpt, the notion of praxis is highlighted in the comments ‘*because we are such a remote school*’ and ‘*we have to do something different*’ further attributed the school’s ways of working in terms of responsibility to the site and circumstances they are faced with in their community. This site-based ontological response directly connects to a praxis stance, where her judgement based on local insight and careful thought was brought forth into the practical actions taken in her day-to-day realities. Terri’s comments also lead us to consider the doubleness of education as she spoke about ‘learning well [on the side of the individual] *is always about reaching outside ourselves* and our school *into the community* [on the side of the collective]’. In these next excerpts, Terri described the practices required to establish and enact learning partnerships.

And so for our *Leading digital literacies in learning partnerships* project, we work as a team [parents, children, teachers and the district support personnel]. The parents have made a big commitment to resourcing the place and providing more on-the-ground support along with Kasey Graham from the district office ... our decisions are always *about what is best for these students in this particular community.*

Excerpt 4: I guess it is like a train the trainer model, but with kids; ... and it works like this, Kasey works directly with the Year 5 and 6 students in what we call *sandpit time*, where they are supported to practice and play with the application, try it out, make mistakes, and trial all the features whatever. So ... Year 5/6 pass their skills onto a Year 4, and Year 4s to Year 2/3 and so on ... you still have the skilled people teaching each other and so, it keeps generating itself, with all of us working together, learning with each other and for each other ... you’ve always got someone who’s got a greater knowledge of it; because they know a lot more than me they sometimes teach me.

For instance, last year we were doing a unit called Making Choices, which was about advertising ... in creative arts they were creating little claymation models to make animations, and then, related to what we were

doing about advertising, they came up with Adverstory, and they produced a movie, which was an advertisement using these little figures.

To change the learning practices in this school required changing the practice architectures, as suggested in Terri’s comments. Specifically, to respond to the circumstances and needs in the site, they as a team (parents, children, teachers and the district support personnel), changed the cultural-discursive arrangements (e.g. bringing in the language of leadership, partnership and responsibility, claymations and animated movies), the material-economic arrangements (e.g. using ‘sandpit time’ for practising using the particular technology application, working in changed learning structures such as teams and partnerships) and the social-political arrangements (e.g. Years 5 & 6 working with agency with peers, with the district office personnel and parents, students taking on leading responsibilities). In this site therefore, the intersubjective spaces for learning and leading were reconfigured as responsive mechanisms for practising in praxis-oriented ways (made visible in the above accounts). For example, in social space, leadership and learning partnerships emerged as new ways for people to relate to one another (as students learnt about using technology to create movies for instance). Year 5 and 6 students developed solidarity and agency as they worked as leaders in the school, and through their practices of leading learning they developed a shared (collective) responsibility for learning in the school. These students not only related differently to their teacher (by sometimes teaching the teacher), they also related differently to the district person by working directly with her, and leading the learning of their learning partners. Furthermore, the principal changed the way that the physical space-time was configured in that new learning set-ups opened up new activities as the students engaged in new activities such as sandpit time for practising, worked directly with the district office personnel to learn new applications, worked with younger students in learning partnerships. In turn, these practices opened up a changed semantic space as new forms of discourse entered the language of the students at Plainsville; for instance, as Terri said in excerpt 1, ‘they learn the language of leadership, partnership and responsibility’ and ‘leading learning partnerships sort of naturally becomes part of routine way of working and talking from Kindergarten, the students just grow in that atmosphere.’

During a student focus group interview, Year 5/6 students explained the leadership and learning partnerships they participated in their day-to-day life at Plainsville School.

Paddy: We're all leaders of the school here

Researcher: In what ways? Can you tell me about that?

Paddy: Well, we are leaders by teaching the younger people about ICT. It is important for a being a leader to have having responsibility

Jeremy: Showing by example

Riley: We have leadership responsibilities, like make the little Kinders feel welcome.

Researcher: Oh, how do you do that?

M: Oh, just by saying hello and including them in your games and teaching stuff.

Krissie: We have learning partnerships in our classroom and we've got to like teach the little kids things like using the new programs ...

Tessa: We have it every day ... Being there to teach them about strategies when using the multimedia

Jeremy: Getting them to check their work, like does it look good, what colours, does the audio sound good, and is it a story that makes sense and helping them practice, you know.

Katie: We help by being a good model when we show them how to do it, and to get them to work it out for their self ... so they can do for the Kinders when they get older ... you have the responsibility of doing it now and then they'll have responsibility when they get older.

Jason: Oh cause, you just know that you're really teaching them something important and that's going to be better for them ...

Paddy: When we learn something new, like using Comic Life to present our stories, Kasey shows one of us first then we practise it and teach our learning partner and then the rest of the people in the class. We take turns in becoming the expert for that program and the little ones can come to us if they need help.

As the students continued they spoke about their ways of learning, teaching and leading; for example Riley having 'another student sit next to you and help you through it' or Trent explaining the importance of 'when you teach the little ones you say it in words they understand and you really can tell if they are listening and get it', so that 'no one gets left behind'. In their words, students described the practice architectures which shaped the activities they did (e.g. practising, teaching and helping others, sitting next to each other), what they said (e.g. listening and saying things in words others understand), and how they related to others (e.g. becoming expert, being responsible, being a model, feeling proud, leading,

including others). Woven through their comments is a praxis orientation; these students, too, recognised the influence of self-responsibility and shared responsibility as they spoke about 'what is important' in 'how we learn here ... it's a good way'. They discussed the generative nature of their practices 'you have the responsibility of doing it now and then they'll have responsibility when they get older'.

When the students spoke about leadership, partnership and responsibility they made visible particular knowledges about how to be in the world – 'we're all leaders' or 'it is our responsibility'. Further to this, they reflected particular dispositions characterised by what they saw as being appropriate, relevant and fair in light of the circumstances in that place – 'this is how we learn here', 'we help each other', 'you say it in words they understand', 'no one gets left behind', or 'we include everyone'. Through their words, we are drawn into the ways they connected with their site, their ontology, their praxis.

The development of this *digital literacies* initiative comes from a firm conviction that teachers should respond to local conditions, rather than to the pressures of political push and performativity. Terri explained:

Initiative-wise, it began by looking broadly at the results of NAPLAN; but the results by themselves are not enough – although there is a pressure from the office, and even the media, about accountability, to always perform better. We used that information to help us as a starting point but it is the analysis done by teachers that is probably the one that thing that's going to target the help for most students. ... I think when you have that class a number of times you're pretty well aware of where their needs are and you keep working at that. It just simply depends on that.

We have opportunities to complete other professional development programs like (names programs) but to be fair for the kids, I firmly believe the teaching directions for most schools should come what they need; sometimes the office doesn't like it, but schools have to resist and be strong, because we know our kids. ... I heard the Education Minister talking about remote schools and their results, that they need more funding. But I don't know whether that's completely accurate – I don't mind the funding ... go for your life, Minister, we'll have the funding; but ... sweeping generalisations don't address what I know about what my students need here.

In her words, to be fair for the kids, Terri resisted ministerial argument and district office programs to design locally responsive teaching based on knowledge of what the students needed in her school site. In her words, sweeping generalisations don't address what I know about what my students need here.

Discussion

When actors in practices – even students – described their actions in relation to ‘what we do here in this place for this purpose is the best way forward under these circumstances’, they reflect particular knowledges and dispositions which give rise to different kinds of individual practical action and responses that may influence the broader society for the better. This kind of action points to a kind of disposition of educational praxis that is about more than schooling; one that is responsive to the circumstances and needs of students in the particular school in the face of regimes of performativity and accountability. Their accounts revealed the particularity and nuances of practices as they connected directly to site-based concerns. From this three key interrelated findings emerged:

1. Praxis-oriented teaching decisions are about education and more than schooling
2. Praxis-oriented teaching is ontologically responsive to local circumstances and needs
3. Praxis-oriented teaching reflects individual *and* collective dimensions, where individual actions taken together influence the broader society.

In the cases, we identified praxis in the sayings, doings and relatings among the teachers, volunteers, students and principals. For individuals in the sites, the choices and decisions formed new schooling practices; for example, co-authoring ‘big-books’ related to culture, food and agricultural activities related to the community garden, or designing a community-based reading program that supported refugee parents learn to read English and support their children, or developing learning partnerships where older students had responsibility for teaching others about using technology. Their work illuminates the visible enactment of ‘praxis’; evident in teaching that was carefully thought out and responsive and based on knowledgeable practical actions, interactions and discourse. Praxis was present in the realm of the cultural-discursive (or their sayings) as they recreated the semantic spaces for using discourse and language. For example, individuals said different things to one another ‘so they understand’. Praxis was also visible in the activities undertaken by individuals and groups as they reconfigured the physical space and time for doing different things necessary to support the learning of students in the particular sites; for instance, creating the community based reading-for-all program as a new learning forum. Praxis was visible in relationships between individuals as agency and power shifted among the teachers, students, community members for individual and collective *action*.

A praxis view moves us beyond the tendency to view

education and schooling as both mutually exclusive and as technical processes concerned with the production of things – the production of people of a certain kind, for example, or the production of ‘learning outcomes’. This is a technical view that overlooks the agency of those acting in the practice (like the teachers and students). What the cases show is how English education and the decisions made in these schools was about more than schooling; the practices of the individuals there reflect the doubleness of a school education that is about living and acting well (as individuals) in a world worth living in (in broader society). For example, learning how to lead, developing self-responsibility and sharing responsibility, working in authentic learning partnerships direct us to a humanistic educational lifeworld that ‘*is always about reaching outside ourselves and our school into the community*’, and in a practice sense ‘*making a difference*’ ‘*taking on local responsibilities and face up to the situation of families at risk and young people at risk in their local community*’. The case study schools seemingly achieved this double purpose through enacting practices that directly responded to the circumstances and needs in the site, modelling and fostering a good life for the persons who encountered one another there; that is, what is right to do for particular students in particular places at the time. This, for us, is ‘praxis’.

In this article, reference to both *practice* and *praxis* in the theory of practice architectures acknowledges that practices have a moral, not just a technical dimension. Practices always have consequences; the unfolding or anticipation of these consequences inform the conduct of the practice. Because moral consequences of a practice are site and situation specific as our cases show, many practice situations demand moral-ethical judgment and creative problem solving, rendering reliance on prescribed procedures or rule-following action inappropriate or *deprofessionalising* by succumbing to regimes of performativity and managerialism.

Conclusions

The cases reported prompt questions to be asked about praxis and English teaching -acknowledging that while the practices reported in this article are worthy of note, they are also worthy of being open to closer scrutiny or critique. In particular, the cases raise questions about the dispositions, knowledge, actions and judgments involved in everyday situated English teaching, and how these connect to teaching practice as a social endeavour with enduring moral, political and historical dimensions and consequences. The focus on praxis emerged from our belief that teachers everywhere *intend* to act in praxis-oriented ways in the course of their everyday

work; however, for this article, using the theory of practice architectures afforded us a lens to examine the particularity of praxis as it happens in decision making and action in particular places. In this we endeavored to show how praxis is realised or made visible in practices; in particular the different discourses about and for teaching English, within different kinds of activities and actions involved in teaching English, and different kinds of relationships between teachers and students and others. Therefore, the theory of practice architectures provided an important mechanism for showing how the cultural-discursive arrangements (realised in sayings), the material-economic arrangements (realised in doings) and the social-political arrangements (realised in relatings) hang together in practices; and that each of these dimensions need to be understood in relation to the other – not as separate fields of inquiry.

Viewing English teaching *as* praxis does not diminish the need for teacher knowledge or pedagogical technique; but rather it foregrounds the distinctive educational practices and responses that are developed through this knowledge and technique in response to the needs and circumstances present in particular sites. As such, understanding English teaching practices must also be re-envisioned to account for an ontological practical perspective that gives pre-eminence to praxis (practical wisdom which sits alongside careful, thoughtful and knowledgeable practical action and judgment). From this praxis and practice architectures emerge as resources for understanding and enacting education; and, for us, orient to re-envisioning teaching English in schools. By doing so, we also hope to invite continuing discussion and debate about praxis and its place in the theorising, policy development and the enactment of practices of English education.

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Christine Edwards-Groves is Senior Lecturer (Literacy Studies) and key researcher for RIPPLE at Charles Sturt University. Her research interests include classroom interaction, multimodal literacy practices and pedagogies, teacher professional learning and practice theory. She is co-author of two recent publications: *Changing Practice, Changing Education* (Springer, 2014), and *Classroom Talk: Understanding dialogue, pedagogy and practice* (PETAA, 2014). Christine is Australian coordinator of PEP International with researchers from Scandinavia, Columbia, The UK, Netherlands and Caribbean.

Peter Grootenboer is Associate Professor (Mathematics Education) in the School of Education and Professional Studies and researcher for GIER Griffith University. His research background includes ethnography, mathematics pedagogy and practice theory. Peter is a key member of the PEP research network and is co-author of *Changing Practice, Changing Education* (Springer, 2014). Peter and Christine are presently co-editing a book entitled *Practice Theory Perspectives on Pedagogy and Education: Praxis, diversity and contestation* (Springer, forthcoming).