

Chapter

WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE?

Recognizing and respecting diversity in understandings of practice

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Abstract: Practice is a rich and complex notion whose nuances remain elusive for many practitioners, researchers, policy-makers and administrators. The theoretical density of practice is frequently underestimated by researchers who too frequently view it from narrow and limited perspectives. The paper presents a framework that aims to illuminate the richness of practice in particular cases as well as in research on practice.

Key words: Practice, practice theory, professional practice knowledge, extra-individual features of practice

In this chapter, I explore a diversity of ways in which ‘practice’ has been understood in various relevant literatures. Given the ubiquity of the term, however, I cannot hope to do justice to all views of practice. Much of what I have to say focuses on ‘professional practice’, although a great deal is also relevant to the wider and more general concept of a ‘social practice’ – an even more elusive concept in the literature, and still more difficult to unravel. My narrower purview may be permissible for a book on developing professional practice. I say little here about the concept of a ‘profession’, though it seems so crucial in defining ‘professional practice’. I am happy to leave that discussion in the background here. I use examples drawn principally from education (reflecting the origins of this paper in a conference of mathematics educators; Kemmis, 2005b), but also, in less depth, from some other professional settings. On the other hand, I am conscious that much of what I have to say about professional practice may have application to many situations and occupations not usually described as ‘professions’. And I am not always sure that the usual kinds of criteria used to define professions (like their use of distinctive bodies of knowledge, or

self-accreditation or self-regulation) are particularly helpful when it comes to understanding professional practice *qua* practice.

I begin by drawing attention to a range of individual and extra-individual features of practice mentioned in various different schools of theorizing about practice, some of which (like Schatzki, 1996, 2002) explicitly understands itself as ‘practice theory’. I do this by presenting a variety of ‘key features’ of practice which I outline in a table intended to give a kind of ‘map’ of the conversation-space between different kinds of theories of practice. The table aims to give a more encompassing view of practice than the views taken by some theorists and researchers, especially those who have focused on practice in terms of the knowledge and action of individual practitioners – that is, the individualistic view of practice against which I want to counterpose the extra-individual features that also constitute practice.

In section 2, before elaborating the table (the task of section 3), I briefly discuss practitioner’s and client’s views of practice, aiming to show that practices are constructed in interaction - beyond the agency of professional practitioners alone. In particular, I aim to show that histories, cultural and discursive resources, social connections and solidarities, and locations in material-economic arrangements and exchanges are all implied in the construction of practices.

Section 3 then elaborates my ‘practice table’, showing how different theorists of practice emphasize different kinds of features in their theories of practice. Although only two-dimensional, I hope the ‘practice table’ gives some sense of how the theoretical ‘conversation’ about practice has employed different kinds of conceptual resources, configured differently in each case – and that there is not clear agreement in the field about what practice is and how it is to be understood. Of course my brief reference to different ideas employed by different theorists does not and cannot do justice to their views or the coherence of their accounts of practice. It is simply intended to suggest some ‘dimensionality’ in the overall conversation or debate about what practice is. I hope section 3 suggests that the contributions of different theorists and theories to the larger debate can be recognized and respected as that – as contributions to a more encompassing understanding of practice.

The final section makes some brief comments about the limitations of the technicist view of practice that has become prevalent in public administration in recent decades, and suggestions about using the practice table in research on practice.

1. TOWARDS A MORE ENCOMPASSING VIEW OF PRACTICE

In this section, I elaborate a view of practice described in a paper I presented at a conference on “Knowing Practice” in Umeå, Sweden in 2004 (Kemmis, 2005a; see also the contributions by Wilfred Carr, Joseph Dunne, Karin Rönnerman, Tone Saugstad and Thomas Schwandt). In that paper, I argued that practice is not best understood in terms of ‘professional practice knowledge’, as, for example, in the views presented by Eraut (1994) and Higgs, Titchen and Neville (2001) who suggest that professional practice knowledge can be described in terms of

1. propositional, theoretical or scientific knowledge – e.g., knowledge of pathology;
2. professional craft knowledge or knowing how to do something;
3. personal knowledge about oneself as a person and in relationship with others (Higgs, Titchen and Neville, 2001, p.5).

Against the view that practice can best be understood from the perspective of practitioners’ knowledge – that is, what is in the heads of individual practitioners – I argued that practice has a number of *extra-individual features*, and that neither practice itself nor the process of changing practice can be adequately understood without reference to these extra-individual features. I drew on a variety of theorists of practice (like MacIntyre, Bourdieu, Foucault and Habermas) to show that, beyond the individual person of the practitioner, practice is also socially-, discursively-, culturally- and historically-formed.

One reason for making this argument was to address the educators of professionals: to argue that we should not limit our teaching to instilling professional practice knowledge in the form of technical, craft and personal knowledge, but rather to insist that neophyte and developing professionals should understand how practices are constructed in the social and other dimensions just listed. If I might put it this way, understanding and changing practice requires work *outside* the heads of practitioners as well as *inside* them. In my Umeå paper, I argued for opening communicative spaces – public spheres constituted for public discourse (based on Habermas, 1996) – in which both communities of practice and practitioners and their clients could thematize and explore problems and issues of practice, and the effects and longer-term consequences of particular kinds of practice.

A second reason for arguing for a more encompassing view of practice is addressed to researchers studying practice in different fields. In our chapters for the second and third editions of *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, 2005), Robin McTaggart and I argued that research on practice has frequently proceeded with impoverished views of

practice as an object of study, and that to understand practice in a more multi-dimensional way it must be studied using multi-disciplinary, multi-method approaches which allow it to be viewed from at least the five perspectives sketched in Figure 1, in part because they characteristically rely on the kinds of research methods and techniques sketched in Figure 2.

Focus:	<i>The individual</i>	<i>The social</i>	<i>Both:</i> <i>Reflexive-dialectical</i> view of individual-social relations and connections
Perspective:			
<i>Objective</i>	(1) Practice as individual behaviour, seen in terms of performances, events & effects: behaviourist and most cognitivist approaches in psychology	(2) Practice as social interaction - e.g., ritual, system-structured: structure-functionalist and social systems approaches	
<i>Subjective</i>	(3) Practice as intentional action, shaped by meaning and values: psychological <i>verstehen</i> (empathetic understanding) and most constructivist approaches	(4) Practice as socially-structured, shaped by discourses, tradition: interpretive, aesthetic-historical <i>verstehen</i> & post-structuralist approaches	
<i>Both:</i> <i>Reflexive-dialectical</i> view of subjective-objective relations and connections	(5) Practice as socially- and historically-constituted, and as reconstituted by human agency and social action: critical theory, critical social science		

Figure 1: Relationships between different traditions in the study of practice

Focus:	<i>The individual</i>	<i>The social</i>	<i>Both:</i> <i>Reflexive-dialectical</i> view of individual-social relations and connections
Perspective:			
<i>Objective</i>	(1) <i>Practice as individual behaviour:</i> Quantitative, correlational-experimental methods. Psychometric and observational techniques, tests, interaction schedules.	(2) <i>Practice as social and systems behaviour:</i> Quantitative, correlational-experimental methods. Observational techniques, sociometrics, systems analysis, social ecology.	
<i>Subjective</i>	(3) <i>Practice as intentional action:</i> Qualitative, interpretive methods. Clinical analysis, interview, questionnaire, diaries, journals, self-report, introspection	(4) <i>Practice as socially-structured, shaped by discourses and tradition:</i> Qualitative, interpretive, historical methods. Discourse analysis, document analysis.	
<i>Both:</i> <i>Reflexive-dialectical</i> view of subjective-objective relations and connections	(5) <i>Practice as socially- and historically-constituted, and as reconstituted by human agency and social action:</i> Critical methods. Dialectical analysis (multiple methods).		

Figure 2: Methods and techniques characteristic of different approaches to the study of practice

These characteristic approaches to the study of practice mean that the practice one researcher ‘sees’ is likely to be very different from what is ‘seen’ by a researcher from a different tradition. These differences may betray disagreements about what *research* is, which in turn give rise to disagreements about what *practice* is – whether practice in general, or in the case of particular professions or occupations, or in the case of particular practitioners.

In our chapter for the second edition of the *Handbook*, we therefore argued for ‘symposium research’ in the study of practice – research drawing on different disciplines and employing multiple methods.

In Figure 3 on pages that follow, I identify a range of different features of practice all of which seem to me significant in adequately understanding a practice. I would like to claim that there are no other interesting categories to consider about practice than the ones pointed to in my summary – but no doubt I have missed aspects of practice just as important as the ones identified here, and have inadequately expressed some of the ideas intended. Repairing some such omissions, the figure also includes aspects of practice not explicitly discussed in my Umeå paper – particularly the column referring to the material-technical aspects of practice as behavior assumed and omitted in that paper. I hope the key words listed in each cell provide sufficient pointers to the work of other thinkers and theorists of practice; clearly, there is not space here to provide a comprehensive justification of all of the elements included – that task would require a large book.

2. PRACTITIONERS’ AND CLIENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON PRACTICE

Before discussing Figure 3 in more detail, I would like to consider some further questions about practice which I believe are central to understanding them as practices – namely, that they involve social interactions in which ‘clients’ are not merely ‘objects’ operated on or influenced by practitioners, but persons-in-themselves who are, to a greater or lesser degree, *knowing subjects* who are co-participants in practice. Thus, for example, learners are not merely ‘objects’ on which teachers ‘operate’, but persons-in-themselves who are co-participants in the joint activity better described as ‘learning and teaching’ than merely ‘teaching’ (which directs our attention to just one of the players in the game of learning and teaching).

(1) INDIVIDUAL FEATURES OF PRACTICE		← constituted in a dialectical relationship with →
<p>Cf. forms of knowledge: (a) cognitive: conceptual understanding [cf. cultural features]; (b) affective: values/emotions [cf. social features]; (c) psychomotor: skills [cf. material features].</p>		<p>(a) CULTURAL-DISCURSIVE FEATURES Medium: language/ discourse Generic social practice: communication</p>
A. Meaning & purpose	<p>Practice is not just activity: it involves meaning and intention, and may draw on professional practice knowledge including technical (knowing that), craft ('know-how') and personal knowledge (Eraut; Giddens; Higgs et al; Oakeshott)</p>	<p>Practice is always meaningful in the sense that it has meaning to practitioners and usually those with whom they interact, and it is frequently 'theoretical' – i.e., it refers to theory that informs it (of which practitioners or others may or may not be aware) (Carr & Kemmis)</p>
B. Structured	<p>Practice is always experientially-formed – it realises and is realised in the identity / subjectivity of the practitioner as a practitioner (Benhabib, Giddens, Schatzki, Wenger). It expresses agency (and sometimes resistance). Participation in practices produces a structure of learned dispositions (habitus) towards the field of practice (Bourdieu).</p>	<p>Practice is always culturally and discursively formed and structured – it realises and is realised in languages and discourses (cf. Bourdieu's cultural capital; Bakhtin; Shotter; Vygotsky; Wittgenstein). It is represented in symbolic forms that codify it. It makes the nexus of power/knowledge (Foucault). Intersubjectivity is grounded in the <i>logos</i> of language (Habermas)</p>
C. Situated	<p>Practice is always embodied (Foucault)– it is what particular people do, in a particular place and time – employing learned capacities and competences, and inevitably involving identity work and emotional work (e.g., as a painful consequence of caring) (Noddings; Schatzki)</p>	<p>Practice is grounded in agreements and debates that form culturally-embodied self-understandings and the discursive histories of communities of practice (Engeström; Kuhn; Lave & Wenger; Toulmin). It invites communicative action to reach intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding and consensus about what to do (Habermas).</p>
D. Temporally-located	<p>Practice is always dramaturgical in character (Habermas) – it unfolds in human and social action, against the narrative background of individuals' lives (biographies) (Schatzki; also cf. MacIntyre's 'narrative unity of a human life')</p>	<p>Practice is always culturally-located against particular traditions of particular societies and groups (Foucault; Kuhn; MacIntyre; Toulmin; Wittgenstein). Practitioners can reach historical self-consciousness of their own perspectives as well as of the events they interpret (Gadamer, effective history).</p>
E. Systemic	<p>Practices are frequently preserved, maintained and developed through the development of the professional role and functions of the practitioner (cf. role theory)</p>	<p>Practices are always discursively/linguistically justified through argument and frequently subject to discursive accreditation and regulation through law, policy, standards (Foucault, incl. on performativity; Habermas, incl. on system and lifeworld, colonisation, juridification)</p>
F. Reflexivity & transformation	<p>Practice is always reflexive, – bringing to mind the relationship between practitioners as subjects and the objects of their practice via their praxis (activity theory; Bourdieu; Giddens; Gouldner; Schatzki; Toulmin). It invites the practitioner to historical self-consciousness (Gadamer). It stimulates the reproduction and transformation of identities.</p>	<p>Practice always invites communicative action (i.e., collaborative action oriented towards mutual understanding, intersubjective agreement and consensus about what to do) (Habermas; Kemmis). Practices are always culturally/linguistically reproduced and culturally/linguistically transformed over time and place.</p>
G. Forms of reasoning about practice	<p>Practice always involves practical reasoning (Aristotle; Gadamer; Gauthier; Schwab), using knowledge in the face of uncertainty (exploratory action) – guided by a practical knowledge-constitutive interest in acting wisely and prudently in given circumstances (Carr & Kemmis ; Habermas</p>	<p>Practice invites aesthetic-expressive understanding and reasoning about practice as symbolic, and exploration of the aesthetics and poetics of practice (Shotter, Lyotard). Practice also invites critical reasoning about cultural-discursive aspects of practice (see the cell to the right)</p>

Figure 3: Individual and extra-individual features of practice

(2) EXTRA-INDIVIDUAL FEATURES OF PRACTICE	
(b) SOCIAL FEATURES	(c) MATERIAL-ECONOMIC FEATURES
Medium: power, social relationship Generic social practice: social organisation/connection	Medium: work Generic social practice: production
Practice involves and expresses values (it is value-laden) like the value of care (Noddings), social norms (it is guided by moral and ethical concerns) and virtues (MacIntyre; Taylor; Toulmin)	Practice involves purposive action and interaction in and on the world (with others and objects) (behaviourists, systems theorists) to address identified needs or problems in pursuit of characteristic goals and ends (Althusser)
Practice is always socially (and politically) formed and structured (and contested , Gramsci) – it realises and is realised in social (and political) interactions and relationships (incl. characteristic practitioner-client role relationships) (cf. Bourdieu's social field and social capital ; Bernstein; activity theory: e.g., Engeström, Leontjev, Vygotsky).	Practice involves the use of learned skills and techniques (that have themselves developed and evolved over time) (cf. behaviourists) in structured systems of relationships between people, and people and things (cf. systems theory, activity theory) which may include relations of economic exchange (cf. Bourdieu's economic capital)
Practice realises and is realised in characteristic solidarities (Habermas) and forms of social integration of people (practitioners, clients, others) in relation to one another (e.g., in care via nursing, in education via teaching, in sustenance of people and land via farming) (Giddens; Schatzki)	Practice involves action on the material world in the material here-and-now (particular times, places, objects, physical conditions) in the form of situated work or labour (Althusser; activity theory; behaviourists). It involves access to and the use and transfer (including redistribution) of resources .
Practice is always historically formed and structured – the product of local (in this situation, among these people) and more global history (Foucault; Giddens; MacIntyre; Schatzki). Practices are reproduced and transformed over time.	Practice occurs in/over time (Giddens), through processes (transformation of raw materials into end products via labour; Althusser), against a technical background of education, training and development
Practices are frequently preserved, maintained, developed and regulated in institutions and organisations , and the cooperative work of professions (MacIntyre; sociology of professions).	Practices frequently involve systemically-structured material interactions (e.g., role related functions) and often economic exchanges and transactions (e.g., payment for services) (activity theory; systems theory)
Practice always invites opening communicative space (and the creation of public discourse in public spheres) in which practitioners, and practitioners and clients and others, mutually explore issues and themes of common concern or interest (Habermas; Kemmis; Kemmis & McTaggart). Practices are always socially reproduced and socially transformed over time and place.	Practice is materially or strategically reflexive , not only in the sense that it makes transformations of the world (e.g., raw materials to end products), but also that the operations and interactions involved can themselves be materially reproduced and transformed over time and place (redesigned, re-engineered, improved) (activity theory; Habermas; Toulmin)
Practice invites critical reasoning in which participants collaboratively explore the nature and consequences their actions against the criteria of comprehensibility, truth (accuracy), truthfulness (sincerity) and moral appropriateness – guided by an emancipatory knowledge-constitutive interest in identifying and overcoming incomprehensibility, irrationality, deception (incl. false consciousness, self-deception) and injustice (incl. suffering, domination and oppression) (Benhabib; Carr & Kemmis; Habermas; Young)	Practice invites technical reasoning about the efficient use of means for given ends in particular contexts, and functional reasoning about organisational capacities to achieve goals – guided by a technical knowledge-constitutive interest in achieving particular ends using appropriate means (Carr & Kemmis; Habermas)

Figure 3: Individual and extra-individual features of practice (continued)

To a greater or lesser degree, ‘clients’ of different practices – patients or students for example – are knowledgeable about the relevant practices and know something about how they are to participate in them. Even an acute hospital patient meeting, say, an occupational therapist for the first time knows something about how to interact with this person – for example, that they are to get some kind of help through some kind of ‘therapy’, that the conversation between them will probably be conducted in a ‘professional’ manner, and that this is a service somehow linked to an institution (like a hospital) and a profession with relevant professional bodies and a distinctive specialist discourse (sometimes perceived as jargon). The acute patient meeting the occupational therapist for the first time thus begins learning how the particular ‘game’ of occupational therapy is played, in terms of the languages and discourses appropriate to it, the kind of activities and work processes involved, and the social relations and organizational and institutional goals, roles and rules that apply to their interactions.

I want to suggest that one might explore the client’s perspective on practice using the table of key features of practice presented in Figure 3. Indeed, I would like to suggest that ‘learning the game’ of the practice involves the client (patient, student) in aligning their perspective on the practice with the perspective implied in the words and actions and social relationship offered by the practitioner. Sometimes practitioners must re-align their presuppositions about the conduct of their practice to connect with those of their clients, and almost assuredly clients will need to re-align their presuppositions to connect with those of the practitioner.

Without the detail of Figure 3, Figure 4 below is intended to portray the juxtaposition of practitioners’ and clients’ perspectives, though inadequately demonstrating that both have some ideas and experience related to all or most of the cells in the matrix.

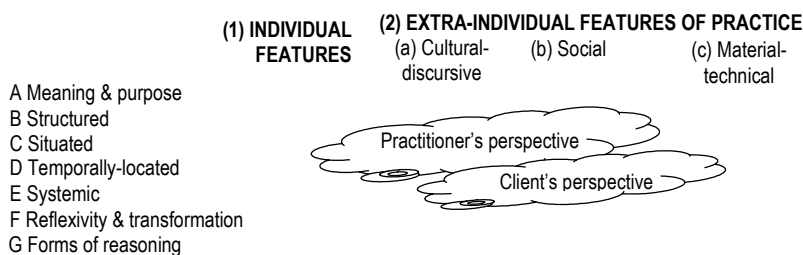


Figure 4: Clients’ and practitioners’ perspectives on practice in relation to the key features of practice

Of course neither practitioners nor clients exist in a social vacuum. On the one side, from the perspective of a professional practice, we might

readily point to the community of practice of the practitioner – the professional bodies and institutions, frequently including universities, carrying the knowledge and traditions of the practice of that profession, and perhaps responsible for accreditation and regulation of members of profession. On the other side, from the perspective of the client, we may also point to those social groups, including family, community and other kinds of affiliations and connections that furnish a background of meanings, purposes, values and the rest brought by the client to the practice situation. And it should be noted that the practitioner also has a background of family, community and other connections that she or he brings to the situation. These backgrounds are roughly portrayed in Figure 5.

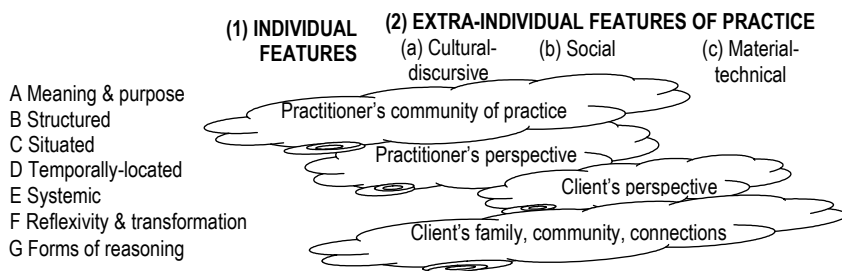


Figure 5: The widening social context of clients' and practitioners' perspectives on practice

As suggested in relation to practitioners' and clients' perspectives, the presuppositions and perspectives of communities of practice and the social groups to which clients belong may also be considered against the framework of key features of practice listed in Figures 3 and 5. Here, this is simply at the level of a thought-experiment. Perhaps the example of successful professional practice you considered earlier allows you to speculate about the relationships between practitioners' and clients' perspectives in that case (cf. Figure 4); the task becomes far more demanding in relation to the variety of perspectives depicted in Figure 5.

In my view, pursuing an analysis of the kind suggested by Figure 5 takes us, reflexively, back into the key features of practice presented in Figure 3. It begins to show, at greater depth, what the columns referring to the social and cultural features of practice refer to, and what the rows referring to forms of reasoning and reflexivity refer to. Perhaps it is to suggest something about the 'forms of life' practices represent, as a Wittgensteinian analysis of practice might begin to show (cf. Wittgenstein, 1974). Some steps towards such analyses have been taken in some recent writing on practice (for example, Schatzki, 1996, 2002; Shotter, 1996, 1999, 2000; Katz and Shotter, 1996).

Applied to the case of mathematics education, we might think of the relationships depicted in Figure 5 in terms of the perspectives of a mathematics teacher, her or his students, any community or communities of practice with which the teacher is involved, and the families, communities and other connections of the students. Clearly, the social networks brought into contact at the point of learning and teaching stretch far beyond the teacher and students in physical and social space, in time, and in terms of discursive resources and relationships. As Shotter suggests, in the *poetics* of conversations like those between students and teachers, *worlds* of meaning connect or collide, occasionally re-orienting both students and teachers as they glimpse aspects of each others' realities through the windows of their words in the here and now, sometimes yielding surprising insights into how each construes their apparently-shared world. Of course, this refers in one way to the "aha!" experience that teachers revel in whenever they see it, and to the idea of "the teachable moment" that teachers aim to construct or respond to when they find it. But it also refers to the "aha!" of the teacher who makes sense of the nature of a student's misunderstanding, or is surprised by facts about a student's family life or background that explain why there have been difficulties 'connecting' with John or Jane.

What I hope to do by juxtaposing the practitioner's and client's perspectives on practice with the framework of features of practice sketched in Figure 3, however, is to say more than that the worlds of the mathematics teacher and student are *different* – I hope also to suggest some of the *ways* they differ.

I invite you to think about a particular case of practice you know well, or a particular case of research on practice, using the framework provided in Figure 3. I hope that using the table will illuminate the richness of the space of practice. I think the exercise will also show, in practice, how practice richly understood is illimitable.

3. RECOGNISING AND RESPECTING DIVERSITY IN UNDERSTANDINGS OF PRACTICE

As Theodore Schatzki (2002) eloquently argues, practices *prefigure* individual actions. I agree – practices have shapes that precede particular actors and actions, and that envelop them (like gloves, perhaps) as they perform a practice, giving what they do meaning and significance in the *cultural-discursive* dimension; solidarity, legitimacy and belongingness in relation to others in the *social* dimension; and practical efficacy and various kinds of satisfaction in the *material-economic* dimension. Human coexistence – as Schatzki (1996, 1997, 2001, 2002) describes the social – is

ordered and prefigured by the shapes of practices that, as modes of performance, ‘speak’ to us as actors, organizing our thoughts and actions, and our relationships with the others who are involved in and affected by our actions. In Schatzki’s view, the practices *themselves* carry these meanings, significances and connections, and the varied and locally-adapted performance of practices acts as a kind of living social tissue that connects us to one another.

In the sections that follow, I will explore some of the key individual and extra-individual features of practices, to show some of the dimensions in which they envelop individual actors or practitioners. The sections refer to the rows in Figure 3, and the brief comments on each are intended to show how the individual ‘side’ or aspect of practice is set in a context of extra-individual conditions that shape or envelop it.

3.1 Intention and meaning

One of the things that makes some behavior or action a practice is that it is guided by *intentions*. Looking at practices entirely from the ‘outside’, as behavior, may make the practice uninterpretable or even incomprehensible. What seem to be the same behaviors may be and mean very different things (for example, typing a letter to a lover versus typing a chapter on practice). And practices are ‘bigger than’ actions, though both share the characteristic of being guided by intentions. Michael Oakeshott (1962), Charles Taylor (1985) and Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) are among the philosophers who have written about the distinction between behavior and intentional action; few theorists of practice do without the notion of intentions altogether, though some, like Barry Hindess (1977), have also pointed out the fallacy of Max Weber’s (1946) rationalist conception of action (assuming that action is ‘oriented in its course’ by meaning) that people’s actions are and mean what they intend them to be and mean.

Different participants in a professional practice may have different *intentions* from one another (to heal or be healed, in the case of a medical practice, for example). In understanding the situation in which they find themselves, the different people involved draw on different resources of *meaning* – different *cultural and discursive* resources (in the case of a patient, for instance, a language about pain or suffering, grounded in personal experience and experience of the suffering of others; and, in the case of a doctor, different kinds of medical and therapeutic discourses). These people encounter each other not just as persons, but also as the bearers of roles (the roles of patient and doctor), to which different values and norms are attached, giving their interaction different *social* meanings and significances for each. One is anxious to be cared for and cured; the other

aims to give care or a effect a cure. The actions of each fit into different parts of a *material-economic* world of goals, functions and actions (those of a health provider, for instance), and a world of economic relations (the one may pay for the other's services, the other may be paid to provide the service, but perhaps not be paid directly by the client or patient).

These cultural-discursive, social and material-economic frameworks existed prior to the arrival of these particular people in *this* encounter, in *this* setting. To change what is meant and intended by *this* social practice in *this* setting may thus require changing not just what the actors themselves think or do, or how they relate, it may also require changes in the language and discourse they use (for example, new developments in the theory of how burns should be treated); changes in the relationships between people around the particular practice (for example, changing the ways different people in different roles relate to each other in the burns unit of a hospital, or the values and norms of care and respect that guide their work); and changes in the material-economic arrangements of what people do, with what resources, in return for what rewards (for example, new ways of treating burns, new technologies like new dressings for burns, or new pay scales for specialist staff working in burns units).

As already intimated, different theorists of practice draw attention to different aspects of practice relating to meaning and intention. Oakeshott, Taylor and Giddens have already been mentioned in relation to practice as seen from the side of the individual actor. Many others, like Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and especially Foucault (1970, 1972, 1977, 1979, 1985, 1990a, 1990b, 2001) refer to the *cultural-discursive* framing of actors' meanings and intentions. Carr and Kemmis (1986) also regard professional practice as implying a theory or theories that make it a practice of that kind – in the sense that to be an educational practice, or a medical practice, or a practice of doing history, the relevant practitioners rely on discourses framed in traditions that give the practice its character, meaning and significance.

Many theorists refer, too, to the *social* framing of intentions and meanings that form and inform practice – via *values* and *norms*, for example, in the case of theorists like MacIntyre (1982), Charles Taylor (1991), Stephen Toulmin (1972) and Giddens (1979, 1984). MacIntyre also insists on the importance of *virtues* in understanding practices of any significant kind – virtues that are partly definitive of the practice.

And, in the Marxian tradition, many theorists of practice have drawn particular attention to the *material* and *economic* framing of practice, including, for example, Louis Althusser (1971). Following Marx himself, such theorists see the intentions and meanings of participants in social life as culturally, socially and politically shaped by material conditions and the

goals and *ends* of economic relationships – indeed, they see even participants' perceived *needs* and *problems* as frequently pre-structured by economic relations.

3.2 Structure

Although there have been spirited debates about 'structure', 'structuralism' and 'post-structuralism', it is doubtful whether it is possible to understand a practice without having some sense of its structure – both for the individual participant in the practice and in terms of the cultural-discursive, social and material-economic dimensions of practices – each differentially emphasized in different kinds of theorizing about practice, with the relative significance of each dimension being contested between theories of practice. Without resolving the question of what structure is, or in what structure is constituted, let us merely assert for the time being that practices have 'shapes'.

Practices have distinctive 'shapes', and sometimes, as the example of the doctor and patient shows, these shapes may be different for different participants (for example, they may be complementary or reciprocal). The shape of a general practitioner's day may involve getting to work from home, seeing many patients with different complaints in a surgery and office, working with each patient differently (drawing on different kinds of knowledge; employing different interpretive and therapeutic techniques; using relevant technologies; referring patients to other specialists for tests or treatments), working with related professionals, managing support staff, overseeing finances, and going home. The patient also comes from home to see the doctor in the surgery, but might only be in the surgery for fifteen minutes, having waited in a waiting room for half an hour. After the consultation, the patient might go to a pharmacy, to be dealt with by different people (the person at the counter, the pharmacist in the back room who prepares the prescription), and then go on to her or his own place of work to be involved in a completely different practice involving still different discourses, social relationships and material-economic relationships and exchanges.

From the point of view of a professional practitioner, his or her practice draws on a particular history of personal experience; it involves a particular view of what an appropriate professional identity is, and a particular way of being a 'subject' (a knowing and knowledgeable person); a particular kind of agency about how he or she can act on the world, and with what likely effect (and what likely resistances); and it involves the exercise of learned skills and capacities (some learned, perhaps, over several years of formal professional preparation).

The shape of the practitioner's practice is not only 'given' by the people actually performing the practice, however, it is pre-structured and prefigured in *discourses* (for example, how knowledge of the practice is represented in texts and curricula), in *social relationships* (for example, through learning to be a doctor from teachers of medicine, and through experiencing the social relationships of medical work – with nurses, patients, relationships with professional accrediting bodies), and in *material-economic* arrangements (like buying and using equipment, being paid for services, paying taxes for the business from which the practice is offered). These more general structures impress themselves upon the particular structure of this particular practitioner's identity and capacities, and the way she or he performs the practice on this occasion, with this client. The same may also be true for the client of the practice, even if they encounter the practice only occasionally (for example, only occasionally being in the role of patient and seeing a doctor). The structures that prefigure the shape of the doctor's practice are indirectly impressed into the experience of the patient via the doctor's performance of the practice and the patient's particular personal reactions to it, expressed in the patient's performance of the role of patient. But the patient's experience as a patient is also pre-structured – by past encounters with doctors or illness (or this particular doctor and illness), and by the way illness and doctors and such things as following through with treatment regimes are regarded by this patient, and her or his family and friends. Such background structures shape the practice of being a patient for this person – and project themselves into the way *this* patient will be perceived by and then acted with or on by *this* doctor in *this* case of *this* illness.

A variety of theorists of practice have chafed at apparently deterministic implications implied by the notion of 'structure' – for example Foucault (famously in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1972). Other thinkers like Bakhtin (1984), Derrida (1974, 1978) and Lyotard (1984) are interested in shapes within *language* and *discourses*, and their consequences for social ordering in a variety of dimensions, in contrast to Marx and various post-Marxians (like Antonio Gramsci, 1977, and especially Louis Althusser, 1971) for whom *social-political* and *material-economic* structures are of paramount importance, even in the context of the reproduction of the material-economic base and material-economic conditions through the cultural 'superstructure'¹. For cultural theorists of practice, it seems to me

¹ Following Marx, for the first half of the twentieth century at least, many questions about the relationship between culture and social and economic structures was conceived in Marxian terms, as the problem of the relationship between the economic base and the cultural superstructure – a problem addressed through the concept of *ideology* (for example, in Gramsci and Althusser, already cited, and Giddens, 1979, 1984). Reviewing a range of usages of the term, Jacques Larrain (1979) concluded that ideology is to be found in and as *practice*. Post-structuralists like Derrida and (perhaps) Foucault took the debate about the

that structure reasserts itself in the forms of discourses, in the language and representations people use and, beyond that, in what Shotter (1996), following Wittgenstein and Bakhtin, calls the *poetics* of practice.

Across the cultural-discursive, social and material-economic dimensions of practice, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1990, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) theory of practice finds the structure of practices in cultural, symbolic, social and economic *fields*, each with associated '*capitals*' (the others by analogy with economic capital). The capitals are what can be accumulated through participating in the practice when practitioners are in the fields in which a practice takes place, and capitals and fields impress themselves into the *dispositions* of actors to form a '*habitus*' or learned capacity to participate appropriately in this or that practice as a 'player' (as a journalist, an academic or a football player, for example). Bourdieu's careful analyses of practices aim to show how practices are characteristically structured in terms of *habitus*, fields and capitals in play.

3.3 Situatedness

In terms of the *situatedness* of practice, clearly different participants in a practice enact it in different ways, using their bodies in different ways. Clearly, not only the physiotherapist or the baseball player depend on using their bodies with particular and elite skill – so do practitioners of almost all practices – including the person sitting at the computer screen. This embodiment has profound effects on practices and their performance – indeed, the physical performance of a practice powerfully shapes the identity of the practitioner. Especially from the perspective of the identity and subjectivity of the practitioner, the performance of a practice has much more significance than might be suggested by what the practitioner has learned in order to perform the practice – competences and capacities whose significance is that they are elements that come into play in the performance, that are brought into play as needed, with judgment and discretion as part of the 'orchestration' of the professional practitioner's practice with *this* client, in *this* setting, under *these* particular circumstances. Seyla Benhabib (1992) speaks of 'situating the self' not just spatially or temporally but also in relation to values and norms which imply universals (like justice and truth). And the physicality of the performance of the practice also calls forth

discursive formation of society out of the Marxian frame of base and superstructure, discovering a variety of kinds of discursive ordering beyond the 'traditional' concerns of Marxian theory. It is against the backdrop of those concerns that they are to be considered *post-structuralist*. One might wonder, however, whether or not some concept of ideology is reasserting itself in contemporary post-Marxian theory via the extended concepts of practice that emerged in the closing decades of the century.

characteristic emotions (perhaps elation or fatigue in the case of the baseball player), although some personally-relevant emotions are characteristically suppressed in the performance of a professional practice (for example, the doctor's anxiety about causing pain, or the teacher's anger). Thus some professions, like teaching, are described as involving 'emotional work' (see for example, Hargreaves and Earl, 2001).

On the side of the extra-individual features of practice, practices are situated in the sense that they are clearly located in space and time (about which more shortly). The practitioner and others involved in the practice operate in a *cultural* and *discursive* context, under particular cultural and discursive conditions which may conform to general or even universal theories, rules or principles, but they are enacted and applied under immediate local cultural and discursive conditions (with these particular people, in their particular community, and their particular backgrounds and experiences). Similarly, the practice is enacted in local *social* conditions, involving specific kinds of social connections and relationships, with these particular people, here, building or changing local and particular solidarities with particular others and building different kinds of relationships with different groups. (Thus, as she proves her worth to a community, the community development practitioner helping women establish micro-economic enterprises may find herself becoming a key person in the village, at the nexus of particular social connections and arrangements.) And similarly, the practice occurs in a local *material* and *economic* context or environment, involving interactions and exchanges with particular aspects of the physical and natural world of objects, and with particular others encountered as subjects worthy of respect (as well as being, in some cases, being the 'objects' worked on in the practice).

Location matters. Rural practice may differ from urban; practice with Indigenous people may differ from practice with non-Indigenous people; practice in *this* setting may differ depending whether the others involved are men or women; practice in communally-oriented Asia may be different from practice in the individualist West. In practice, practice is inevitably *situated*.

The situatedness of practice is recognized in different ways in different theories of practice. On the side of the individual participating in the practice, Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* has already been mentioned. Giddens's (1984) notion of *agency* is similarly situated, mutually-constituted with social structure in his dialectical pairing of agency and structure. There is also a wide range of theorists who emphasize the situatedness of identity and subjectivity in terms of the *standpoints* of different participants in different kinds of groups.

On the side of the extra-individual, Foucault and others emphasize the situatedness of practices in *cultural-discursive* orders (for example, through the concepts of “disciplines” and “regimes of truth” in Foucault, 1979). From a very different perspective, Habermas (1984, 1987a) sees persons and practices as located in *lifeworlds* which give them the cultural-discursive resources for understanding themselves and the world, as well as the social resources (of norms and legitimacy, belonging and connectedness) that find expression in the sense of identity, the personality and the learned capacities of each participant. He distinguishes these lifeworlds, with their characteristic processes of cultural reproduction and transformation, social reproduction and transformation, and the formation and transformation of individual identities and capabilities, from the social *systems* in which participants characteristically play particular roles according to relevant rules, performing particular functions in pursuit of system goals. But both lifeworlds, in which people relate in a person-to-person sense, and systems, in which they relate in an organizational sense, situate practices and participants and form multiple extra-individual matrices within which their lives and work are conducted.

Other theorists of practice emphasize situatedness in *social* terms, in terms of the social formation of practices and practitioners. For example, Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) draw attention to the role played by *communities of practice* in the formation of practices and practitioners.

Still other theorists of practice emphasize situatedness in terms of the *materiality* of the interactions that form practices – like activity theorists Vygotsky (1978, 1986), Leontjev (1974, 1981), Engeström (1987, 2000) and, arguably, action science advocates Argyris (1990), Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) and Argyris, Putnam and McLain Smith (1985). Similarly, many Marxian theorists focus on situatedness in terms of the materiality of practices, especially in relation to *economic* interactions and their social and cultural effects.

From a social geographer’s perspective, David Harvey (1996) draws cultural-discursive, social and material-economic threads together in his exploration of the *positionality* of people, groups and practices. From a philosophical perspective, Theodore Schatzki (1996, 2001, 2002) also emphasizes the situatedness of practices through his concept of the *social* (“human coexistence”) and the “hanging together” of people and practices in social space (elaborated in conceptual detail in Schatzki, 2002).

3.4 Temporally-located

Practice is also located in time. The performance of a practice occurs through or over time: it has duration. Social practices, professional practice included, takes place at particular times, at particular moments in the lives of the people involved, against the wider background of the narratives of their lives (cf. MacIntyre's 1982 notion of "the narrative unity of a human life"). Moreover, the conduct of the practice may occupy a special place in the life and identity of the practitioner, especially a professional practitioner. For such reasons, Habermas (for example, 1984, 1987a) refers to the "*dramaturgical*" character of practices (that is, the quality of being like a dramatic performance, especially one performed by its author).

On the side of the extra-individual, in the *cultural-discursive* dimension, practice also occurs in the temporal context of evolving traditions of thought in particular communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). A stream in the philosophy and sociology of science continues to explore the nature of scientific traditions, brought into sharp relief by the publication of Thomas Kuhn's (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and various commentators and critics for example, in Lakatos and Musgrave, eds., 1970; Feyerabend, 1970; and Toulmin, 1972) of Kuhn's views about evolutionary and revolutionary developments in science. MacIntyre (1982, 1988, 1990), too, has emphasized the role of tradition in shaping practices, evident in continuities and developments, over longer historical periods. A significant contribution to understanding traditions in relation to practices, especially the practice of interpretation in history and art, is Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1975) notion of "effective-historical consciousness" (the historian's consciousness of the historicity of her or his own interpretive categories as well as of the historicity of the tradition being interpreted) – a notion that generalizes to the "double hermeneutic" of interpretation of the subject as well as the object, crucial to the notion of understanding a practice.

In the *social* dimension, practices are historically-formed and structured, involves different connections and relationships among particular people (who are also at particular moments in their lives), building or undermining particular kinds of solidarities among people, and contributing to or diminishing social integration among those involved and affected (for example, in communities of practice; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

In the *material-economic* dimension, practices are also located in time. The continuity and change in practices over time in relation to material-economic contexts and conditions has been a particular focus in reproduction theory – which has explored cultural-discursive and social reproduction and

transformation as well as the reproduction and transformation of the material conditions of different groups over time – especially in relation to education and social class, for example (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bernstein, 1977, 1996; Connell, *et al.*, 1982; Giroux, 1983; Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986; Willis, 1977).

As an example of the temporal location of the practice of education, for example, teachers and students have characteristically different perspectives on the unfolding drama of education offered and received, through all its episodes, and at the different stages in their lives and careers. It is composed on multiple timescales – the ‘period’, the unit of work, the term or semester, the year, the stage or level, and so on. The teacher teaches students with their own narrative understandings of the unity of their lives and prospective careers, and their own personal goals and ideas of the good for humankind. And the student experiences not *only* Mr Jones the mathematics teacher, but *also* Mr Jones the person, with his own character, background and view of life. Student and teacher also have very different views of how the present class, the present episode of practice can be viewed against the background of history. Is Mr Jones merely old-fashioned, or does he believe that his social constructivist view of mathematics education has roots reaching back as far as, and perhaps beyond John Dewey, and so he teaches in a way some regard as ‘progressive’ but that he regards as justified because it is necessary to draw on students’ experience to make explicit the relationship between the students’ knowledge and experiences and the topic now before them? Of course the students also bring a history to the class – a history of success and failures in schooling, of interests inflamed and extinguished, of expectations raised or lowered in a history of attainments in schooling and outside it. Some, of course, experience their greatest educational successes in educational episodes outside the school – in workplaces, social clubs, family life, and the adventures of adolescent peer group activities that raise the ire or eyebrows of adults. And each draws in different ways on the historically-given store of meanings in words, discourses and theories available to them, and each draws on these resources in different ways, for different purposes which may, in the end, converge in something like the practice of mathematics or ideas about the good life or the good society – but which may not converge, and will probably diverge as students go on to live their lives by other lights than the ones that guide their teachers.

3.5 Systemic

In terms of the *systemic* character of the relationships between participants in a setting like education, clearly teacher and students occupy different and reputedly reciprocal *roles*.

From the extra-individual perspective, these roles are *discursively* framed and interpreted in traditions and theories internal to the field and profession of education. But these are not the only ways teachers and students are discursively framed. Alongside educational theories, many people involved in or affected by the education of rising generations – parents, potential employers and administrators and legislators responsible for education systems, for example – have ideas and expectations about what education is meant to achieve that are very different from the ideas and expectations internal to education as a field. External to the practice of education, students and their families are construed in some discourses as clients receiving services, or as consumers exchanging money for educational services. These ways of framing learners and correspondingly framing teachers (for example, as service providers) have become increasingly prevalent in the discourses of educational policy in recent decades.

Such educational and extra-educational administrative and market discourses shape not only how education is understood, but also have an impact on the ways participants in education relate to one another in *social* space. Once upon a time, schools stood *in loco parentis* (in the relationship of parents) to their pupils, especially younger pupils. Nowadays, the roles are more ‘professionalized’ in the particular sense that the rights and responsibilities of schools, teachers and whole state school systems are differentiated from the rights and duties of parents, with the former increasingly regarded as providers of professional services, and therefore as subject to professional accreditation and regulation.

This transformation is marked by the rise of corresponding system structures in education, beyond the level of the particular classroom or school or state education system. As Habermas (especially 1984, 1987a, 1987b; see also Kemmis, 2000, 2001) shows in his theory of lifeworld and system, these administrative systems, like economic systems, become increasingly “autonomous” in the sense that they operate according to their own principles and procedures, with the individual people in the system being decreasingly treated as subjects in the philosophical sense – as persons worthy of respect in their own right – and increasingly being treated as objects to be regulated. This shift from a *lifeworld* perspective on the educational encounter – the perspective in which subjects encounter one another as *persons* – to a *system* perspective – in which persons encounter one another as *incumbents of roles* – is characteristic of modern administrative and administrative relations, Habermas argues, and has led to a further development: the colonization of lifeworlds by the imperatives of economic and administrative systems. This colonization occurs, in particular, through the operation of the “steering media” of money and administrative power which penetrate the lifeworld as stand-ins for

intersubjective understanding, mutual agreement and consensus about what to do. As a consequence of this colonization, intersubjective understanding, agreement and consensus become contractualized, on the one hand in terms of a fair trade between the buyer and seller of services, or on the other via state regulation and surveillance. But it remains true that education itself still requires the particular achievements that can only be attained via lifeworld processes – processes of cultural-discursive reproduction and transformation by which intersubjective agreement and understanding can be achieved between people; processes of social reproduction and transformation by which consensus, social integration and legitimacy can be achieved; and processes of socialization and identity-formation and transformation by which personal identities can be secured and validated in capabilities necessary for people to lead satisfactory lives.

In the *material-economic* dimension, teachers and students are also reciprocally enmeshed in material exchanges of work for grades, for example, as part of larger institutional-administrative systems of schooling, educational administration, teacher professional development and educational research and evaluation. Both students and teachers find themselves enmeshed in institutional processes of evaluation, assessment, accreditation and regulation as part of the social system they jointly inhabit, with characteristically different, sometimes cooperative and sometimes mutually-resistant perspectives on what it means to be enmeshed (or entrapped) together in these systems.

Different theorists of practice emphasize different elements of the spectrum of individual and extra-individual features of practice in relation to the systemic character of practice. For example, on the side of the individual, psychological role theory and organizational theory have offered one way into understanding the roles of people involved in practice. And theories like Habermas's theory of lifeworld and system explore the boundary-crises between lifeworlds and systems which leave their marks on persons obliged to interpret themselves in the different terms provided by the systems to which they must relate as well as in terms of the diverse lifeworlds they inhabit as persons coexisting with other persons in families, workplaces and a variety of social groups in civil society.

On the extra-individual side, the systemic character of practices has been explored in the *cultural-discursive* dimension by theorists such as Foucault (on regimes of truth, performativity); in the *social* dimension by researchers in the sociology of the professions, for example; and in the *material-economic* dimension by researchers in such fields as activity theory and systems theory including 'soft systems theory' (Checkland and Scholes, 1990; Flood and Jackson, 1991; Jackson, 1991).

3.6 Reflexivity and transformation

Practices are always reflexive – people involved in practices ‘observe themselves’ in the conduct of their practice and can modify their performance as they do so, or on future occasions. Professional practice, moreover, always invites historical self-consciousness of oneself as a practitioner in relation to other practitioners previously encountered (through experience or texts). In modifying her or his professional practice to a lesser or greater extent in the light of experience, practitioners (social workers, builders, farmers) not only reproduce and transform different elements of the form or ‘shape’ of their practice, they also reproduce and transform aspects of their identities as practitioners, sometimes becoming more specialized (and seeing themselves increasingly as specialists) in particular areas of practice as they do so.

Many theorists have explored reflexivity on the side of the individual in theorizing practice – including Bourdieu, Giddens, Gouldner (1976), Schatzki and Toulmin, to name just a few.

On the extra-individual ‘side’, the performance of a practice understood through particular *discourses*, particular interpretations of events, and particular communications with others in and around the field of practice also leads to the reproduction and transformation of the cultural-discursive contents and conditions that give the practice meaning and significance – potentially contributing to the evolution of the cultural-discursive dimension of the practice (for example, the ways these symptoms will now be understood, as indications of the possible presence of a newly-identified virus). Similarly, the *social* connections and relationships involved in particular instances of practice can contribute to reproduction and transformation of the social content and conditions of the practice, and the ways people involved relate to one another, potentially contributing to the evolution of the social dimension of the practice (for example, the ways doctors will relate to nurses in the future). And, likewise, the performance of the practice can contribute to the reproduction and transformation of the *material-economic* arrangements supporting the practice – potentially contributing to the evolution of the practice as materially- and economically-constituted (for example, the development of new pharmaceuticals to combat the newly-identified virus).

Theorists focusing on *cultural-discursive* features of reflexivity and transformation include Shotter and Lyotard, for example; some of those focusing on *social* features include Benhabib, Habermas and Young (1990); some focusing on *material-economic* features include the Marxians (Althusser, Gramsci), reproduction theorists (like Bourdieu and Passeron) and activity theorists (like Vygotsky, Leontjev and Engeström).

3.7 Forms of reasoning

Different theorists and theories of practice have different ways of understanding practice and contribute to different forms of reasoning about it. Since Aristotle (especially in his *Ethics*, 2003), distinctions have been drawn between forms of knowledge and reasoning that relate to action or practice in different ways – a set of distinctions employed by Habermas (1972) in his *Knowledge and Human Interests* to describe the different kinds of ‘knowledge-constitutive interests’ that impelled scientists to produce different kinds of knowledge to serve different kinds of purposes. (For a revised and updated view, see Habermas, 2003, especially Ch.7 “The relationship between theory and practice revisited”.) Using the example of teacher education, Figure 6 gives an overview of these different perspectives on how, for the individual, knowledge relates to action, and how, in the realm of public knowledge, theory relates to practice. These or similar distinctions were discussed in Carr and Kemmis (1986).

A similar table to Figure 6 could be produced for other professions and practices, to disentangle the forms of reasoning characteristically employed at particular moments in the practice of those professions (for example, the occupational therapist acting in a theoretical way to elucidate the concept of ‘therapy’; the social worker acting in a technical way in following state procedures for removal of a child the subject of domestic abuse; the historian acting in a practical way to inform debate about contemporary immigration policy; and the doctor acting in a critical-emancipatory way on a public health issue like the effects of herbicides and pesticides on a rural community).

Returning to the question of forms of reasoning about practice as outlined in Figure 3, however, on the side of the individual much reasoning about practice is based on taking the *practical* perspective, taking into account current circumstances and theories and traditions of thought relevant to a practical situation so the person will act wisely and prudently in the situation (*praxis*; see also Aristotle, 2003; Gauthier, 1963; Grundy, 1987; Schwab, 1969).

On the side of the extra-individual, however, different forms of reasoning may be brought into play. Some theorists (and some participants in a practice) explore the *cultural-discursive* dimension of practice – the discourses that shape it (for example, following Wittgenstein, Shotter, and Schatzki). A theorist like Shotter has a particular interest in *expressive-aesthetic* understandings of practice. In some ways, Gadamer (1975, 1977) takes a similar line, arguing that a positivistic-scientific view of ‘method’ cannot replace, and indeed distorts, proper understanding of practices which can only occur through interpretation.

	Theoretical perspective	Technical perspective	Practical perspective	Critical-emancipatory perspective
Telos (Aim)	The attainment of knowledge or truth	The production of something	Wise and prudent judgement; acting rightly in the world	Overcoming irrationality, injustice, suffering, felt dissatisfactions
Disposition	Episteme A disposition to seek the truth for its own sake	Techné A disposition to act in a true and reasoned way according to the rules of a craft	Phronesis A moral disposition to act wisely, truly and justly; goals and means are both always open to review	Critical A disposition towards emancipation from irrationality, injustice, suffering, felt dissatisfactions
Example in teacher education	Studying philosophy of education with the aim of developing a personal theory of education	Learning knowledge (like theories of learning, individual differences, motivation) and skills to teach a lesson, manage a class, assess learning	Learning about the nature, traditions and purposes of education as a moral activity intrinsically involved with the formation of good persons and the good for humankind	Community projects aimed at developing understanding of historical, discursive, social and material-economic circumstances which constrain capacities for self-expression, self-development and self-determination
Action	Theoria Contemplation, involving theoretical reasoning about the nature of things	Poietike 'Making' action, involving means-ends or instrumental reasoning to achieve a known objective or outcome	Praxis 'Doing' action, morally-informed action oriented by tradition, involving practical reasoning about what it is wise, right and proper to do in a given situation	Emancipatory Collective reflection and action aimed at historical self-understanding and collective consensus about what to do to overcome constraints on rationality, justice, well-being
Example in teacher education	Development of logical thinking using and building on the theoretical resources of educational traditions	Development of lesson preparation skills, skills to teach state curriculum, skills to assess students according to policy or rules	Development of reflexive capacity to adapt immediate goals and means to changing circumstances in a class or school in light of educational values about the good for students and the good for humankind	Community action and education projects (and action research projects) taking emancipatory action on educational and social issues confronted by a community

Figure 6: Different perspectives on the relationship between knowledge and action, theory and practice

Other theorists, linking the cultural-discursive and *social* dimensions, explore practice through *critical reasoning* (for example, Habermas, 1972, 1974; Benhabib; Carr and Kemmis). And still other theorists and practitioners approach practice in terms of its *material-economic* dimension, in terms of *technical reasoning* – that is, with a primary interest in controlling practice as a means to produce particular ends or effects. This technical understanding of practice dominates some literatures of practice,

especially in the Anglo-American literature, where practice is understood almost entirely in instrumental or functional terms – a position criticized by many in the literature (for example, Habermas, 1984, 1987b, in his *Theory of Communicative Action*). I will conclude with a few remarks about the inadequacy of the technical view of practice when it become so dominant as to obscure the other proper ways in which practice must also be understood and enacted.

4. CONCLUSION

The technicist view of practice has become prevalent in public administration in recent decades. This view is particularly apparent in the recent ‘evidence-based practice’ movement, which, in my view, demeans practice by its resolute focus on measurable outcomes or outputs at the expense of many of the other features of practices outlined in my ‘practice table’. In its zeal for measuring practice, the evidence-based view makes practice almost unrecognizable from the perspective of professional practitioners whose intentions, values and commitments are crucial in the conduct of their work. It also makes practice almost unrecognizable from the perspective of anyone who understands that practice is constructed in cultural-discursive, social and material-economic dimensions, through history and the living traditions of communities of practice – anyone, that is, who understands that practices have historical and social consequences, meaning and significance for communities and societies which are beyond the particular measurable effects (and effectiveness) of particular acts of particular practitioners at particular times. In particular, and based on a long tradition of splitting facts and values in positivistic science and pseudo-science, the technicist view threatens to empty practice of its *moral* dimension. This is a price professional practitioners should not be prepared to pay for the ‘certainties’ allegedly given by the particularly restricted range of ‘evidence’ that ‘counts’ in the evidence-based approach to practice. Practice is just not that simple.

Using the framework presented in my ‘practice table’ may yield a richer understanding of the ends and goods of education can give a more profound reading of practice than can be gained by assessing the ‘quality’ of practices against technical, instrumental performance measures. We may hope such measures point towards the unmeasurable aspects of quality, but they do not adequately capture the quality of practice in the more encompassing sense outlined in Figure 3 – *nor can they be expected to do so*. For example, making some assessment of the outcomes of learning and the conduct of teaching is technically-necessary for a teacher to have an idea of whether she

is achieving her aims as a teacher, but it is not sufficient. The quality of learning and teaching in the richer sense of participation in the practice of *education* (aimed at the development and continuing self-development of individuals and the development and continuing self-development of societies in which they live) is not measurable by tests or assessments, no matter how allegedly valid or reliable. In addition to and instead of these measures, educators do, however, make assessments, evaluations, interpretations and judgments of their work as *education* – as do professional practitioners in every other field, in interpreting and judging the quality of their practice and the quality of their lives as practitioners of that practice. In my view, they do so not so much by measuring as by *reading* practice.

One can make a reading of an act, an episode, or a life of professional practice, against a framework of features of practice like the one I have offered here, and make one's own judgment – which may disagree with the judgments of others – of the quality of the practice on this or that occasion or over that whole life. Such a reading is not a measure or an assessment, it is an elucidation of the way in which the act or episode or life holds up as a consistent, developing effort to realize the distinctive ends and goods of the practice (MacIntyre, 1982) in one's own life, in the lives of others with whom one works, and in a society. And it is *one's own* elucidation of the 'facts' of the act or episode or life with which one is presented – a judgment that is informed, to a greater or lesser degree, by relevant theory and traditions, and by a community of practice whose interest is in the maintenance and continuing development of the tradition. As Gadamer's notion of "effective-historical consciousness" (understanding the historicity of the interpreter as well as the thing being interpreted) reminds us, the judgment tells as much about the judge as about what is judged.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that different theorists of practice, and different traditions in the study of practice, have very different views about what the key features of practice are. The 'practice table' presented in Figure 3 is one 'map' of a conversation-space between some of these different theories and traditions.

My central purpose in characterizing the individual and extra-individual features in a 'map' like Figure 3 is to suggest how complex and manifold 'practice' is, and to emphasize that changing a practice requires not only changing the knowledge and actions of individual practitioners but also changing extra-individual features and elements of situations that are necessarily implicated in practices. In short, changing practice requires changing more than people – it requires changing (at least) the cultural and discursive fields in which practices are understood locally and more generally, the social fields in which practices connect people with one another locally and more generally, and the material-economic fields in

which they act in and on the material world – in particular in relation to the acts of production and consumption that locate them in local and wider economies.

If my ‘practice table’, Figure 3, does provide a provisional framework for understanding and researching practice, it shows how rich and complex practice is, stretching out from the here-and-now of particular episodes of behavior and action in time and physical, material, cultural, semantic and social space. It suggests what *lies behind* or *may* lie behind particular acts, in the minds of those participating in them. It suggests what cannot be ‘seen’ by research that limits its purview just to the actions of a practitioner as seen by an observer, or to exploring the perspectives of particular participants. It suggests a kind of *illimitability* of practice, for example in the dimension of history and tradition, even though it points towards a genealogy of connections between these people and acts and others long gone and far distant. And this illimitability of practice itself makes a mockery of most ‘measures’ of practice that observe only particular behaviors or acts without attention to the wider conditions which form and inform them.

On the other hand, using Figure 3 as a framework for critique of practice makes it possible to explore at least the nearby regions of the illimitable space occupied by a practice in particular cases. This is a task I have begun to pursue using the ‘practice table’ as a guide or ‘table of invention’ – as a schedule or set of prompts to guide interviews, observations and document analysis – in a new program of research to explore the manifold character and richness of practice via case studies of particular initiatives in teacher education and education for sustainability.

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