

Chapter 2

Praxis, Practice and Practice Architectures

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline a view of praxis and practice that allows us to re-imagine the work of teaching, learning and leading. It does so, first, by reconnecting with a lifeworld—human and humanistic—perspective on practice as a human and social activity with indissoluble moral, political and historical dimensions. Practice always forms and transforms the one who practices, along with those who are also involved in and affected by the practice. Moreover, practice transforms the world in which the practice is carried out; by doing so, practice makes history. This perspective is approached through the concept of *praxis*.

After a brief discussion of *praxis*, the chapter elaborates an ‘outsider’ perspective on practice that takes account of the dimensions of *intersubjective space* discussed in Chap. 1. It does this by outlining a theory of practice and practice architectures.

Finally, the chapter shows how the theory of practice architectures offers a way of theorising Education. By doing so, it reconnects 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.

Praxis and Education: Educational Praxis

There is a tendency in our times to imagine that processes like Education and schooling are technical processes concerned with the production of things—the production of people of a certain kind, for example, or the production of ‘learning outcomes’. On this technical view, some understand teachers as technicians who are responsible for producing such learning outcomes in the knowledge, skills and values of the students they teach—as if it were the teachers alone, working with the pliant or resistant ‘raw materials’ that are the students themselves, and with the tools and resources available, who ‘produce’ the outcomes. Such a view overlooks the agency of the students; at every age (though with less responsibility when they are very young), they too are responsible for what they learn or do not learn—for their

own self-formation. Schwab (1969), Gadamer (1975, 1983), Grundy (1987), Dunne (1993) and Kemmis and Smith (2008b) have written extensively on the limits of this technical view. These authors draw attention to another kind of action: practical action taken in response to the particular circumstances surrounding “uncertain practical questions” (Reid 1978, p 42), that is, questions that are answered only by *doing* something (even if that means *not* doing anything other than what one is already doing; Gauthier 1963). It turns out that we confront uncertain practical questions more or less constantly, in the form “what should I do now/next?” The kind of action we take in these circumstances is not a kind of rule-following, or producing an outcome of a kind that is known in advance (both characteristic of technical action) but rather action whose consequences are more or less indeterminate, but that can only be evaluated only in the light of their consequences—in terms of how things actually turn out. This kind of action is ‘praxis’.

There are two related views on what ‘praxis’ is: first, a view that reaches back to Aristotle, according to which praxis might be understood as “action that is *morally-committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field*” (Kemmis and Smith, 2008a, p 4), that is, action that aims for the good of those involved and for the good for humankind. A second view of praxis, following the usage of Hegel and Marx, understands praxis as ‘history-making action,’ that is, as action with moral, social and political consequences—good or bad—for those involved in and affected by it. In *The German Ideology* (1845/1970) Marx and Engels articulated their historical materialism, arguing that social formations, ideas, theories and consciousness emerge from human and collective social praxis, and that social action (praxis) makes history. In much Anglophone usage today, the term ‘praxis’ is used in the Aristotelian sense; in much of Europe, by contrast, ‘praxis’ is used in the post-Hegelian, post-Marxian sense. ‘Educational praxis,’ therefore, may be understood in two ways: first, as *educational* action that is morally committed and informed by traditions in a field (‘right conduct’), and second, as ‘history-making *educational* action’.

The term ‘education’ also needs clarification, especially in a European context. In Chap. 1, we noted the distinction between ‘education’ and ‘schooling’. We believe much Anglophone usage of the term ‘education’ is much corrupted today because, in Anglophone usage, we too often use the term ‘education’ when we really mean ‘schooling’ (the activities that routinely go on in different kinds of ‘educational’ institutions that *may or may not* be educational). Common usage obscures and threatens to erase the important distinction between education and schooling, with the consequence that the philosophical and pedagogical origins and competing intellectual traditions of education as a discipline, field and profession begin to become invisible. Here is our definition of education:

In our view, *education, properly speaking, is the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one another and the world, that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind.*

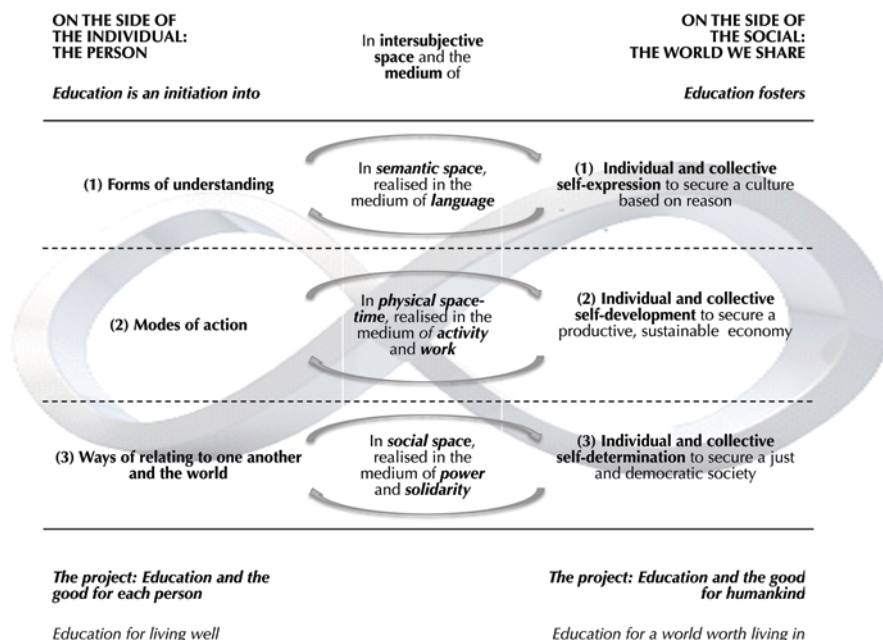


Fig. 2.1 A theory of education

This definition of education, schematically presented in Fig. 2.1, shows the double purpose of education: to prepare people to live well in a world worth living in. On the side of the individual, it concerns the formation of persons; on the side of the social, it concerns the formation of communities and societies. It thus takes a view about how people should live in the world, and about the kind of world they should aim to establish.

To achieve this double purpose of the good life for each person and the good life for humankind, education must be conducted in ways that model and foster the good life for humankind—what it means to live well in a world worth living in. Yet ‘what the good life for humankind *is*’ is permanently contested. In *After Virtue* (1983, p 204), Alasdair MacIntyre concluded that

... the good life for man [*sic*] is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.

This is the journey on which everyone concerned with the discipline, the field and the profession of education is embarked: the task of unravelling, for some particular time and place, what the good life for humankind consists of. Inevitably, however, given our different standpoints and life experiences, people will disagree about what the good life for humankind is. What counts as the good life for humankind, individually and collectively, must always be determined anew for changing times and circumstances. Similarly, what it is good for any person or group to do at any particular historical moment is always a matter for practical deliberation.

On this view of education and its double purpose, the practice of education, properly speaking, must always be conducted as praxis in both the neo-Aristotelian and the post-Hegelian, post-Marxist senses. It is praxis in the neo-Aristotelian sense because it aims to be ‘right conduct’ aiming at the good for persons and the good for humankind. It is praxis in the post-Hegelian, post-Marxian sense because it aims at the formation of rising generations of children, young people and adults into modes of personal and moral life and modes of social and political life that are oriented towards the good for each and for the good for all.

Practice

The view of practice we advance in this chapter draws on recent developments in practice theory and philosophy (for example, Gherardi 2000, 2008, 2009; Green 2009; Kemmis 2009; Reckwitz 2002; Sandberg and Dall’Alba 2009; Schatzki et al. 2001; Shotter 1996). In particular, we have been greatly influenced by the practice theory and philosophy of Theodore Schatzki (1996, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010). As will become clear, however, our theory of practice diverges from Schatzki’s in a number of ways.

Language Games, Activities and Practices

To begin, we distinguish language games, activities, ways of relating and practices adopting a broadly Schatzkian perspective. A *language game* (Wittgenstein 1958, 1975) is an activity of a particular kind; it involves participating with others with whom one shares broad ‘forms of life’ in using language in ways (or arriving at ways) that orient speakers and hearers in common towards one another and the world. In language games, one or more interlocutors may be present, as in an ordinary conversation among people meeting face-to-face or on the telephone, or absent, as in the case of the ‘conversation’ one has with the dead author of a book one is reading. To understand language from the perspective of language games is to reject the view that language can be understood in terms of meanings that are ‘read off’ in the mind, on a kind of picture theory in which words and sentences somehow *correspond* with states of affairs in the world. The theory of language games, by contrast, sees language and meaning as a shared achievement among speakers and hearers, authors and readers, and as something dynamic and interactive. It is to see language not as a lexicon but as an interlocutory activity of meaning making. In turn, this process of meaning making, both on the side of the individual person using the language, and on the side of the history of words, languages and language communities, occurs only through language use—people entering and using language. On this view, learning or mastering language is not a solitary, cognitive achievement; on the contrary, like language itself, learning or mastering a language is a shared, collective, *intersubjective* achievement.

An *activity*, according to Schatzki (2010, p 171), is a “temporalspatial event”. The temporal nature of an activity is evident in what we might call the ‘happeningness’ of activities in that they occur only in the present, although they are oriented towards the future and in response to the past. Activities are also spatial events in the sense that they occur somewhere—in particular places or sites, and of course this is also symbiotically related to their temporal nature. “The anchoring of places at particular objects is grounded both in the prescriptions, acceptabilities, and regularities of practices and in the motivations, projects, and ends that determine people’s actions” (Schatzki 2010, p 171). Thus, *practices* are distinct from *activities*; they are, “the site of the social” (2002, pp 146–147). According to Schatzki (2002, p. xi):

The social site is a specific context of human coexistence: the place where, and as part of which, social life inherently occurs. To theorize sociality through the concept of a social site is to hold that the character and transformation of social life are both intrinsically and decisively rooted in the site where it takes place. In turn, this site-context ... is composed of a mesh of orders and practices. Orders are arrangements of entities (for example, people, artifacts, things), whereas practices are organized activities. Human coexistence thus transpires as and amid an elaborate, constantly evolving nexus of arranged things and organized activities.

This idea of a “nexus of arranged things and organised activities” is central to Schatzki’s view of the social world. It is an ontological view in which “arrangements” play a role in enabling and constraining human action and human coexistence. His ontological emphasis helps us to see, first, the *material* “things” (like doors and walls, gravity and colour) that enable and constrain action, but we can readily add to these the *semantic* things that likewise enable and constrain action: the languages and specialist discourses that shape the ways we interpret the world. And to these we can add the *social* things that enable and constrain what we can do: most obviously, other people, but also social groups and relationships that shape the ways we act in relation to others. These three dimensions of sociality will be important in the view of practices we take in this book, which is a little different from Schatzki’s. Shortly, we will show some of the ways our thinking differs in our respective notions of ‘practices’.

Schatzki (2010, p 51) defines practices thus:

By a “social practice” I mean an open, organized array of doings and sayings. Examples include political practices, horse breeding practices, training practices, cooking practices, religious practices, trading practices and teaching practices. Practices of any of these sorts can vary historically and geographically, the variation consisting in different practices of a given sort comprising different doings and sayings, organized differently, with a different history. The doings and sayings that compose a practice are organized by phenomena of four types: (1) action understandings, which combine knowing how to perform an action that helps compose the practice, knowing how to recognize this action, and knowing how to respond to it; (2) rules, by which I mean formulated directives, admonishments, orders, and instructions to perform or leave off certain actions; (3) a teleoaffective structure, which comprises acceptable or prescribed ends, acceptable or enjoined projects to carry out those ends, acceptable or prescribed actions to perform as part of those projects—thus acceptable or prescribed end-project-action combinations—as well as, possibly, accepted or prescribed emotions and even moods; and (4) general understandings about matters germane to the practice. The ends, projects and actions that form a teleoaffective structure can be enjoined of and acceptable for either all participants in a practice or those participants enjoying certain statuses, for example, certain roles or identities.

As will be seen, our research program is informed by our engagement with Schatzki's theorizing of practice. His conceptualization of practices focuses on the 'doings' and 'sayings' of practices. While it is clear, in his (2002) *The Site of the Social* that these doings and sayings imply relationships between people and things that are 'organized' and arranged in time and space, and it is clear in his (2010) *The Timespace of Human Activity* that he sees sayings and doings as temporally and spatially arranged, we believe that the 'relatings' aspect of practices needs to be made explicit. Making 'relatings' explicit brings the social-political dimension of practice into the light, draws attention to the medium of power and solidarity which always attends practice, and invites us to consider what social-political arrangements in a site help to hold a practice in place. We thus include *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* in our conceptualization of practices, and understand practices as enabled and constrained by three kinds of arrangements that occur at sites, namely, *cultural-discursive*, *material-economic*, and *social-political arrangements* (respectively). These three dimensions of human sociality have ancient roots. Hadot (1995), for example, refers to the ancient Greek distinction between three parts of philosophy—(a) *dialectic* or *logic*, (b) *physics*, and (c) *ethics*—which were regarded as separate only for pedagogical purposes, that is, only to help people learn what it means to 'live a philosophical life' and thus (a) to speak and think well (logic), (b) to act well in the world (physics) and (c) to relate well to others (ethics)¹. In more recent social theory, similar dimensions are identified by such theorists as Habermas (1972) who discusses the three social media of (a) language, (b) work and (c) power; and Bourdieu (for example, 1990, 1998) who discusses (a) cultural and symbolic capitals and fields, (b) economic capital and fields, and (c) social and political capitals and fields. Of course we do not want to assert that these categories are identically conceptualized by these very different theorists. In the light of these considerations, we want to speak not only of *sayings* and *doings* but also of *relatings*.

At the same time, we have also been influenced by MacIntyre's (1981. p 175) very different view, according to which a practice is

... any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that activity are realized, in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.

There is not space here to elaborate, but there are resonances between the role played by the 'internal goods' of a practice in MacIntyre's definition (for example, the goods of history that can be realized only by the practice of history, the goods of chess that can be realized only by the practice of chess) and the role played by the notion of 'teleoaffective structure' in Schatzki's—and by the role of teleology

¹ In a different order, but with the same force, Marcus Aurelius (121–180AD, Stoic philosopher and Roman Emperor (161–180AD), said that [the human soul, freed of everything foreign to it,] "does what is just, wills the events which happen, and tells the truth" (*Meditations*, XII, 3,3; in Pierre Hadot, 2001. p 237). Ordered as in the text above, they would be (a) "tells the truth", (b) "wills the events which happen", and (c) "does what is just".

in his more recent (2010) characterization of activity timespace. These notions of internal goods and teleology give practices their distinctive character as practices of a particular kind (for example, farming, chess, herbal medicine production, horse racing). We are inclined to believe that both these ideas are captured in the notion of the *project* of a practice—what the practice ‘hangs together’ in. Simply put, the project of a practice is what people say when they sincerely answer the question “what are you doing?”

In arriving at our working definition of practice, we focused most particularly on the relationship between participants (or practitioners) and a particular practice as being a relationship in which participants speak language characteristic of the practice (*sayings*), engage in activities of the practice in set-ups characteristic of the practice (*doings*), and enter relationships with other people and objects characteristic of the practice (*relatings*), all oriented by the distinctive kind of project characteristic of the practice. Therefore, as a guide to our empirical observation, we focussed on how participants in a practice take up and use the *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* that the organization of the practice ‘offers’ them. Shortly, we will describe this organization in terms of *practice architectures*. Thus, taking a lead from MacIntyre and Schatzki, our working definition of a practice is this:

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

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

The Theory of Practice Architectures

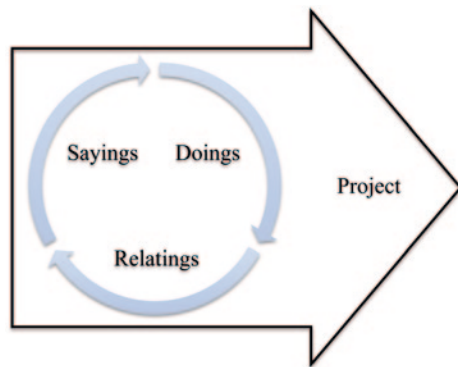
On our view of practices, (a) individual and collective *practice* shapes and is shaped by (b) what we will describe as *practice architectures*, so that (c) the *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* characteristic of the practice hang together in *projects* that in turn shape and are shaped by (d) *practice traditions* that encapsulate the history of the happenings of the practice, allow it to be reproduced, and act as a kind of collective ‘memory’ of the practice. The practice architectures that enable and constrain practices exist in three dimensions parallel to the activities of *saying*, *doing* and *relating*. They constitute enabling and constraining preconditions for the conduct of practices. They appear in the form of:

- *cultural-discursive arrangements* (in the medium of language and in the dimension of *semantic space*) that are the resources that make possible the *language and discourses* used in and about this practice; these arrangements enable and constrain the *sayings* characteristic of the practice (for example, constraining what it is relevant to say, or—especially—what language or specialist discourse is appropriate for describing, interpreting and justifying the practice);
- *material-economic arrangements* (in the medium of *activity and work*, in the dimension of *physical space-time*) that are the resources that make possible the *activities* undertaken in the course of the practice; these arrangements enable and constrain the *doings* characteristic of the practice (for example, by constraining what can be done amid the physical set-ups of various kinds of rooms and indoor and outdoor spaces in a school); and
- *social-political arrangements* (in the medium of *power and solidarity* and in the dimension of *social space*) that are the resources that make possible the *relationships between people and non-human objects* that occur in the practice; these arrangements enable and constrain the *relatings* of the practice (for example, by the organizational functions, rules and roles in an organisation, or by the communicative requirements of the lifeworld processes of reaching shared understandings, practical agreements about what to do, and social solidarities; Habermas, 1987a).

Our conceptions of *practice architectures* and *practice traditions* have a resemblance to Schatzki's (2010, pp 104–105) felicitous notion of “*practice memory*”, although we take a different view of how such memories are stored. In our view, social memories are not only stored in participants' individual memories, they are also hidden right under our noses, in plain sight. In the semantic dimension, they are stored in the *logos* of shared language used by people in a particular site. In the dimension of physical space-time, social memories are stored in physical set-ups and the activity structures of work and life at the site. In the dimension of social space, social memories are stored in such arrangements as organizational-institutional roles, rules and functions or the inclusive and exclusive relationships characteristic of the different lifeworlds people inhabit in the site. We reject the view of collective memory that hypostatizes some version of ‘collective mind’; however, our formulation does not require us to posit social memory as stored entirely in the individual memories and interactional capacities of *actors*. We view practice memories as sedimented into the architectures of practice settings in terms of the languages spoken and discourses used there (for example, the discourses teachers use in justifying the structure of a mathematics lesson for Year 3 students), the physical set-ups and activity systems to be found there (the set-up of the Year 3 classroom, the timetable, and the rhythms of classes and school days), and the organisational arrangements that pertain there (for example, the reciprocal role relationships between the teacher and the students in the class).

On the one hand, according to our theory of practice architectures, practices come into being because people, acting not alone but collectively, *bring* them into being. In practices, individual will, individual understanding and individual action are *orchestrated* in collective social-relational *projects* like teaching children to read or theorising and researching professional practices. On the other hand, people's

Fig. 2.2 Practices are composed of sayings, doings and relatings that hang together in projects



individual and collective participation in practices is prefigured and shaped by the *practice architectures* characteristic of the practice, that is, the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements present in or brought to a site. As suggested earlier, in our view, these sayings, doings and relatings hang together intersubjectively in the *project* of a practice, as depicted in Fig. 2.2.

These practices, which constitute a project of one kind or another, occur in the present, although they are oriented towards the future and in response to the past.

Site Ontologies

Schatzki's theory is an *ontological* theory of practices. It insists on the reality of practices as things that are always *situated* in time and space, and that unfold and happen in *site ontologies* (Schatzki 2005). While of course it addresses practices in general, Schatzki's theory requires us to understand that, as they occur in reality, practices are always located in particular sites and particular times. Practices are not performed from predetermined scripts; the way a practice unfolds or happens is always shaped by the conditions that pertain in a particular site at a particular time. The practices that we observe in real life are not abstractions with an ideal form of their own; they are composed *in* the site where they happen, and they are composed *of* resources found in or brought to the site: cultural-discursive resources, material-economic resources, and social-political resources.

Practices unfold or happen in what Schatzki (2010) describes as *activity timespace*, in which an activity unfolds in time, and in which objects in physical space are linked together and arranged by a particular activity. The notions of site ontologies and activity timespace lead us to the insight that *practices are not merely set in, but always already shaped by, the particular historical and material conditions that exist in particular localities or sites at particular moments*—that is, sites are not a container-like 'context' for practices; rather, practices take on shapes at least partly prefigured by the particular, historically-given *contents* and *conditions* pertaining at a particular site at a particular moment. In particular, the sayings, doings and relatings of a practice take up and express (a) particular cultural-discursive contents and conditions that exist in the

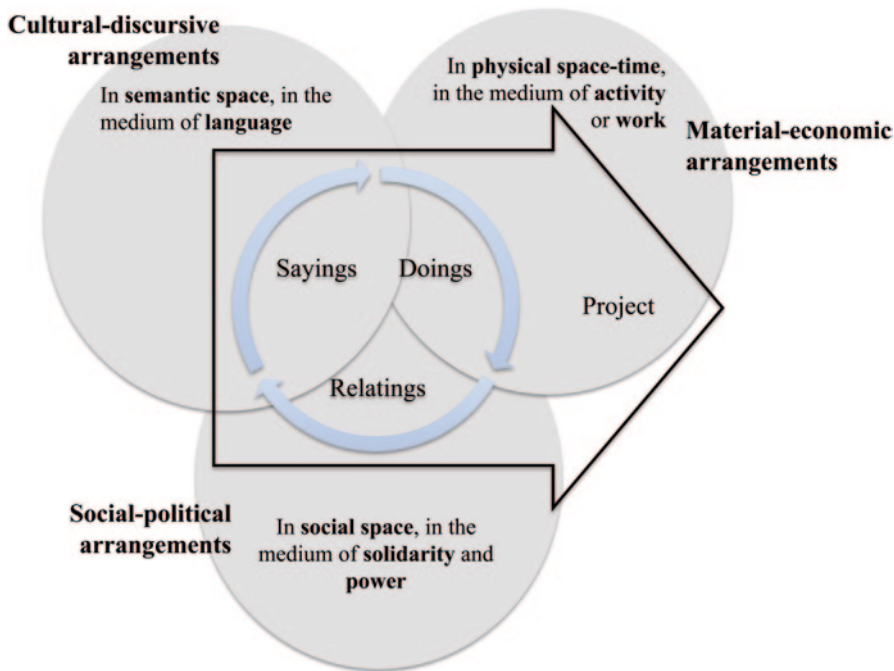


Fig. 2.3 The media and spaces in which sayings, doings and relatings exist

site (in the dimension of *semantic space* and in the medium of *language*), (b) particular material-economic contents and conditions in the site (in the dimension of *physical space-time* and in the medium of *work/activity*) and (c) particular social-political contents and conditions obtaining in the site (in the dimension of *social space* and in the medium of *solidarity* and *power*). Figure 2.3 aims to depict this embeddedness.

The relationships depicted in Fig. 2.3 are not just abstract. *As it happens* (Schatzki, 2006), a living practice becomes part of the *happening* that unfolds in a particular place, part of the *happening of* that place, part of its existence and being in time. The practice takes up sayings, doings and relatings already to be found in the site, *orchestrates* and engages with them, and leaves behind in the setting particular kinds of discursive, physical and social traces or residues of *what happened* through the unfolding of the practice. These traces or residues are left not only in participants' memories and interactional capacities but also in the practice itself as a site for sociality. Some of these residues become part of the practice architectures of the setting and are newly encountered by others who subsequently inhabit it—for example, when tomorrow's class discovers where the chairs were left in the classroom by today's students, or when new contributors to a debate in the research literature of a field find that the field has 'moved on' from the debates of earlier years.

To give an example of a practice happening as part of the place it happens in: we observed a kindergarten class in which the children were making and experimenting with 'garden ornaments'. The kindergarten curriculum required that children should

Changing Practices, Changing Education

Kemmis, S.; Wilkinson, J.; Edwards-Groves, C.; Hardy, I.;

Grootenboer, P.; Bristol, L.

2014, XV, 278 p. 10 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-981-4560-46-7