Chapter 1

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**Chapter 1**

# Practice! Practice! Practice!

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### Chapter 1: Abstract

The chapter begins with a discussion of enduring stereotypes and recurring debates about the nature of research in education, including who should conduct it and how. Through the work of Carr (1995), it illustrates how our current concept of educational research and its relationship to educational practice are end-products of social, historical and political processes through which an older, more comprehensive and coherent concept of practice has been changed to the extent that it has been, ‘rendered marginal and now faces something approaching total effacement.’ (Carr 1995, p. 73). The work of Dunne (1997) Carr (1995), Kemmis (1995) are drawn upon to consider the nature of practice and how practice changes and improves. The chapter moves on to explore the nature of practice in education and how educational practice changes and improves. Boundaries between theory, research and practice are examined in terms of their social, historical and political constructions in the field of education and in other disciplines. This includes how these constructions have served to isolate and separate research from practice and practice from theory, in ways which an older, more comprehensive and coherent concept of practice would not do.

Taking examples of the social, historical and political constructions of a vocational-academic divide, Hyland (2017) draws attention to the risks and consequences of the creation of false dichotomies and artificial separations in any form of practice. The lure of such divisions and separations he argues, is strong with origins that can be traced back to the social, economic and political stratifications of ancient Greece.

Consideration is also given to the consequences of the acceptance of the existence of a vocational- academic divide for the development of educational theory, research and practice in the Further Adult and Vocational Education (FAVE) sector today. It is argued that the question of a vocational-academic divide involves bringing to the fore and critically engaging with, the concepts and suppositions which brought that divide into existence. The chapter concludes that all theory comes from practice, not only in relation to the conduct of research, theory and practice in the field of education, but also in the pursuit of all forms of life including the practices of thinking, theorizing, engaging in inquiry and scholarship as well as in the practice of leading a fulfilled life. In this chapter, no distinction is made between practice in subjects widely taken to be vocational and those usually considered to be academic.

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### Introduction

Questions of the nature of research, who should conduct it and what counts as good research have to date generated heated debate across subjects, fields and disciplines but not much light. Enduring stereotypes continue to populate the landscape of research and competing discourses regarding the above questions can at times become strident and dismissive of each other. As we shall see however, stereotypes are often deep-rooted and compelling and can be very difficult to shake off.

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#### Case Study: Enduring Stereotypes and Competing Discourses in Research

In the 1934 horror movie, *The Man They Could Not Hang,* (Columbia Pictures), directed by Nick Grinde, Boris Karloff plays Dr. Henryk Savaard, a man obsessed with bringing the dead back to life. Dr. Savaard’s research into transplant heart and lung surgery involves ‘arresting’ the body’ s metabolism. He is interrupted in mid-experiment by police officers tipped off by Savaard’s nursing assistant that his research is breaking the laws of God and man. On the operating table, the heart of his patient (a trusting student who has volunteered to participate in Dr. Savaard’s experiments) stays ‘arrested’. Subsequently Dr. Savaard is arrested, convicted and sentenced to hang for murder. Before his hanging, he vows revenge on the judge and the jury who convicted him. Luckily for Savaard, his laboratory assistant has been paying attention. After Savaard’s hanging his assistant is able to resurrect him using the Savaard’s own techniques. Unluckily for those who sent him to the gallows, Savaard returns with a chip on his shoulder. Looking for revenge and out to punish the ingrates who wronged him, he sets about murdering members of the jury who derided his contributions to research.

In the movie, the image of Dr. Savaard as a researcher, is of a wealthy, brilliant and well-intentioned man of science. He works hard in his laboratory which is situated in his luxurious mansion home. He is committed to advancing scientific knowledge. He carries out his research on his trusting, naïve and highly impressionable students who are clearly in awe of him. Their deference to Dr. Savaard’s ‘first-class mind’ is palpable. In the movie, Dr. Savaard finds us, ordinary human beings, beneath him, wanting and undeserving of his intellectual gifts. His genius is clearly beyond us. We scorned his science and hanged him. Outraged, he comes back to seek revenge on us for scorning his work.

The imagery of the movie tells us that Dr. Savaard is rich, knowledgeable, mild-mannered, well-read and clearly well-intentioned. His daughter is beautiful and dutiful. On the other hand, ‘ordinary’ characters in the movie, reporters, police officers, members of the jury and the general public are depicted as being stupid, lazy, ignorant and callous. Clearly incapable of understanding or engaging in research. Obviously unworthy of the noble pursuit of advancing science. In the end, Dr. Savaard is brought to justice. As he has been hanged once, in the eyes of the law he cannot be hanged again. In the closing scenes, in a struggle to escape further justice, he is shot and dies for a second time.

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### The Power of Stereotypes

Stereotypes are evident everywhere in the movie and their messages are both powerful and disturbing. Scientific research is seen as the legitimate province of a wealthy male elite. Women may also serve science and research but only in subordinate and dutiful roles. Those who engage in ‘real’ research and science do so only under laboratory conditions and in laboratory coats. Research is seen to require highly specialized technical skills and expensive equipment. A clear message in the movie is that ordinary people carrying out their day to day work cannot understand ‘science’ and therefore cannot and should not engage in research.

It would be naive and wrong to think that these stereotypes of researchers and research are simply a fiction or a product of Hollywood in1930s. The origins of such stereotypes reach much further back in history. They also reach forward in time and can still be seen in the competing discourses surrounding research in general and research in the field of education today.

Competing debates concerning what research is and who should conduct it can be seen to cluster around four main positions. The first, can be linked to a notion advanced by Plato (429-347 BC) regarding the existence of absolutes or ‘perfect forms’ which underpin much of what is regarded as ‘scientific’ approaches to research which seek to uncover invariable ‘truths’. From this perspective, methods based upon positivist world views pursue objectivity and certainty by employing randomized Control Trials (RCTs), meta analyses, laboratory experiments etc. These are considered to be the only research methods that we can and should trust.

A second position is that research should be conducted by highly trained professionals in higher education who can and should be trusted to produce good (rigorous and robust) research. From this perspective, ‘ordinary’ practitioners are simply not equipped to conduct research not only on the grounds that they do not have the knowledge and skills to conduct ‘good’ research, but also because their closeness to the various practices they pursue in their everyday life, clouds their ability to see practice in the world in an objective and scientific way.

A third contribution to the discourse takes a more emancipatory and moral turn where knowledge produced by research (particularly research in the social sciences) is seen as a form of ‘power’. From this standpoint, the role of research is to redress imbalances and misuses of power, reduce inequality, bring about social justice and contribute to democracy. In educational and other fields of social science, this approach seeks to liberate those who are oppressed by powerful social and political forces in circumstances where knowledge derived from research and intellectual thinking is put to work to liberate and emancipate the oppressed from ‘false’ consciousness.

The fourth position can be traced back to Aristotle’s (384-322 BC) foregrounding of the importance of human experience in all forms of practice, the role of experience in meaning-making and the development and improvement of practice in the interests of the common good. From this perspective, practice matters and practitioner research matters more, because that is the arena in which theory and research are put to the test. Without practice, theory and research may go unchallenged and experiences derived directly from practice cannot contribute to the development of theory and research. From this standpoint, theory is not ‘up there’. Practice is not ‘down here’, in the cheap seats in the midst of a mob of mindless practitioners. Research is not located beyond practitioners, somewhere ‘out there’, in the territory of a privileged elite. Instead, all three are accepted as being at play and in constant interplay in practice and in context. As Carr (1995, p.3) argues, the work of educational practice, the work of research and the work of theorising develop ‘hand in hand’ and eye to eye. Viewed from this position, the relationship between educational research and educational practice cannot be reduced to the simple application of technical knowledge, gained from research conducted by others. Far from teachers being passive consumers of educational knowledge produced by others (often in the form of ‘recipes’ for good practice) teachers are in fact, accepted as being creators of new knowledge as well as (in some cases) generators of and contributors to educational theory. Indeed, as Kemmis argues, that the new learning involved in putting an idea, concept or theory from educational research into educational practice is a process of inquiry and therefore an important and legitimate form of educational research (Kemmis, in Carr 1995).

These four positions in the discourse surrounding the nature of practice and relationships between theory, research and practice are themselves broad representations (even caricatures) which do not take into account more nuanced and subtle perspectives in the discourse. It would also be a mistake to think of each of these positions as being mutually exclusive or indeed to think that any one of them holds the complete answer to questions of how good educational research should be conducted. The creation of ‘silos’ of research and heated defences of extreme positions and ‘paradigm wars’ have not been particularly helpful to us in the past. Nor are they likely to be the future. Indeed, it may be that in developing a better understanding of each of the above positions and the contributions they can make to the improvement of educational practice, new ways forward may be found.

### Beginning with Ourselves

Hunt (1987) challenges the division of practice, theory and research and points to the importance of taking experience seriously by ‘beginning with ourselves’. He argues that the quality of human experience is a neglected aspect of educational research and that the starting point in the change process is personal and practical knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge. With references to personal experience, using examples from the field of psychology, he illustrates how, when those who theorize about a practice become removed from the sites and experiences of that practice, then it is the quality of theory and theorising in that field of practice which suffer and, in some cases, the practice itself.

### What is a Practice?

The work of Dunne (2005) provides a useful overview of the nature of practice and how practice improves. Dunne’s definition is particularly interesting in that it admits social and historical factors which influence how a practice develops and changes over time. For Dunne a practice is,

*A coherent and invariably quite complex set of activities and tasks that has evolved cooperatively and cumulatively over time. It is alive in the community who are its insiders (i.e. its genuine practitioners) and it stays alive only so long as they sustain a commitment to creatively develop and extend it – sometimes by shifts which may at the time seem dramatic or even subversive. Central to any such practice are standards of excellence, themselves subject to development and redefinition, which demand responsiveness from those who are, or are trying to become practitioners*

Dunne in Carr 2005, pp. 152-153.

What is interesting, is the way in which Dunne brings to light the evolutionary, cooperative and temporal nature of practice and how it develops. He also points to the vibrant and dynamic nature of a practice, kept alive by its ‘insiders’ who are committed to creatively challenge, develop and extend it sometimes in small shifts which incrementally modify the practice, at other times in more dramatic ways which may radically change, transform or even transcend the practice altogether. These understandings of practice ultimately take us back to the work of Aristotle and his notions of *techné,* makingsomething in circumstances where ends are known,

and *phronesis* or practical wisdom which involves the development of good judgment through engagement in action in a particular *context*.

Through the work of Eagleton, Carr (1995) points out that any practice involves some technical skills. However, he draws attention to how practice can never be reduced to just a series of technical skills or techniques,

*A practice is never just a set of technical skills ...What is distinctive of a practice is in part the way in which conceptions of the relevant goods and ends which the technical skills serve - and every practice does involve the exercise of technical skills - are transformed and enriched by those extensions of human powers and by that regard for its own internal goods which are partially definitive of each particular practice.*

Eagleton, 1990 pp. 26-27, cited in Carr 1995, p. 60.

Here Eagleton and Carr remind us, that techniques or technical skills serve a wider purpose in relation to the relevant internal goods, the purpose(s) of the practice or what the practice is *for* and the ends of a practice, what we mean by good work. Carr notes how technical skills are dynamically enriched and transformed by the human beings who engage in and care about the practice (its insiders) enough to be committed to its continual improvement. The dangers of preoccupations with prescribing exhaustive lists of the technical skills of a practice in the absence of considerations of the internal goods and ends of a practice are already well-documented (see for example, Elliott 2002, Coffield 2011, 2017 and Ball 2017).

As Hunt (1989) observes, technical skills and practices theorized by those removed from the sites and day to experiences of practice (its outsiders) suffer a disconnect from dynamic and direct experience in context. The central argument here is that if you want to change/improve a practice you have to understand what a practice is and how it develops. If you do not, as the above authors caution, you may find yourself caught up in a thinly framed, technical understanding of practice which although initially intuitively appealing ultimately proves to be unhelpful. The ‘insider’ nature of practice and its development described by the above authors is characterized by care for the internal goods of the practice (the individual and collective rewards that come from doing a job well and what we mean by good work in that field of practice). It also means having a care for the desired outcomes or purpose(s) of the practice (what it is *for*). From this perspective, practice cannot be understood without reference to the understanding of those who *realize* the practice in the world. To underscore this point Kemmis presents an account of his own training in behaviourist psychology in the 1960s in which he was encouraged to look at action ‘from the outside’,

*… as if it were controlled by a mechanism, as hidden and as powerful as the mechanism that so harmoniously and so rigorously determines the movements of the planets and the stars ...The image of the mechanism was so powerful that the very task of behavioural science was driven by it. We were convinced that we knew what the ‘truths’ we sought looked like - they would be mathematical formulae like those published in Newton’s Principia of 1867 that described the secret mechanisms and springs of the material world.*

Kemmis, in Carr, 1995, p. 3

Kemmis observes that viewing action ‘from the outside’, suggests that human beings at best poorly understand the meaning of their actions and assumes that people rationalize or deceive themselves about their actions most of the time and it is left to the ‘outsider’ to interpret and explain the real meaning of actions in social life. This preference for a mechanical view of the social life of human beings, makes it is possible to strip social life and the human beings who constitute it, of ambiguity and complexity. This invokes a certain kind of science ‘able to ‘see’ beneath the surface of things to discover principles of order which account for the workings of the mechanism beneath’ (Kemmis, in Carr, 1995, p. 4). Kemmis explains that according to this world view, human beings do not know what they are doing, let alone why and it takes the ‘outsider’ scientist to reveal the forces by which our actions are determined. The driving idea here is that these discoveries can be made available so that in future ‘action can be more carefully controlled and directed’ (ibid). Viewing action from the ‘outside’ in this way, involves what Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (2014) identifies as technical reasoning which he describes as *techné*. Technical (instrumental means-ends) reasoning. This is the kind of reasoning you engage in when you know what the given ends of action are/should be and where you are following known rules to arrive at those ends. Examples of this ‘making’ action or *techné* includes, making a pot, baking a cake or writing a lesson plan.

Aristotle distinguishes between technical reasoning (*techné*)and practical reasoning (*phronesis*). In technical (instrumental means-ends) reasoning, ends are known, rules are known and followed and given materials are used to achieve known ends.

For Aristotle, practical reasoning differs from technical reasoning. Practical reasoning does not assume known ends or given means. Nor does it follow imposed rules of method. Practical reasoning involves viewing action from the ‘inside’. This includes the form of reasoning which is appropriate in social, political and workplace situations. In such circumstances, people draw upon experience and reason about how to act truly and rightly in situations and contexts where both means and ends are problematic in contexts where it is not always clear what to do for the best. In this kind of ‘doing’ action, people have to work out what to do as they go along. We can describe them as being ‘in’ the action when they are faced with evidence of the consequences of previous and current actions.

Aristotle describes ‘scientific reasoning’(*theoria*)as the pursuit of intellectual questions. Here he is referring to a kind of ‘pure’ analytic or logical reasoning of the kind that we might use in mathematics or analytic philosophy. To argue for approaches to understanding practice from the ‘inside’ is not to say that theories derived in contexts removed and disconnected from practice have no value or contribution to make to the development and improvement of practice. Theory has much to offer. Theory offers us the benefit of being able to stand back from the practice. Theory helps us to uncover the relays of power and pursuits of vested interests at work in wider contemporary society. But this does not mean that theories in themselves deserve our deference and uncritical acceptance. They do not. They do however need to be tested out in the arena of practice.

### The Practice of Education

In relation to the practice of education Kemmis foregrounds the unique, moral and democratic position of teachers in developing educational practice as a force for continuity or change in society.

*Educational practice is a form of power - a dynamic force for social continuity and for social change which, though shared with and constrained by others, rests largely in the hands of teachers. Through the power of educational practice, teachers play a vital role in changing the world we live in.*

Kemmis, in Carr 1995, p. 1.

Following Carr, Kemmis (1995) notes the historical and social construction of concepts of practice. Educational practice, he reminds us, is something made by people. The meaning of any practice he contends, including educational practice, is not self-evident. Carr (1995, p. 73) argues that our concept of educational theory *and* our concept of educational practice are end products of a historical process through which an older, more comprehensive coherent concept of practice. As discussed above Carr argues that this older more coherent concept of practice has been pushed to the margins of the discourse to a point where it begins to look strange and unfamiliar when compared to more contemporary, ‘common sense’ understandings of practice. Carr cautions that our contemporary common sense understanding of educational practice is radically ambiguous and incoherent. For Carr, defects in our current concept of educational practice operate to limit our grasp of the nature of practice in education and the processes through which it develops. Kemmis (1995) also challenges contemporary understandings of the nature of educational practice. He questions in particular the existence of a gap between theory and practice in education and the nature of reasoning, in, about and through practice, practical reasoning (*phronesis*).

Carr invites us to consider why ‘attempts to analyse the concept of ‘practice’ which focus on its relationship to ‘theory’ fail to furnish us with a satisfactory understanding of what an educational practice is’ (Carr 1995, p.61). He points out that one of the common ways to think about the relationship between theory and practice is to think about them in oppositional terms - ‘practice’ is everything that ‘theory’ is not. From this perspective, ‘theory’ is concerned with universal, context-free generalisations free from pressures and time and ‘practice’ is concerned with concrete realities and responsive to the demands of everyday life. ‘Solutions to practical problems are found in knowing something, practical problems can only be solved by doing something … when applied to the field of education this view of practice is always unsatisfactory’. Carr 1995, p.62). The fundamental weakness here he argues is that this ‘oppositional’ view generates criteria for ‘practice’ which when applied to the notion of *educational* practice excludes too much.

*By making the twin assumptions that all practice is non-theoretical and that all theory is non-practical, this approach always underestimates the extent to which those who engage in educational practices have to reflect upon and hence theorize about, what in general they are trying to do… Practice is not opposed to theory but is itself governed by an implicit theoretical framework which structures and guides the activities of those engaged in practical pursuits.*

Carr 1995, p. 62-63

Through the work of Ryle (1949), Carr (1995) argues that while educational practice cannot be reduced to a form of theorizing, educational theorizing *can* be reduced to a form of practice. Practice is therefore not the step-child of theory. Ryle argues that efficient practice precedes the theory of it and therefore theorizing itself is a form of practice. He points out that although the meaning of the Greek word *praxis* broadly corresponds to the term ‘practice’ in English, the conceptual structures within the original Greek term refer to a distinctive way of life - the *bios praktikos - a* life devoted to right living through the pursuit of the human good. This was distinguishable from a life devoted to *theoria (bios theoretikos)* - thecontemplative way of life of the philosopher or the scientist. Each was distinctive in terms of both its end and its means of pursuing this end. Carr points out that the Greek distinction between theory and practice has little to do with the way in which the distinction is now drawn. He shows how that for the Greeks, the distinction between the two is, ‘not a distinction between knowledge and action, thinking and doing, ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how. Rather, it is a way of articulating two different forms of socially embedded human activities, each with its own intellectual commitments and its own moral demands’ (Carr 1995, p.67). He points to how for the Greeks, the modern philosophical problem whether theory and practice are or are not independent from each other would have made little sense as each would have been seen two forms of human action *praxis* and *poiesis,* a distinction which can only be rendered in English as ‘doing something’ (realizing some morally worthwhile ‘good’. The ‘good’ for the sake of which a practice is pursued cannot be ‘made’ it can only be ‘done’ in circumstances - where the ends are not always known, and action is guided by a form of knowledge which Aristotle called *phronesis* or practical wisdom). *‘*Practice is therefore a form of ‘doing’ action precisely because its end can only be realized through action and can only exist in the action itself’ (Carr 1995, p.68). This is very different from ‘making action’ (bringing some specific artefact or product into existence. The ‘good’ for the sake of which *poiesis* is pursued is ‘made’ in circumstances where ends are known, guided by a form of knowledge which as discussed above Aristotle describes as *techné.*

We need to be careful here however not to assume that *praxis* and *poiesis* are mutually exclusive. As discussed above through the work of Eageleton (1990), every practice involves the exercise of technical skills (*techné*). These are enriched, modified, extended and transformed by the human powers of its practitioners who have a deep regard for the internal goods which are partially definitive of each particular practice.

Sennett (2009) and Hyland (2017, 2018) show that *techné* is embodied and at work in practice. Sennett sees *techné* in the ‘eye’ and the hands of the glassblower when she sees the glass material being blown does not behave in a predicted way. *Techné* can be seen in the eyes, hands and feet of the apprentice engineer in the engineering workshop on day 28 of the Fitting Module moving from cross-filing to flat-filing. Techné can be found in the feet and knees of the dancer when he does not land as expected; in the hands and the ‘eye’ of the baker when the dough does not rise; in the nose of the sommelier choosing an award-winning wine; in the hands eyes and ears of the stonemason as she carves; in the eyes, ears and hands of the cellist etc. as they rehearse. Sennett (2009) points out that in these cases while the epistemic status of the end is not uncertain or ambiguous and the means by which the end is to be achieved is clear, there is still an element of *poiesis* at work here as techniques have to be adapted in context. *Techné* pursues and progresses towards a known end as noted above but not always in predictable and straightforward ways. That is why, as this chapter argues, the human powers of practitioners, who care deeply about the internal goods of practice and who recognise the relationship between *techné* and *poiesis* , consistently make artefacts to the highest standards. While it is therefore possible and desirable to produce a theoretical specification of what the ends of *techné* should be for example in following a recipe to bake a cake there are some limitations which are worth bearing in mind here which involve both *poiesis* and *praxis*. This is discussed in some detail in Chapter 11.

As we have seen, however *Techné* cannot be reduced to the mindless, mechanical or instrumental pursuit of known ends as poiesis also involves making judgments in complex and unfolding situations. However, the object of *poiesis* is known prior to action and this makes the judgments of *poiesis* very different to the kinds of judgments to those required in *praxis.*

As argued above the development of good practice in any form of life involves much more than just instrumental technique. It demands that the internal goods of the practice are articulated and embodied Hyland (2017) in practice. This includes the exercise of practical wisdom or *phronesis* in context as well as a strong commitment to *praxis*. Dunne describes *praxis* as :

‘... conduct in a public space with others in which a person, without ulterior purpose and with a view to no object detachable from himself, acts in such a way to realise excellences he has come to appreciate in his community as constitutive of a worthwhile life.”

(Dunne, 1993, p.10)

Carr also draws attention to how *praxis* can never be understood solely as a form of technical expertise designed to achieve some externally related end which can be pre-specified in advance of engaging in a practice. *Praxis* is different from *poiesis* because the judgment of the ‘public good’ which constitutes its end is inseparable from the action and the context in which it occurs, including the question of doing the right thing to do at the right time in that situation.

Practice in this sense can be seen as morally informed or morally committed action. Carr points out that within the Aristotelian tradition all ethical and political activities were regarded as forms of practice including the practice of education.

To ‘practise’ *poiesis* or *praxis* therefore is to act within a tradition derived from the practical knowledge made available to us by those who have gone before. However, the authoritative nature of tradition does not and should not make tradition immune to criticism. As we have seen above, through the work of Dunne (2005), traditions and practical knowledge evolve cooperatively and cumulatively over time through practitioners and their commitment to creatively develop and extend practical knowledge in the light of direct experience. In doing so, practitioners move the practice forward sometimes through incremental adaptation and modification sometimes in more dramatic ways which transform and even transcend the practice itself. As discussed above, while it is only by submitting to the authority of tradition that practitioners can begin to require the practical knowledge and standards of excellence by means of which their own practical competence can be judged, that tradition is constantly being reinterpreted and revised through critical dialogue and discussion about how to produce the practical goods which constitute the tradition in the light of experiences of practice (Carr 1995, Sennett 2009). Carr notes that ‘it is precisely because it embodies this process of critical reconstruction that a tradition evolves and changes or remains static or fixed’ (Carr 1995, p.69).

The works of Carr, Sennett and Dunne discussed above help us to see that, while the early stages of any practice is likely to involve the acquisition of some basic technical and practical skills, the acquisition of any practice cannot be reduced to technique.

In view of the above, this chapter argues that many (if not all) forms of practice involve not only *techné* but also elements of *poiesis, phronesis* and *praxis.*  Acquiring the techniques and practical knowledge and engagement in critical reconstruction of practice take place in a public and social space with an educational purpose. In these public and social spaces, we act in the interests of others and for the public good. Here we act in the ethical interests of the pursuit of the internal goods of the practice and development of traditions of the particular practice in question. Understanding and applying the ethical principles involved in taking a practice forward for the ‘good’ involves promoting the good of a practice and moving it forward through morally right action.

Rational discussion about how the ethical ends of a practice were to be interpreted and pursued was what Aristotle took practical philosophy to be all about. It is the science which seeks to raise the practical knowledge embedded in tradition to the level of reflective awareness and through critical argument to correct and transcend the limitations of what within this tradition has hitherto been thought said and done.

Carr 1995, p.69

The continuing presence of contesting philosophical viewpoints regarding the nature of a practice (in this case the practice of education) and how practice improves (represented in the competing discourses set out at the beginning of this chapter provide the oppositional tension necessary for critical thinking to perform its transforming role in moving our understanding of the nature of practice in general and the nature of educational practice in particular, forward. ‘Understanding and applying ethical principles are therefore not two separate processes but mutually constitutive elements in the continuous dialectical construction between knowledge and action’ (ibid).

Carr (1995) points out that since the ends of educational practice are always indeterminate, a form of reasoning is always required in which choice, deliberation and practical judgement play a central role. This is very different from purely technical reasoning. The overall purpose of practical reasoning is to decide what to do when it is not clear what to do for the best when faced with the dilemma of competing and conflicting moral ideals, in situations where it may only be possible to respect one value at the expense of another. For Aristotle, this involves proceeding in an incremental and deliberative way. Dewey (1933) illustrates how in the process of deliberative reasoning means and ends are open to question. For Dewey, deliberative thinking begins with a ‘disturbance’ in routine thinking. This leads to thinking about alternative understandings of the ‘problem” and its alternative potential ‘solutions’. These happen in transaction and involve imagining the potential consequences of alternative courses of action, taking the action reasoned and judged most likely to achieve the desired and continuing or abandon/adapt the action in the light of the evidence of its consequences.

The quality of deliberative reasoning is influenced by the experiences of individuals and their potential to imagine the consequences of potential actions. Aristotle recognises this and insists that, ‘collective deliberation by the many is always preferable to the isolated deliberation of the individual’ (Carr 1995, p.71). In the context of this chapter, this underscores the importance of opening up spaces for collaborative and cooperative deliberation for teachers based upon problems and issues encountered in practice.

For Aristotle, good deliberation depends upon *phronesis* or practical wisdom - the virtue of knowing which general ethical principles to apply in a particular context or situation. He regards this as the supreme intellectual virtue and the engine of good practice, critique. This requires not only having knowledge of what is required in a particular moral situation but also having the willingness and the courage to act so that this knowledge can take a concrete form. This involves the linking of deliberation and practical wisdom with action to arrive at a good judgment in educational contexts with a view to moving practice forward.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The works of the above authors help us to see that thinking, inquiring into and theorizing about ‘action’ and indeed action itself are embedded in all forms of human life. Dewey (1933) reminds us that thought and action are not separate or temporal. For Dewey, the thinking is in the action and the action is in the thinking. Thinking, inquiring and theorizing therefore take place in the action itself. As such, thinking, inquiring, theorizing and acting in the world are all practices. They are all part of the action not separate from it. McIntyre (1981 cited in Carr 1995) suggests that,

*Theory is just a practice forced into a new form of self-reflectiveness...Theory is just a human activity bending back upon itself, constrained into a new kind of self-reflexivity. And, in absorbing this self-reflexivity, the activity itself will be transformed.*

McIntyre, 1981, p. 180 cited in Carr, 1995, p. 40.

Here Mcintyre lends support to the arguments advanced above by Carr (1995), Kemmis (1995) and Dunne (1993) where they draw attention to how theory, research and practice are not separate in any human activity but integral aspects of the activity itself, including the activity (practice) of education.

The work of Kemmis (1995) is helpful in rebutting claims that enduring questions of theory and practice in education have long been resolved. Kemmis contends that the nature of educational practice and the relationship between educational theory, research and practice are not well understood, particularly in relation to how we think about, in, and through practice. The combined work of Carr (1995) and Kemmis (1995) bring significant flaws and misconceptions regarding what now passes for educational research including the notion of the existence of a gap between theory and practice into focus. They point out that this purported gap is still widely reinforced and reproduced in education ‘through conventional courses on educational theory, research methodology and educational practice’ (Kemmis, in Carr 1995, p.2). Kemmis reserves his strongest criticism for theorists and researchers who view practitioners as mindless foot-soldiers performing in accordance with the theories of others. He questions the merits of,

‘those who deny that that practice and theory develop reflexively and together and those who appear to believe that the insights that they have gained in the intellectual tussles of post-graduate seminars and research conferences will produce changes in the educational practices of teachers who attend neither’

Kemmis, in Carr 1995, p. 3.

Kemmis contests the false separation of theory and practice and the creation of arbitrary divisions between research and practice. He points out that dissolving these divisions and collapsing existing and long-standing dichotomies will involve developing new relationships between those conventionally regarded as theorists, those conventionally regarded as researchers and those conventionally regarded as practitioners. For Kemmis, this calls for nothing less than the development of new collaborative forms of science which challenge the existing demarcations of function and divisions of labour, embedded in the history and social practices of educational theorising for over a century.

Carr (1995) shows us that when attention is focused on the *connection* between the practice of educational theorising and the educational policy to which theorising is addressed, it becomes clear that educational theory not only identifies educational practice but also defines and shapes practice as well. Questions about the nature of educational theory and the nature of educational practice become logically linked. Questions about how educational theory changes educational practice are therefore not independent of questions of how theory is to be understood. Carr urges active engagement in a rigorous critique of the preconceptions which constitute our present understanding of theory and practice so that we can be confident that what we say about the practice of education is ‘neither contaminated by ideological distortion nor corroded by intellectual complacency’ (Carr 1995, p. 51).

The works of the above authors show us how an awareness of Aristotle’s older and more coherent concept of practice enables us to understand why current attempts to analyse the relationship between theory, research and practice run into the sort of difficulties they do. The same body of work illustrates that these difficulties are the product of ahistorical assumptions about the nature of all three which he argues have more to do with a 19th Century mechanical world view which makes arbitrary and binary distinctions between theory and practice; knowledge and action; ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing that’. These are he notes, arbitrary and binary distinctions between different kinds of knowledge, technical knowledge (*techné* ), practical knowledge (*phronesis*) theory (*theoria)* and a knowledge of and concern for the common good (*praxis*). Carr (1995) cautions that, failure to recognise the flawed nature of such arbitrary and binary distinctions has not only left our concept of practice confused, but also made it difficult for us to talk about why education is construed as a practice at all. He goes on to point out that in acknowledging the importance of recognizing these as different and dynamic forms of knowledge we can begin to see how characterizations of educational practice which focus on binary distinctions between theory and practice and arbitrary divisions between practice and research always break down. This is because, as educational practice is always guided by some theory about the ethical good internal to that practice and always involves some form of inquiry, then it cannot be made intelligible in terms of positioning it in opposition to theory. At the same time however, he cautions against assuming that educational practice can be sufficiently characterized as a theory-guided pursuit. For Carr, what is distinctive about an educational practice, is that it is guided, not by just some general practical theory but also by the demands of the practical situation in which the theory is to be applied. The guidance given by theory therefore always has to be moderated by the guidance given by phronesis, wise and prudent judgment concerning if, and to what extent, this theory ought to be invoked and enhanced in a concrete case. Carr argues that the fact that educational practice cannot be characterized as ‘theory-dependent’ or ‘theory-guided’ does not mean that it should be regarded as some kind of theory-free, home-spun ‘know-how’. What is distinctive about *praxis,* Carr (1995, p.73) contends, is that it is a form of reflexive action which ‘can itself transform the theory which guides it …where theory is as subject to change and is practice itself … each is continuously being modified and revised by the other’.

In sum, the relationship of theory to practice cannot be explained simply in terms of a cognitive function where teachers are seen as mere technicians mechanically and mindlessly putting theories derived by research conducted by others into practice. Nor is the relationship between research, theory and practice well understood simply in terms of a division of labour or the arbitrary allocation of social roles and relationships.

This chapter begins by pointing to the dangers of stereotypes and the risks of polarised, binary and oppositional discourses about the nature of research, the nature of theory and the nature of practice.

It concludes that theorising, research and practice are public processes and social practices. This is the case for any practice, including the practice of education. Kemmis urges us to remember that,

Who participates in this public process, this social practice is crucial not only in whose interests are best served by educational theorizing but also in terms of what the substance of educational theorizing will be about.

Kemmis, in Carr 1995 p.17.

The personal and professional accounts of experience presented by Hunt (1989) and Kemmis (1995) from the disciples of psychology and education, in the introductory section of this chapter, provide vivid and salutary examples which reveal that, when those who theorize about a practice become removed from the sites and experiences of that practice, then it is not only the quality of theory and theorizing in that field of practice which ultimately suffer, but the practice itself.

In view of the above, practice-focused research presents us with opportunities to develop new collaborative forms of science which challenge existing demarcations and divisions of labour between those widely regarded as theorists, those widely regarded as researchers and those widely regarded as practitioners. As illustrated in the case of Dr. Henryk Savaard in *The Man They Could Not Hang*, these demarcations and divisions of labour have existed for over a century and have served to limit our understandings of the relationship between theory, practice and research. We do not yet know how to develop these new and collaborative forms of science or what they might look like in practice. Understanding how to do so will be an indispensable in further advancing the practice-focused forms of educational inquiry and approaches to educational improvement advocated above. It is hoped however that some of the chapters presented in this book might offer glimpses into how and where we might start.

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