

The Practice Turn: Towards Practice-Based Doctorates

ADAM BARNARD*

Nottingham Trent University, UK

The first part of this paper examines practice and practices as the practice turn in social sciences. The cartography of practice in the late 20 century has way makers or milestones that are significant in the trajectory of practice. Bourdieu has a project of 'praxelogy' in Outline for a Theory of Practice (1977) and The Logic of Practice (1990) with habitus, field and practice influenced by structuralism. Giddens' 'theory of structuration' (Giddens, 1979, 1984) is influenced by the late Wittgenstein and in Giddens's world, 'the basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, not the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time' (Giddens, 1984: 2). Giddens (1984) discusses how theories of practice might transcend the dualisms of structure and agency, determination and voluntarism. The range of practice theorists forms the nexus, constellation and force field of practice-based doctorates that have applied and real-world value. The second part of the paper discusses possible translations of theory into applied research to examine practice in real-world research.

Key words: practice, professional doctorates, the practice turn, case

Introduction

Social Practice

Social practice has many inheritors, many legacies and draws from different discipline bases. Social practice involves knowledge production, and the theorization and analysis of both institutional and intervention practices. Practices have a trajectory or path of development and a history, reaching from the ancient Greeks to Heidegger (Nicolini, 2012). The message for Doctoral Education is for doctoral learning as a social practice to be fully explicated and

* Corresponding author adam.barnard@ntu.ac.uk

this paper is a step towards a social practice theory of doctoral education and this paper evidences the practice turn in producing a thesis.

The cartography of practice in the late twentieth century has way makers or milestones that are significant in the trajectory of practice. Bourdieu has a project of 'praxelogy' in *Outline for a Theory of Practice* (1977) and *The Logic of Practice* (1990) with habitus, field and practice influenced by structuralism. Giddens' 'theory of structuration' (Giddens, 1979, 1984) is influenced by the late Wittgenstein and in Giddens's world, 'the basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, not the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time' (Giddens, 1984: 2). Giddens (1984) discusses how theories of practice might transcend the dualisms of structure and agency, determination and voluntarism although remains trapped in a duality of structure and agency. Archer's (2000) morphology and analytical dualism provides a more fluid and less constricting analysis between the poles on a spectrum of agency and structure but undertheorizes practice. King (2000) discusses Giddens's postulate of the existence of virtual structures to explain how social relations are stretched across time-space to reproduce the system and intuitions which Giddens (1998: 65) sees as 'the most deeply layered practices constitutive of social systems'. King (1998) ends with the assessment that Giddens's baroque structuration theory is a form of theoretical rococo, whose curlicues and arabesques are limited to solidify structure and neglect the relational, knowledgeable lay actors interacting with other knowledgeable actors.

Social practice theorists, from Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990), to more recent work by Reckwitz (2002), Schatzki (1996, 2001, 2002), Shove (2010), Shove and Pantzar (2005) and Warde (2005), have all sought a middle level between agency and structure. One attempt to occupy the middle meso level between structure and agency is provided by communities of practice but case-studies is the third approach to practice emerges in the twentieth century, in response to emerging problems of theory as some researcher's self-conscious attempt to overcome the increasing polarization between instrumental and practical tendencies in social and political theory and practice.

The practical turn in sociology represents a shift from a philosophy of praxis to a sociology of practice. Sociological frameworks concerned with practice critically diverged from the philosophy of praxis and sought to incorporate elements from other theoretical traditions, particularly linguistics. The sociology of practice contains the conceptual resources necessary to address what had been a major question for the philosophy of praxis, that is, the relationship between large-scale historical processes and subjective experiences. Practice enters the vocabulary of social scientific enquiry and figures in different strands of social science through the 1980 and 1990s. At the close of the twentieth century Theodore Schatzki and his Wittgensteinian theory of practice is found in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (Schatzki et al., 2001). Shove et al (2012) examine the rise, transformation and fall of social practices and the multilevel dynamic of practices such as driving, emergence of frozen foods, hula hooping to bring abstract concepts ground in empirical case studies.

Theories of practice have as yet untapped potential for understanding change (Shove 2003; 2004; 2010). Realizing their potential depends on developing a means of systematically exploring processes of transformation and stability within social practices and between them. Schatzki (1996: 12) argues practice theories 'present pluralistic and flexible pictures of the constitution of social life that generally oppose hypostatized unities, root order in local contexts, and/or successfully accommodate complexities, differences and particularities' (1996: 12) as 'both social order and individuality [. . .] result from practices' (1996: 13). For Reckwitz (2002: 245-6), the appeal of practice theories is they incorporate an appreciation of cultural phenomena beyond acting rationally and following norms. Practice gives a theoretical architecture for a holistic, contextual, situated and relational approach to understanding social phenomena. Nicolini (2012) adds practice theory has its importance in activity, is embodied and material, sees individuals as agentic carriers of practice, problematises knowledge, meaning and discourse, and reaffirms the centrality of power and interests.

Schatzki (1996) makes a distinction between practice as a coordinated entity and practice as performance. The first notion is of 'practice as a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings'. Examples are cooking practices, voting practices,

industrial practices, recreational practices, and correctional practices. To say that the doings and sayings forming a practice constitute a nexus is to say that they are linked in certain ways. Three major avenues of linkage are involved: (1) through understandings, for example, of what to say and do; (2) through explicit rules, principles, precepts and instructions; and (3) through what I will call “teleoaffective” structures embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions and moods’ (Schatzki, 1996: 89).

The second notion is practice as performance. As performance, practice is the performing of the doings and sayings which ‘actualizes and sustains practices in the sense of nexuses’ (Schatzki, 1996: 90). The reproduction of the nexus requires regular enactment. As Reckwitz (2002: 249–50) puts it: mental agents ‘carry’ practices.

Practice, inherently social, is aimed at changes in behaviour from the complexity of the nexus of practices. As Warde (2005) suggests ‘the source of changed behaviour lies in the development of practices’ (Warde, 2005: 140) and understanding their emergence, persistence and disappearance through the reproduction and transformation of social practices and the systems of practice that are formed’ (Shove et al 2005; 2).

Reckwitz (2002) argues ‘the lack of theoretically systematic analysis by some practice theorists’ are ‘good reason to argue there is something new in the social-theoretical vocabulary’ that practice offers’ and a ‘novel picture of the social, and human agency’. Practice theories are founded upon a different form of explaining and understanding action, by having recourse to symbolic structures of meaning. These symbolic structures mitigate between individual purposes, intentions and interest with social order as the product of the combination of single interests (*homo economicus*), and the collective norms and values or guiding normative value and consensus (*homo sociologicus*) (Reckwitz, 2002: 245). The ‘shared knowledge’ is the implicit, tacit and unconscious layers of knowledge that enables a ‘symbolic organisation of reality’ (Reckwitz, 2002: 246). As such, practice theories are opposed to the purpose-oriented and norm-oriented models of explaining action.

The unifying force of these theories is a focus and interest in the ‘everyday’ and the ‘life world’, an influence of the cultural turn in social theory, the late Wittgenstein, early

Heidegger, mid Weber with an under theorized inheritance. The practice turn has also seen the application of action-focused theories to Action Research, and Participatory Action Research. The lacuna of these applied approaches at the recognition, theorisation and understanding of the authenticity of authorial voices, and a lack of theorised social, political and cultural context in favour of change and action.

Social Practice as inquiry aims to integrate the individual with her surrounding environment whilst assessing how context and culture relate to common actions and practices of the individual. Research can be developed as a specific theory of social practice through which is not defined by philosophical paradigms but by researchers' commitments to specific forms of social action.

Reckwitz (2002) arrives at the conclusion: a social-theoretical vocabulary as a heuristic device or a sensitizing framework for empirical research to open up a certain way of seeing and analysing social phenomena. The vocabulary would mould and change 'our' self-understanding and defining our positionality. Practice theory demands a fluidity, a connected contextual understanding of a loose network of praxelological thinking and an 'ethics of the good' (Schmid, 1998). To enable the development of practice theories we have orchestrated a format for producing new knowledge and developing practice.

Pantzar and Shove (2010) argue that webs of social practices emergent, generative and creative, such an approach has certain affinities with the notion of "social choreography" (Klien, 2007), a concept that positions efforts to steer and order social change as forms of creative and aesthetic intervention (Pantzar, 1989), rather than as deterministic exercises in social engineering.

Materials, competences and meanings are the elements of practice and Shove et al (2012) examine the emergence, persistence, shift and disappearance when connections between elements are made, sustained or broken. For example, imbedded social practices such as riding a bike to work gives way to using a car, as practices recruit, reproduce and defect across time. In examining practices connections, they discuss how bundles and complexes of practices form, persist and disappear. They draw a distinction between bundles of

practices loose-knit patterns based on co-location and co-existence, and complexes representing stiffer and more integrated arrangements including co-dependent forms of sequence and synchronisation. These 'flows' of practice across time and space involve practice and political questions. Shove et al (2012:8) makes an analytical distinction between practice-as-performance (carriers of practice) and practice-as-entity (competence, material and meaning). Nicolini (2006: 29) charts the running of practice like an underground river but as a process of practical displacement, deferral and abatement of practice.

Shove et al (2012: 10) contend that '[i]n picking our way through these [practices] debates we are broadly sympathetic to the view that that agencies and competences are distributed between things and people and that social relations are 'congealed' in the hardware of daily life'.

Research is a constant process and from the proposition that practices are the principle steering device of research through desire, knowledge and judgement, recruitment to a practice becomes a principal explanatory issue (Warde, 2005: 145).

Warde (2005: 149) concludes,

Finally, a turn to practice alters the importance of the type of research questions to be asked... This range of research questions suggests a parallel need for breadth in method and techniques of interpretation which are equally conditions for the development of a programme of research inspired by theories of practice.

Hui et al (2017) have five cross-cutting themes that pervade practice. Suffusing which means to spread over or through as with a liquid or gas and permeate practice. Threading through practices, spatially and temporally and the 'thickness' of threads and density of woven ties in practice. Largeness is the way practices connect in the changing connections and those people concerned as practitioners or participants. The nexus or constellation of practices carry these features. It is to 'zoom in' on the accomplishments of practice and to 'zoom out' to the relationships across space and time (Nicolini, 2012).

Having discussed the etymology, history and trajectory of practice theories, the task is to apply these theoretical and conceptual frameworks to empirical work. Practice approaches give 'prominence to situated, observable, and meaningful social occurrences performed linguistically, through bodily movement and with the contribution of material artefacts' and offer templates on how to study and reflect on the everyday (Nicolini, 2012, 2017:10). Practice theory allows 'a heightened epistemic flexibility within curricula' (Barnett, 2014) and a more reflexive role for knowledge. Practice enables the crossing of discipline and breaking of traditional boundaries of knowledge production (beyond interdisciplinary) to transdisciplinary ways by producing a socially extended and heightened epistemology.

Examining case studies of Practice Based Doctorates provides further illumination on practice-based doctorates. The first is a professional practice on a specific work-related issue, the second is a philosophical challenge to the theoretical architecture of a discipline, the third is a philosophical engagement with psycho-social health care. The explicit focus of this paper is having made the relationship between the practice theory literature and the methodology and epistemology of the practice-based doctorate. The next section shows how these doctorates take everyday practices of meaningful social occurrences and develop methodologically and epistemologically.

Methodology

Case-studies enable close inspection, connections and discourses. A case-study is a systematic inquiry that investigates a contextually specific phenomenon of relevance to current practice, using multifaced approaches to the collation of evidence and where there is often evident ambiguity between the phenomenon and the context (Hayes 2019: 173). Yin (2013) has written extensively on the use of case-study as a largely positivist methodological approach. Stake (1995) identifies intrinsic, instructional and collective case-studies. Intrinsic is studying a situation (e.g. hospital or a school) as an exemplary case or where people are struggling with difficult issues and problems. Instructional is a concept of

a particular phenomenon explored across several sites such as how assessment is approached across social work departments or schools. Collective is one or more sites to explore or gain an understanding of a phenomenon. This then follows Simons (2009) purpose of research as theory-led to test with a case-study, evaluative to test an innovation or development and ethnographic exploring an issue in detail. Case-studies enables the in-depth systematic interpretation of policy, experience and context, providing a means of examining the functional dynamics of experience, a lens to identify the process of active implementation of phenomena and a mechanism for making research data accessible to a wider audience, reflection for the interpreter and adaptation to events (Hayes 2019: 186). The cases presented are summaries as one would in the legal profession. The cases have the affinities of case-studies but the contextual detail is in the thesis. Cases have greater ability for accountable knowledge production due to the insider researcher and a socially extended epistemology by using practice-based research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Case One - The Quest for Permanence

This study examines the reunification of children in care with their birth families, and whether this can contribute to our understanding of permanence.

The existing literature on reunification reports poor success for reunification as a means of achieving permanence. In addition, the literature lacks accounts of the lived experience of the people involved. Therefore, the research questions were:

Considering children who have been looked after and are now reunified with their birth family: How can we understand the experience of children, their carers and their social workers? Secondly, what do these experiences tell us about permanence for Looked After children? Using an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) the experiences of 3 children, one parent and one grandparent, and their social workers were investigated. The aim was to understand the experience of these families who had been successfully reunited. Seven interviews were transcribed and analysed. IPA is deeply rooted in the experiences of the individual, which are interpreted in a questioning way, albeit while fundamentally accepting the participants account. IPA is thus particularly appropriate for exploring this research question. Ethical approval was granted by the University Professional Doctorate Programme ethics committee.

The interviews revealed the importance of the birth family bond; these family ties were sustained throughout a long period of separation. Contact was important in maintaining these ties, much of it unofficial. Reunification reinforced the children's sense of identity. Membership of the birth family and the support this provided contributed to their resilience and sense of permanence.

The families had to reconstruct family life: 'doing family'. Strong motivation was demonstrated from both carers and children. Equally important was the belief of the social workers that the families could change, and their tireless efforts to support the families through periods of difficulty. The local authority policy of exiting children from care provided the impetus for this process.

Commitment to the birth family formed a key underpinning value system for the social workers.

Factors emerged which both reinforce and challenge previous findings about successful reunification; key points are:

Children can be reunified at an older age and after a long period in care.

Contact is a very powerful factor, and unofficial contact helped keep the birth family ties alive.

The social worker has a key role as an agent for change.

The legal status of the placement (discharge of the care order) was extremely important to the families, as it confirmed that the social workers had confidence in them.

The implications for practice identified are:

1. The need for a strong professional assessment, using a strengths-based perspective.

2. Open-mindedness and the ability to see the potential for change. 3. Commitment to the process even when the going gets tough. 4. Acknowledgement of the strength of the family bond for some families. 5. Listening to the children, both spoken and unspoken messages (e.g. through behaviour). 6. Understanding the importance of the legal status of the placement.

The study demonstrated that permanence can be achieved for older children in inauspicious circumstances through reunification with the birth family.

Case Two - The paradox of career.

Career is an activity that occurs in-the-world-with-others, an interdependent social project which inevitably has political, sociological and philosophical dimensions. Such dimensions are rarely acknowledged within the literature, a literature that explores career via a dichotomous logic lacking in criticality. This project observes how the literature uncritically views career as paid work, thus promoting work as a perpetual vortex, pulling, appropriating, colonising and sucking within all that is viewed outside of its parameters of action. This project provides an exploration of 'career' via a broader lens of the life career, a career that encompasses a diverse range of social strands (Goffman, 1961). It is argued that such an analytic lens allows richer, more nuanced and critical readings of career to occur, a challenge to career as work that invariably serves the interests of capital. Via such a lens, the project also asserts how the articulation of social strands in a person's life evoke moments of paradox, complex articulations that push conception to contemplate conclusions that contradict the entities and nature of its own inquiry. The document argues that paradoxical moments are useful and revealing moments, an analytic that provides numerous and critical readings. The notion of paradox can therefore be a useful analytic for the recursive relationship between research and pedagogy. To demonstrate and illustrate the utility of such methodology the document provides longitudinal accounts of a small yet detailed sample of individuals from the last year of undergraduate study through to up to 3 years post-graduation, concluding that paradox is an ontological aspect of career articulation, where there is articulation there is paradox, an important observation to contribute to the literature, policy and pedagogical practice.

Case Three

In *The Master and His Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist proposes that an intrinsic aspect of human neurology has an undue influence on shaping culture and that this particular trait manifests itself in opposition to spirituality, art and the body. Examining these domains finds evidence for the cultural processes he warns of. Drawing on Lacanian theory, via the work of Slavoj Žižek, as a general template maps out the ideological landscape in which the features McGilchrist identifies are played out. The use of Lacanian theory is limited so that there can be a space for the development of McGilchrist's ideas.

The thesis looks at aspects of culture that manifest this ideological process and focuses on the delivery of psycho-social healthcare as an exemplar of it, on how overt statements of beneficence are ideologically grounded. State delivery of psycho-social care ignores the assumptions on which its methods are founded. This thesis addresses that lack. Any attempt to promote a definitive solution to this situation could become yet another ideological structure that merely compounds the problem. Solutions in areas beyond the symbolic network utilised by an ideology, areas that correspond to the Lacanian Real. In the daily lived experience of a subject, this can also be translated as the esoteric.

Discussion

These case-studies provide three visions of practice. These are cases of 'heightened epistemic flexibility' to provide a richly detailed epistemic motivation. Practice theory is a theoretical orientation towards the study of the social where the methodological element remains central. Nicolini (2017) suggests this is a pragmatic effort to re-specify the study and re-presentation of social phenomena in terms of networks, assemblages and textures of mediated practices. This change in epistemology produces a heightened epistemic reflexivity by including the researcher in the research conversation in professional activity, planning and discourses.

There are four strategies that can be used to conduct practice-based studies and demonstrate a 'heightened epistemic flexibility. Firstly, the analysis of the concerted accomplishment of orderly scenes of action and ways of understanding that action. Permanence, career and discourses are able to describe the textual description of action and the experience of these actions. Secondly, the examination of how scenes of action have been historically constituted. Adoption in social work, career in career guidance and the discourses of psycho-social interventions in health have a history and policy context that are not explicit in the experience of practice. Thirdly, the study of the cases of the development and disappearance of individual practices, charting practice and shows the study of practice and practitioner research. Finally, the inquiry into the co-evolution, conflict and interference of two or more practices is a detailed examination of practice-based investigation from a practitioner's point of view.

The first case-study is an examination of the concerted accomplishment of orderly scenes of action and the historical constitution of these scenes of action, and the way these practices have developed and disappeared. The case-study on social work examines orderly scenes of action in adoption, how these have been historically constituted how these changes and the interfaces of different practices. The case examines the practical functioning in fostering and adoption grounded in empirical study, with its own vocabulary and ethics. The field is an underground river where the flows of practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity are illuminated in the thoughts, actions and behaviour of professionals striving for a quest for permanent placements for care experienced community.

The second case-study starts from an analysis of concerted accomplishment of orderly scenes of action in a specific disciplinary area and how these scenes of action that have been historically constituted and developed. The conflict of emerging practices and the established practises provide the fertile ground for this practice-based professional doctorate. The carriers of practices in careers are explored and the relationships across practice activity demonstrated.

The third case study falls into this strategy as the interference of two practices, the philosophy of McGilcrist and Žižek, and psycho-social health care. The conflict of these practices provides fertile ground for reinvigorating the social and of critically engaging with the practice of psycho-social health care. The thickness, largeness, and nexus of practices are neatly shown in competing systems of care.

These case studies provide a richer, thicker, more convincing and compelling cases of practice-based research. This invitation to see these cases zoom in to see the accomplishments of practice, zoom out to discern practice' relationships across space and time; and produce diffracting machinations that enrich our understanding through thick textual renditions of mundane practices (Nicolini, 2012). The zooming out of case-study two deals with the 'distributedness of ontological relations' and the mediated knots of practice in a career situation. The expanding hermeneutic circle (Nicolini, 2012: 234) provide the 'wider picture' of practices. The third case-study provides a lens to explore the interfaces between competing discourses.

Having reviewed the theories of practice, this leads to Pread's (1981) 'daily paths and life paths of individuals and the practice and dominant projects they carry'. Dominant projects are influential on multiple fronts at once. In concentrating priorities and energies, they focus time and attention in some directions and not others, and that individuals' lives are woven into the reproduction of dominant societal institutions. The situatedness of practice, the historical emergence of practices, their consolidation and the conflict, febrile and abrasive relationship these cases have with existing discourses are the original contribution made.

The cases are illustrative of the practice literature. The first is a phenomenological study based on 7 interviews on parents, children and social workers that related the experience of the individuals involved. The second is a discursive analysis of what is meant by 'career'. The third about the connection between social care and Lacanian theory and its ramification. They are reflective studies on everyday practice in meaningful social occurrences. The practice turn lifts the studies out of traditional discipline boundaries, focuses on the practices of everyday discourse and is a heightened epistemic flexibility on

what counts as knowledge in practice. The practice of the everyday challenges taken for granted assumptions and conceptualisations, creating new ways of looking at established practices, new conceptual tools, methodologies, methods and frameworks. The uncertainty of the doctoral journey provides a practice focus that brings alive these debates.

Conclusion

Social Practice applies to concrete historical situations, the mediations of contemporary theoretical development, the fear, uncertainty and doubt of the current situation for an embodied, cultural, material understanding of contemporary patterns and trends in human activity, guided by a value-based critique.

Practices then are approaches that give prominence to situated, observable, and meaningful social occurrences performed linguistically, through bodily movement and with the contribution of material artefacts. They are the regimes of doings and sayings rather than what people do and say. So, practice approaches do not look for behaviour, and motivations inside people, and step away from reified concepts of psycho-dynamic approaches, towards how regimes of actions are knotted together and what this implies in terms of agency, meaning and empowerment. It is flow and sequence, and the learning process. Research has a heightened epistemic flexibility, avoiding 'epistemic violence' (Liegghio 2013) and 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker 2010), and creating more democratic, experiential and inclusive knowledges.

Practice theory allows 'a heightened *epistemic flexibility* within curricula' (Barnett 2014) and a more reflexive role for knowledge. Practice enables the crossing of discipline and breaking of traditional boundaries of knowledge production (beyond interdisciplinary) to transdisciplinary ways. Costely (2019) suggests increased flexibility in the way research is approached and the range of methods used to immerse research into Schön's swampy

lowlands of applied research to rethink research in the areas of practice. The practice turn enables acute, surgical, forensic and flexible approaches to everyday phenomena. It crosses discipline boundaries drawing from a range of theoretical and epistemological insights from across social sciences and humanities. The vocabulary, self-understanding and positionality in social practices is evidenced in these cases.

A focus on 'practice' recognizes ontological features of the postmodern without succumbing to epistemological relativism in practice studies. The future areas for development in social practice are for an examination of Communities of Practice to explicate and expound the Social Practice. For the practice focus to be applied to empirical areas such as doctoral education, nursing, education, public health and for the 'practice' (or ways of conducting research) of practice research to be investigated.

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