

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Choosing Schatzki and Freire**

Over the past 20 to 30 years I observed that some teachers were keen to engage in school-based research while others were not. I wished to explore whether a teacher's attitude was shaped mainly by intrinsic or extrinsic forces, what different teachers thought about practitioner research, and whether this was consistent across different settings. This interest led me to examine the degree to which context might play in shaping a teacher's stance.

I believe that teachers' work, including their endeavours as practitioner researchers, does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it is influenced or shaped by the unique environment in which each teacher operates. A broad network of variables, ranging from the local and tangible to the more global and intangible directly or indirectly has an impact on the work teachers do. For example, students exhibiting different levels of interest and engagement, the availability of resources, the pressure to complete the syllabus or revise a certain topic, the need to complete administrative duties, and write reports or communicate with parents, could influence a teacher's work on a day-to-day basis. In addition, emerging technologies, new policy initiatives, the faculty's vision and mission, populist beliefs and parental pressure, could also have considerable impact. A teacher's own background will also significantly shape their work. As Campbell and McNamara (2009) state, "a complex web of skills, types of knowledge and professional dispositions and attitudes" makes up the anatomy of teaching (p.20).

Consequently, in order to be effective in the classroom, teachers need to develop a clear and deep understanding of their local setting and the nexus in which it exists, contemplating the multifarious factors that might both impede or enhance their work, while considering how they might perhaps challenge some of the prevailing orthodoxies. This is especially so when conducting research in the classroom or school or implementing innovation and change in order to effect improvement. On the most basic level, for instance, teachers are constantly reminded to consider the particular needs and interests of their students in order to effectively engage them in the classroom.

I have therefore chosen to integrate the theories of two researchers, which I view as complementary, to frame my study. A strong analytical framework is provided by Schatzki for understanding practice relationships, and by Freire, for understanding transformational practices. Schatzki's theory is used to investigate the diverse contexts in which teachers function as practitioner researchers while Freire's ideas are used to study how teachers themselves contemplate these contexts in order to effect change.

### **A Critical Analysis of Context**

This work is informed by a close reading of both Schatzki and Freire who both advocate a critical analysis of context: for Schatzki, to understand a phenomenon, and for Freire to contemplate action for the future. In order to best understand a social phenomenon, Schatzki advocates it be studied in the context in which it transpires, specifically the 'site of the social' - a nexus of human practices and material arrangements. Freire, meanwhile describes a process of 'conscientization', whereby practitioners, through careful consideration of context, might effect change and social good through praxis – action based on reflection. In illuminating teachers' experiences as practitioner researchers I examine both the context in which it transpires and the value teachers assign practitioner research, including its potential for the future. Therefore Schatzki's theory of the site of the social and Freire's theory of conscientization are juxtaposed to provide a useful scaffold and theoretical perspective to frame this study. This is coupled with the constructivist idea that knowledge is locally constituted and situated. Like Freire, constructivists support the view that the purpose of learning is the construction of an understanding of life not merely the regurgitation of 'banked' information which is usually someone else's interpretation of the world.

By adopting Schatzki's site ontology (2002, 2003, 2005, 2010), it is suggested throughout this study that any practitioner research enterprise in a school should be viewed as a practice that occurs inside other practices. Any illumination of this practice needs to take into account other social phenomena that might be connected with it. The practice a teacher engages in as a practitioner researcher will be constructed and nuanced according to the practical understandings, rules and structures that characterise the social site through which the practice emerges. Concurrently, by embracing Freire's theory of conscientization it is understood that teachers need to develop a critical consciousness of the world and participate

in transforming acts in order to realize the potential value and emancipatory capacity of practitioner research. Following is a brief discussion of the two main theories that frame my thinking.

### **Site Ontologies and the Site of the Social**

Social life is defined by Schatzki as “human coexistence” and a phenomenon as social “when it comprises some state of human coexistence” (2001, p.350). Practitioner research, accordingly, may be construed as an activity or practice occurring within social life. Indeed, Stenhouse (1985) has described research as “a threat of heresy” for those yearning tradition for it “brings in its trail a press towards social change” (p.8). Social ontology examines the basic structure of social life and social phenomena and, according to Schatzki (2005), has traditionally been divided into two camps: individualists and societists. In recent decades, though, a new approach to social ontology has emerged called site ontologies. Schatzki advocates an ontology of this type. He offers a new approach to understanding what constitutes social life and how it is transformed, which he calls the site of the social (Schatzki, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2010). He believes social life is tied to a context, or a site, of which it is inherently a part, theorizing that the site of social life is composed of a nexus (a closely connected group) of human practices and material arrangements, “one immense transmutating web of practices and arrangements” (2010, p.130).

As described by Schatzki (2003, 2005), individualists ultimately hold that social facts and phenomenon are constructions of individual people. Societists, on the other hand, oppose this belief. They hold that social phenomena can only be adequately analyzed and explained by reference to facts and features of collections or groups of people. Explanations cannot be reduced to the actions of the particular individuals involved. It is something more, beyond, or other than that. For societists, social phenomena have a nature that is distinct from those of the individuals populating them.

Site ontologies borrow from both the individualists and societists, forging a path between the two. They contextualise “the actions, mental states, and relations of individuals within wider social vistas ... [while] espousing a continuity of being between this individualistic stuff and the wider vista forming its context” (Schatzki, 2003, p.181). In common with societist views,

site ontologies hold that social phenomena cannot merely be reduced to constructions of individuals and their relations. Social life is inherently tied to a type of context in which it occurs. Practices are not seen as the property of individuals, but are instead the property of the social site. Schatzki asserts that “social phenomena can only be analysed by examining the sites where human coexistence transpires” (p.176). But at the same time, site accounts acknowledge individuals as constituents of such formations and recognize that individuals can have considerable agency. Schatzki argues that “the post-humanists are wrong to debunk the integrity, unique richness, and significance of human agency” (2002, p.xv).

A context is defined by Schatzki as “an arena or set of phenomena that surrounds or immerses something and enjoys powers of determination with respect to it” (2005, p.468). A “site” is a type of context. The term refers broadly to the many kinds of spaces humans might inhabit: spatial, temporal, and teleological. It is “*where* things exist and events happen” (2002, p.63). A site might encompass things such as language, the span of a life, or the set of activities that make up a practice. Adopting Schatzki’s views, practitioner research, then, occurs or transpires in a site.

Schatzki provides three explanations of site. The first refers to the location where something is or takes place. As human activities occur in “time and objective space” a site may be a spatial or temporal location. A site might also possess teleological and activity-place locations. Teleological location refers to where an act fits into the hierarchies of “ends, purposes and tasks”. An activity-place space is where an activity takes place within the structure or “layout of places and paths in the setting where it is performed” (2003, p.176). So the site where practitioner research transpires might include a meeting in a staffroom, a discussion with an academic partner, a classroom activity, and a teacher working at a home computer. Additionally, each of these activities has a teleological location within the hierarchy of actions and tasks that constitutes the practitioner research cycle.

The second sense of ‘site’ encompasses a wider scene than the first sense, Schatzki stating that a site might also be located “within the broader region or set of phenomena in which it exists or takes place” (2003, p.176). To illustrate this idea, I would suggest that practitioner research, conducted by a group of teachers in a school, might also be part of a national drive towards innovation. The third sense of site encompasses “that realm or set of phenomena (if

any) of which it is *intrinsically* a part” (2003, p.177). In this instance, practitioner research might be seen as intrinsically part of an education department’s professional learning agenda and practice.

### **Sets of Practices and Arrangements**

Various site ontologies exist. The ontology Schatzki advocates treats the site of the social as a mesh or nexus of practices and arrangements. So central to Schatzki’s idea of site is “a set of practices”. By practices, Schatzki means “organized spatial-temporal manifolds of human activity” (2010, p.129). Examples might include political practices, educational practices and research practices. He states that the set of actions that composes a practice is organized by three phenomena, namely, (1) understandings of how to do things, (2) rules, and (3) a teleoaffective structure (2003, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010). Schatzki describes a teleoaffective structure as “an array of end, projects, uses (of things), and even emotions that are acceptable or prescribed for participants in the practice” (2005, pp.471-472). This idea has been elucidated by Lloyd (2010) as describing why things are done taking into account the feelings, values, beliefs and hopes which influence the way a practice proceeds (p.249).

To apply and illustrate Schatzki’s theory of a practice then, the actions that constitute practitioner-research in secondary schools, can be seen as being organized perhaps by: (1) understandings of how to do research, including such things as how to observe classroom behaviour, record observations, plan, formulate strategies, develop instruments, communicate ideas clearly with others, implement plans, analyze and assess student artifacts, reflect, document, discuss and present findings; (2) rules such as instructions, requirements and guidelines pertaining to developing a research proposal, applying for grants, gaining the requisite approval and permission from authorities to conduct research in a school or classroom, human ethics, engaging an academic partner, use of funds, teacher workload, timetabling, and publishing research findings, and; (3) a teleoaffective structure that embraces such ends as developing teacher capacity, improving teaching practice, enhancing student performance, effecting social good, sharing research findings, enhancing career or promotional prospects, and developing leadership potential.

A practice, as articulated by Schatzki, “always exhibits a set of ends that participants should or may pursue ... and a selection of tasks that they should or may perform” (2002, p.80). However, because these are situated in a context and might need to accommodate unique or unexpected events that occur, they may not be always regular or routine. Therefore central to Schatzki’s notion of practice is the idea of prefiguration where the form a practice takes is determined by the social site in which it transpires. A site will act to either enable or constrain a practice. In this investigation I examine the different factors that enable and constrain teacher practitioner research and explore how these factors might prefigure and then shape the form practitioner research takes in different contexts and settings.

Further, Schatzki explains that a teleoaffective structure only exists when general agreement reigns about what is and is not acceptable in a practice. But such agreements are not immutable or indisputable. “They evolve along with innovations, changes in circumstances, and the results of disputations” (2002, p.84). He elaborates:

The existence of disagreement of such magnitude that people do not largely concur and are split into two or more conflicting camps entails that the practice has been destroyed, is dividing into two or more different practices, is about to coalesce, or never existed – despite appearances – in the first place. (2002, p.84)

It is therefore particularly significant in this study to confirm whether practitioner research is burgeoning as a unified practice across cultures, or even between and within schools, or in fact functions as a set of disparate practices, understood differently by various people in different settings. As Crossley and Watson (2003) have described, when undertaking a comparative study it is important to illuminate such differences in order to circumvent problems of conceptual equivalence.

Schatzki refers to ‘material arrangements’ which he explains are set-ups of material objects. Such arrangements might include four types of entity: human beings, artefacts (objects produced by humans), other organisms, and things (other objects). The site of the social is a mesh of practices and material arrangements and all human co-existence and social activity takes place or happens in “practice-arrangement bundles” (2002, 2009). A bundle is a very powerful metaphor used by Schatzki to illustrate the site where various practices and arrangements intersect, mesh or group. Schatzki states, “human coexistence transpires as part

of, not practices alone, but material arrangements as well ... [it] is not practices, on the one hand, and material arrangements on the other, but a *mesh* of practices and arrangements” (2005, p.473). Furthermore, practices, arrangements, and meshes intrinsically interlace within an “immense plenum” (2009, p.41).

Adopting Schatzki, it can be seen how the practice-arrangement bundle which comprises a group of teachers conducting practitioner-research in a school links and overlaps with the mesh that constitutes the classroom, the subject department or faculty, and the school administration. Further, this larger net of practice-arrangement bundles that comprise a secondary school is tied to similar nets that are other secondary schools, as well as to those that form clusters or regions, an education system, and a state or national government. Schatzki explains, “All these meshes, nets, and confederations form one gigantic metamorphosing web of practices and orders, whose fullest reach is coextensive with sociohistorical space-time” (2005, p.473). Consequently, any social phenomenon is a “feature or slice” of this overall practice-order web. In adopting a Schatzkian view, an analysis of practice cannot be reduced to its “cognitive features”, explains Lloyd (2010), rather, a researcher needs to consider “how the practice is constructed corporeally and socially and how these features are interwoven and mesh together within the social site” (p.249)

The practice-arrangement bundles that comprise practitioner research within a school overlap, connect and interact with practice-arrangement bundles that comprise other bundles. These interactions might cohere or conflict. Conflict exists, “when the perpetuation of one is incompatible with the continuation of the other ... [and] the bundles are not mutually sustaining” (Schatzki, 2005, p.474). While it is envisaged that practitioner research ultimately will translate to improvement in classroom practices, and that the two practices, research and teaching, should cohere, this study illustrates instances where the two practices in fact conflict, practitioner research, described by participants, as imposing on the “core business” of teaching.

As summed up by Crosby (2002), the site of the social is “significant in its plasticity” and Schatzki’s theory of the social site is able to account for the phenomena of movement, rearrangement, and reorganization that he believes are inherent in social life. Actions,

intentions, projects, and ends, Schatzki explains, are both tied to and altered in response to the contingent flow of events that results from the intertwining and conjunction of human doings with material ones. “An account of the social site is inherently one of ceaseless movement and incessant rearrangement and reorganization” (Schatzki, 2002, pp.189-190).

### **The Perpetuation of Practices**

Of considerable relevance to this study, Schatzki conjectures how practices originate and are then perpetuated. He postulates that practices result from existing practices and that a practice learned and carried on elsewhere can be applied in new circumstances. He posits, “other practices are reinstated and carried forward amid new material arrangements with a new cast of humans” (2005, p.475). Dependent on the peculiarities of the new circumstances and dispositions of the people involved, practices might evolve and change. Schatzki writes, “understandings might subtly change (consciously or unconsciously), different rules might be promulgated ... ends might be ... emphasized differently ... and a different array of projects might be deemed acceptable (either intentionally or not)” (p.475). He believes that “generally” what will be acceptable or prescribed in any practice will always be “subject to discursive determination” (p.475).

In order for a practice to be sustained, individuals are incorporated into and carry forward the practice component of a practice-arrangement bundle. Schatzki states, “Carrying on the variant practices requires drawing on acquired know-how, acquiring additional know-how, and becoming familiar with whatever different rules, ends, projects, and equipment are germane to the new practice-arrangement bundle” (2005, p.475). He further argues that practices are not static but “evolve as circumstances change, opportunities and problems arise, personnel changes, new ideas arise, and so on” (p.475). These changes may be intentional or unintentional and participants may be conscious or unconscious of them. Sometimes, for example, there might be a “conscious intervention” from inside or outside a practice to rework goals, alter rules or redesign projects.

Analogous with Schatzki, other researchers (Freire, 1974, 1998; Kemmis, 2008, 2009, 2010; Lloyd, 2010; Somekh, 2006, 2011) also postulate that practices are understood, develop and evolve contingent on the setting in which they transpire. Lloyd postulates that practices have

“a social, historical and political trajectory ... [and] are built up over time, place and context” (p.251). Kemmis describes practices as being in an “endless dance”. He states that they are “restlessly made and re-made ... in each different time and place ... [being] transformed as well as reproduced” (2009, p.466). Contemporary practitioners “inherit” practices already formed and in turn become the custodians and developers of the practice (Kemmis, 2009, 2010). New understandings may emerge dependent on the context in which the practice is oriented and conducted. Freire describes how a community might adopt and modify a practice from a foreign culture by giving it “a kind of ‘purifying bath’” (1998, p.103) so that it retains something of its originality, particularly in its formal elements, but acquires a “new coloration”. Referring specifically to practitioner research, Somekh speculates that a practice evolves dependent on context and the “values and culture” of the group involved. She explains:

The history of the group, its traditions, the kinds of tools it uses to mediate its activities, its dominant discourses and regimes of truth, the institutional structures in which it is framed and the political constructions of power and ideology that enable and constrain its activities, all play a part in determining how action research methodology is shaped to the group’s purposes and the kinds of knowledge that are generated by action research projects. (p.31)

Llyod (2010) also notes that the ways of knowing that are interwoven through a practice are “implicit and culturally specific” (p.248). Adopting Schatzki, and the above confederates, I argue strongly that practitioner research has evolved in different guises within the different contexts and settings explored in this study.

Schatzki states that a researcher studying an organization must first identify the actions that compose it. The researcher must then identify the practice arrangement bundles of which these actions are part. The next task would be to discover whether these bundles cohere or compete. Then finally, the researcher should identify other nets of practice-arrangement bundles to which the ones under study are closely tied. Summing this idea up he states, “To grasp the ties among these nets is to study, among other things, commonalities and orchestrations in their actions ... including harmonious, competitive, and conflictual interactions ... and the desires, beliefs, and other attitudes that participants in one net have toward the other” (2005, p.476). But he qualifies that it is desirable and feasible for the

investigator to provide an “overview” of the social phenomena and their workings related to the research interest rather than “track and register the potentially labyrinthine complexity of bundles” (p.477).

Seemingly paralleling the idea that policy as practised often varies from policy as espoused, Schatzki notes that the actions workers perform as shop floor practices, based on their “know-hows” and the “end-project-use combinations” they deem acceptable to carry out, sometimes vary from the “official strictures” the organization’s formal structures dictate. Hence, the practices that are bundled together in the organization are “descendant, sometimes considerably altered versions of practices that were appropriated at the origin of the organization (or subsequently incorporated or initiated)” (2005, p.478). This notion has particular relevance when practitioner research is implemented top-down as a policy initiative across or within schools. The degree of facility or autonomy participants have in determining the nature and scope of the practice and to what extent the practice varies from official strictures is consequently explored within this study. If policy as intended and policy as practised are dissimilar, policy makers would need to consider the implications of, and the reasons for, this occurrence. This thesis investigates issues such as communication of policy, teachers’ acceptance or resistance to the policy initiative, the allocation of resources, the training of teachers, the transmission of practices, and the effectiveness of these practices in the classroom and school.

### **Human Agency and Agential Humanism**

Schatzki does acknowledge that humans, especially their mental states, have considerable play in shaping practices, while still asserting that practices are non-individualist phenomena. People perform the actions that compose a practice but the organization of a practice is not a collection of individual people. The organization of a practice is the open-ended set of actions that composes a practice. This organization though will be “differentially incorporated” into the minds of those participating in the practice. Schatzki asserts that, “Different combinations of a practice’s organizing elements are incorporated into different participant’s minds due to differences in participant’s training, experience, intelligence, powers of observation, and status” (2005, p.480). Supporting this notion, this study demonstrates the way in which various participants understand, and practice, practitioner

research and argues that their different interpretations might be attributable to participants' disposition, training, exposure and a range of other background factors.

While asserting that humans do possess considerable agency, Schatzki illustrates how non-human entities in the world also have agency, thus establishing a connection between the individualists and the societists. While many theorists equate agency with free will, Schatzki defines agency simply as "doing". He defines "doings" as a kind of event, one that accomplishes something within a larger chain of events. He states, "To say that Y is attributable to the agency of X is to say that X either did Y or did something that determined Y" (2002, p.191). The entities performing doings could be human or non-human. A natural catastrophe, for instance, might impact on the way a practice evolves. He states, "The doings of humans and nonhumans combine to make the social site the scene of continuously metamorphosing orders and perpetually performed, and often evolving, activities" (p.190). Therefore his ontology accommodates both humanists and post-humanists alike. It acknowledges that "nonhumans do things as much as humans do" (p.191). Social change therefore can be construed as affairs of agency, both human and nonhuman.

As noted by Crosby (2002), Schatzki makes an interesting transition from the concept of human agency to the concept of agential humanism. While human agency relates to "doings", doing Y or causing Y to happen, the goal of agential humanism, on the other hand, is "creating a better – more human, just, and hospitable – world" (Schatzki, 2002, p.193). In common with Schatzki, Friere too is concerned with the humanization of the world, describing such a state as humankind's "utopia" (1985, p.70). For Freire it is his central thesis. Like Shatzki, Freire sees social practice and change being intrinsically linked to the context in which it occurs. For instance, in reference to education, Freire states that no practice "takes place in a vacuum, only in a real context – historic, economic, political, and not necessarily identical to any other context" (p.12). He acknowledges that social practices and phenomena interlace, and that one social phenomenon might exercise a limiting control over the other. Exemplifying this he states:

It is not education that molds society to certain standards, but society that forms itself by its own standards and molds education to conform with those values to sustain it ... any radical and profound transformation of an educational system can only take place when society is also radically transformed. (1985, p.170)

This suggests that humans alone do not have deterministic power over a practice unless they further enjoy powers of determination over the phenomena that surrounds or immerse that practice. Certainly, Freire believes that there exists a simultaneous conditioning of creator and product. While people create history and culture, history and culture condition them (Freire, 1985, p.30; Glass, 2001, p.17).

### **A World Becoming**

Like Schatzki, Freire (1974, 1985, 1998) also sees the social world as constantly evolving and in a state of flux, rather than as a fixed or static entity. He declares that in trying to understand the world the critical and careful student should not restrict themselves to a definite or definitive profile of the social reality, because for reality to exist, “it must be becoming” (1985, p.158). Through careful study and analysis of the context in which social life occurs, Freire believes it is possible to effect social change for good, as articulated in his theory of conscientization.

Freire describes a dialectical notion of power, where there are two positions, the oppressor and the oppressed, persons with power and persons without. Thereby, certain persons will have a “voice” while others transpire in “a culture of silence”. He declares though that domination is never so complete that power is experienced exclusively as a negative force. There are always “cracks, tensions and contradictions”. Furthermore, the relationship in a sense is enacted on both sides. Freire states, “It is not the dominator who constructs a culture and imposes it on the dominated. This culture is the result of the structural relations between the dominated and the dominators” (1985, p.72). Such relationships imply that the dominated introject the “cultural myths of the dominator”, that they unconsciously adopt the values or attitudes of those in power. Accordingly, the oppressed have to play a role in their own liberation, achieved through “conscientization”, which Freire describes as “the process in which human beings participate critically in a transforming act” (p.106).

### **A Theory of Conscientization**

Humans are distinct from other animals, Freire asserts, in that they are capable of reflecting upon their lives and relationship to the world (1974, 1985, 1998). They are able to achieve a

“consciousness” of the world, rather than remain merely determinate beings. It is therefore possible for humans “to think in terms of their liberation” (1985, p.68). Although an individual’s consciousness may be conditioned by those with “voice”, those in “power”, an individual is still capable of recognizing this and moving beyond this condition. Conscientization is viable, Freire states, “only because men’s [*sic*] consciousness, although conditioned, can recognize that it is conditioned” (p.69).

Teachers, perhaps unconsciously or unwittingly, often adopt and transmit the attitudes and values of the authorities, or those in power (Freire, 1974, 1985, 1998; Freire & Shor, 1987). Freire notes that education is political and that schools often function as agencies of social, economic, and cultural reproduction. He elaborates:

There are no neutral educators. What we educators need to know is the type of political philosophy we subscribe to and for whose interests we work ... Educators who do their work uncritically... have not yet grasped the political nature of education. (1985, p.180)

Freire asserts the teacher must ask, “What kind of politics am I doing in the classroom?” (Freire & Shor, 1987, p.46). Somekh (2006), Kemmis (2008), and Kemmis and Smith (2008) have echoed and perpetuated Freire’s view. Somekh argues that teachers, in developing practices inevitably become “agents of cultural reproduction” as they are “encultured” by the education system in which they function (p.179). Kemmis draws a distinction between “schooling”, exemplified by the institutional formation of learners to attain state-approved learning outcomes, and “education” which he states is a “moral and political endeavour” (p.17) performed in the interests of the students and for the good of mankind. Reflecting Freire, Kemmis emphasizes people need to develop a capacity to make such a distinction and form a critical view of schools.

Conscientization, as described by Freire, is first of all “the effort to enlighten men [*sic*] about the obstacles preventing them from a clear perception of reality” (1985, p.89). The oppressed, those without a voice, those whose consciousness has been conditioned by authorities in power, need to supersede their introjected reality. There needs to be a critical examination of the social world. Freire requires people “to engage in a kind of historic-cultural political psycho-analysis” (Glass, 2001, p.16). But it is not a case of what exists

must exist. Individuals need to see that social life as it currently transpires need not be the only experience or absolute destiny. Rather than adopt a fatalistic position, through a close study of context, individuals can envisage possibilities and plan future action to effect change and social good. Freire talks about “the untested feasibility, the constructable future”, (1985, p.154; Freire and Shor, 1987, p.153) as a response to any given or problematic situation. He states, “one must apprehend the real world, not as something that only exists, but as something that is to be” (1985, p.169). Stenhouse (1985) too believed that people might better anticipate the outcome of their actions by carefully defining the context, the “complex web of social variables” (p.10), in which they act.

Conscientization though involves more than overcoming a false consciousness. In order to change a situation, human beings must translate their intentions, the “untested feasibility”, into action. Conscientization involves “action upon” reality in addition to a “consciousness of” reality. Freire explains how critical consciousness is achieved not through an intellectual effort alone but through praxis, which he describes as “the authentic union of action and reflection” (1985, p.87). He further states that, “praxis is not blind action ... it is action and reflection” (pp.154-155), maintaining that there should always be unity between practice and theory, action and reflection. Furthermore, Freire (1974, 1985, 1998) describes an ongoing, continuous process, which is in flux and is continually evolving. He states, on throwing light on an accomplished action “... authentic reflection clarifies future action, which in its given time will have to be open to renewed reflection” (1985, p.156). Freire believes that human beings are “beings of praxis” and thus capable of “transforming the world” and giving it meaning (p.155). He states:

If this historical-cultural world were a created, finished world, it would no longer be susceptible to transformation ... human beings ... and the world ... come together as unfinished products in a permanent relationship, in which human beings transform the world and undergo the effects of their transformation. (1998, p.145)

In advocating praxis within practitioner research, Kemmis (2008, 2009) appears to bridge both Freire and Schatzki. Very much like Freire, he insists teachers think about what their practice will mean in the world. He believes they must choose between either conducting themselves as the “operatives” of the education system (2008) or, through praxis, work towards the good for students and the good for humankind, the stance he champions.

Adopting a markedly Schatzkian view, Kemmis describes society as “a social space constructed in an organic tissue of structures, practices, and relationships that enable and constrain people” (p.18). He believes that any practice is shaped not only by its internal knowledge, capabilities, and values but by “external meta-practices”. He labels this network of relationships “practice architecture”. Kemmis believes humans have considerable agency to shape practices and change the world, but function in a world that is “pre-formed”. There will always be certain enablers and constraints acting upon them. He states, “[M]eta-practices function as practice architectures that enable and constrain possibilities for action in education” (p.22). Teachers need be critical of existing structures, practices, and relationships and the effects they might cause, both positive and negative. They must consider the consequences, good or ill, that might “ripple out” from any action they may take. Praxis then is action in which “the practitioner is aware of acting in history” (p.20).

While I would agree that teachers, generally speaking, do not subscribe to the rhetoric of ‘being oppressed’, they do express considerable frustration that they are constrained in many aspects of their work. Freire’s philosophies are applicable in this regard. Teachers would benefit through reflexively considering the type of politics they are “doing in the classroom” (Freire and Shor, 1987, p.46) and reflecting on the meta-practices in which they function in order to contemplate “the untested feasibility, the constructable future” (Freire, 1985, p.154). Ultimately it will be the students who will benefit, if teachers are able to translate such reflection into action.

### **Conclusion**

Framing the experiences of teachers as practitioner researchers through site ontology serves several purposes. Providing an account of context provides not only a background to the study but is central to understanding how practitioner research occurs. It enables us to understand better the complexity of the phenomenon and how it has been shaped by various socio-cultural, historical and political forces. The frameworks presented here serve to provide a foundation on which to base the empirical study that follows. Furthermore, Freire’s theory of conscientization provides a backdrop to examine the extent practitioner research is valued by teachers as a means of effecting change within and beyond their classrooms. Freire encourages practitioners through research to move themselves and others

beyond ‘banking’ and the ‘culture of silence’ into a new space of conscientization and therefore critical pedagogy which is informed by research and praxis and results in liberatory education.

This research which compares teachers’ experiences in schools within and between Singapore and NSW has provided me a rich field of events and interactions which I have then related to the theories of Schatzki and Freire. Embracing Freire, this study does not seek to make value judgments or identify elements that are better or worse in one culture than the other. Rather the belief I share with Freire is that you cannot understand a people or their behaviour without some understanding of their culture or history (1985, p.181).

The following chapter explores important issues in the literature that are relevant to practitioner research identifying essential themes on which to base the interview questions, analysis of the data, and organization of the thesis. The theoretical framework based on the ideas of Schatzki and Freire was then applied across these themes or categories in the cross-analysis and discussion of the data and in the conclusions of this thesis. The way in which the theoretical framework and the themes accordingly intersect is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

*The Relationship of the Theoretical Framework to the Themes that Emerged in the Literature*

Theoretical Framework	Themes that emerged in the literature			
	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Etc.
Schatzki’s theory	☼	☼	☼	☼
Freire’s theory	☼	☼	☼	☼