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Turning base metal into gold: Transmuting art, practice, research, and experience into knowledge¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the theoretical underpinnings of an ongoing, innovative, arts-based social intervention research study in light of contemporary theory on knowledge production. It begins by outlining the nature of the study, which seeks to raise community awareness of domestic violence, and the context in which it is being conducted. Thereafter, it examines the relationship between social work and art and argues that the situated knowledge of Mode 2 knowledge production is more useful for social workers - and artists - engaged in participatory community practice than science-driven Mode 1.

Keywords: Social work, knowledge production, community arts practice

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There has been ongoing debate in social work as to what constitutes valid knowledge on which to base practice. Despite ongoing attempts to ground practice more firmly on sound research, social workers continue to resist scientific models of knowledge development as antithetical to their humanistic theoretical frameworks and practice-based approaches. Social workers, consequently, tend to draw on a strong humanistic value base and a wide range of perspectives informed by diverse theories and points of view which they attempt to integrate into a holistic client or service-user centred approach to practice. They tend to value practice experience and collegial expertise as the first port of call rather than systematic research or formal studies of practice effectiveness. While most professions and occupations learn from and draw on their practice experience, over-reliance on informal knowledge can lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes and even misinformation. Further, it can lead to disregard for the client's or service-user's perspective with social workers drawing on their professional authority and subjective understanding and that of their colleagues. This form of practice runs the risk of heavy criticism from those who see virtue in basing practice on sound evidence (Gray, Plath and Webb, 2009). Most resistant to evidence-based practice are those who see social work as an art, though few have examined the synergies between social work and arts practice though England (1986) saw parallels in practice evaluation in social work and art criticism. He pointed to the subjectivity inherent in the social worker's 'personal use of self' and the dangers inherent in its value-based, humanistic approach. This paper explores the relationship between social work, community arts practice, and the new theory of knowledge production that distinguishes between two modes of research: discipline-based Mode 1 science-driven and interdisciplinary, engaged and collaborative Mode 2 knowledge development. While there are some parallels between the quantitative-qualitative debate within social work, Modes 1 and 2 distinguish not only

between approaches to research but also the context within which research is conducted and the infrastructure supporting it. The theory of knowledge production, as developed by Gibbons *et al.* (1994), purported to reflect a change in ‘doing science’ that was being driven not only by information technology but also by increasing calls for socially accountable, useable knowledge that directly addresses social problems. Thus within the sciences there was a perceptible shift towards collaborative research with industry partners involving several disciplines seeking to find solutions to concrete real-world problems. Similarly, within the social work context, Marsh and Fisher (2008) have noted the emergence of the “‘relevance’ criterion as a quality marker for knowledge’ (p. 974) in the development of an evidence base for social work. They identify Mode 2 as a framework which places the usefulness of research upfront and provides a helpful analysis for how the different forms of research might be made more practice relevant. We would argue that both qualitative and quantitative forms of research can be examined as part of the Mode 2 framework. Further, Marsh and Fisher (2008) suggest that Mode 2 offers a means by which tensions between practice relevance and knowledge producers might be more easily identified. This surely is the preferred model of social work. Thus the theory of knowledge production offers social work support for its favoured mode of doing - collaborative, engaged, participatory, service-user focused, and problem-centred - research that seeks to directly involve and address the needs of service providers and users.

The Safe at Home study that forms the subject of this paper is an example of Mode 2 knowledge production with its immediate concern being community attitudes to domestic violence. While domestic violence constitutes the context of this study, this is not a paper about domestic violence *per se*. Since the project is currently in the implementation stage of art making, it is too soon to draw conclusions as to the effectiveness of this long-term study

though the paper provides a brief report on the findings of the community-wide pre-intervention survey (Gray and Schubert, 2008; Schubert, Gray and Graham, 2009). Already into its fourth year, those involved accept that changing attitudes is a slow process and requires long-term commitment to community engagement. Therefore, this paper concerns the theoretical underpinnings of the study in the new theory of knowledge production in the belief that this vast and growing literature offers something of value to social work. Traversing as it does the terrain of social work and fine art, this interdisciplinary Mode 2 study is located on the common ground between social work and community arts practice, which, it was discovered, draw on the same pool of critical social science knowledge and share historical connections in the work of Jane Addams and the Settlement Movement as acknowledged by Lydia Rapoport (1968): 'Both social work and art can be conceived of as instruments of social change' (p.144)

The Safe at Home project

The Safe at Home project is an ongoing, innovative, social intervention research study being conducted in partnership with a community anti-violence network (the Network) that includes a range of domestic violence service providers in the area under study. The research site is located outside the academy in the broader community. The study brings together social work and fine arts researchers with social work taking the lead role in developing the research framework, partnership with the service network, community-wide pre- and post-intervention surveys, and community engagement activities. The project leader is a social worker and artist working with a Professor of Fine Arts to engage with the community around the production of the artworks and a Professor of Social Work providing guidance on the empirical and social dimensions of the research. Within Australia, a social work perspective on domestic violence includes a community-wide approach and involves

therapeutic counselling, including sexual assault and domestic violence, as well as community-based practice, for example, in community health teams, in which the project leader – a social work practitioner - has many years experience.

Ethics and safety clearance were obtained from the University of Newcastle's Human Research Ethics and safety committees with strong supports built into the study design. The ethical aspects are being constantly monitored by the Network practitioners. The study also meets the ethical requirements of the partner agencies regarding the safety and wellbeing of the research participants. Thus far no safety or ethical concerns have arisen in the conduct of the research.

The project examines the effectiveness of art-based intervention in changing community attitudes about domestic violence within a particular local government area (LGA) located in Australia's Hunter Valley, an area with a strong coalmining history. It is interdisciplinary in that it engages artists and social workers, who share an interest and focus on working in and engaging with the community to address social issues, problems or concerns. In this instance, the goal was to raise community awareness and, therefore, hopefully to prevent domestic violence through changing attitudes within this medium-sized rural community. A consequence of such whole-of-community responses is that one never knows who might participate or whether perpetrators might be reached, though the community-wide survey uncovered pro-perpetrating attitudes. Hence the ultimate goal of the Safe at Home project was to design and test a community-based intervention model based on artworks that evolved through conversations with community members and the issues they identified in collaboration with the artists and network partners. Given the study's purpose, an important step was the collection of baseline data on community attitudes to domestic violence via a community-wide survey that was mailed to 18,473

households across the LGA under study in April 2008 of which 1,505 (8.1%) were returned (Gray and Schubert, 2008; Schubert *et al.*, 2009). This was significantly better than the predicted 3% return rate and meant that 4% of the adult population responded to the survey. Several incomplete surveys were returned with comments written on the form. These responses were included in the analysis of results as the researchers believed that the comments reflected important community attitudes. The survey comprised fifty-six (56) questions that covered *inter alia* demographics, understanding and experience of domestic violence, and attitudes towards domestic violence. Space does not permit a full report of the survey findings but rather highlights some important results. As regards demographics, 82.4% of the respondents were female and 17.6% were male. Reflecting the predominantly white Anglo-Celtic nature of the community, only 1.7% identified as Aboriginal, 0.4% as Torres Strait Islander, and 0.3% as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. There was a broad age range with the majority in their middle years (8.9% aged 18-29; 17.8% aged 30-39; 23.1% aged 40-49; 25.3% aged 50-59; 16.1% aged 60-69; 6.6% aged 70-79; and 2.1% aged 80 or over).

Key findings in relation to the prevalence of domestic violence and related experience within the community were that 62% of the respondents indicated that they knew someone who had experienced or was experiencing domestic violence, 37.6% had experienced domestic violence in their immediate family or relationship, 16.9% had experienced domestic violence after a relationship had ended, and 32.3% had experienced domestic violence within their family of origin. In light of recent concerns within the Network relating to abuse of pets as an indicator of high levels of domestic and family violence, 14% had witnessed violence towards pets by a family member while 31.9% had

witnessed children (including adult children) being violent towards their parents while 11.6% reported that their children had been violent towards them.

Key findings to the 27 items relating to attitudes towards domestic and family violence were that 80% of respondents agreed that *it's hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships*, 70% that *women going through custody battles often fabricate or exaggerate claims of domestic violence to strengthen their case*, 58% that *most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to*, 35% that *the woman must be getting something out of the abusive relationship*, and 26% that *the woman has often done something to cause the violence* indicating ongoing victim blaming in relation to domestic violence. Alarming in Australia, where public education campaigns, including television and radio advertising, have targeted the criminal nature of domestic violence, 18% did not think *domestic violence is a crime*, 17% believed that *domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family* and 15% maintained that *it's a woman's duty to stay in a violent relationship to keep the family intact*. Almost two thirds of respondents (64.9%) were in agreement that *domestic violence was common in their community* with 68.4% believing that *most people turn a blind eye to, or ignore domestic violence*. In terms of reasons for violence, 8.1% believed that *a person would be justified in using physical force against their partner if they admitted to having sex with another person*, 5.3% believed *a person would be justified in using physical force against their partner in order to have contact with their children* and 7.7% believed that *domestic violence could be excused if the offender were heavily affected by drugs or alcohol*. Almost one quarter of respondents (24.9%) were in disagreement with the idea that *in a domestic situation where one partner had been physically violent towards another that it was entirely reasonable for the violent person to be made to leave the family home*. This figure would suggest the implementation of new

programmes where the focus is on the perpetrator being removed from the family may be likely to receive a degree of resistance in the communities within the research site. It was widely felt that *people who experience domestic violence are reluctant to go to the police* (77.8%). By contrast, in terms of *help seeking* in the face of domestic violence, by far the majority said they *would turn to family* (61%), *friends* (60.6%) and/or *police* (64.5%) (Respondents were able to select multiple choices as appropriate to them). This compares to 25.1% who said they would turn to *local services*, 27% who would seek assistance via a *telephone helpline* or 6.6% from the *internet*. Of concern are the 6.4% who indicated that they would *not seek assistance* or 6.8% who *did not know who they would turn to*. Some 13.6% indicated that they did not believe that *domestic violence was a serious issue in their community*. Nevertheless, 96.5% agreed that *it was important to them that domestic violence was addressed within their community*.

In addition to the survey, a series of four community consultations were conducted to recruit participants and seek community input into the arts-based intervention. Following a lengthy preparation process with the Network, four public fora were held at various sites across a range of dates and times. The consultations were widely advertised and there were also word-of-mouth attempts at engagement via personal invitations to the consultations by the Network members. Despite this intensive process, only four community members participated in these public fora, two of whom indicated that they had survived domestic violence. Despite the small number, the following views were strongly expressed: The implementation phase should take a respect-based approach to domestic violence situations and the blaming of men should be avoided while the link between alcohol and domestic violence should be addressed as part of the study. A number of potential arts-based strategies were identified for raising awareness and addressing negative attitudes towards domestic

violence, for which funding was subsequently sought, secured and implementation is presently under way.

Studying the effectiveness of social work intervention is integral to social work practice and informs the design and development of strategies for change (Fraser, 2004). The social intervention research approach used in the study proceeds through six stages: Problem analysis and project planning, information gathering and synthesis, intervention design and protocol development, implementation and pilot testing, evaluation, and dissemination (Rothman and Thomas, 1994). These steps shaped the Safe at Home study based on an analysis of the problem of domestic violence, existing awareness-raising programmes and community arts practice and skills in translating this knowledge into an intervention protocol in collaboration with the research partners who had considerable experience with and a deep understanding of domestic violence in this community. The implementation of the arts-based programme is still underway and, as already mentioned, the outcomes have yet to be evaluated. It comprises several art-making activities as follows: Installation work within a local playground; a mosaic work within one of the local housing estates; T-shirt, poster and coaster, bookmark and billboard campaigns; collage and printmaking workshops; community art competition; and a range of smaller art-making activities with exhibitions of the artworks in the community. Change in community attitudes to domestic violence will be determined by the administration of the post-intervention community-wide survey at the end of the project in 2012.

Domestic violence

Within Australia, as elsewhere, domestic violence is a significant problem with an estimated economic cost of AUD8.1 billion in 2002 (Laing and Bobic, 2002). This is minor compared with the associated social and health costs. An enduring issue in addressing domestic

violence against women is not only how one prevents domestic violence but also how one knows when violence has been prevented. One strategy has been community public education. Long a project of feminist social work, community education programmes have sought to raise public consciousness as to the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence in the community in order to promote a culture of non-violence. Often community education posters have been a major means of getting this message across though various approaches to reducing and preventing domestic violence have been tried over the years, most of which focused specifically on women, including personal safety and self-protection training, and specialist sexual assault services. However, these programmes failed to deliver anticipated changes to widespread violence against women though they did highlight the complexity and diversity of affected groups. More recently, strategies have sought to target men but it is commonly accepted now that community education is, at best, only a partial solution to this problem. Awareness does not necessarily change behaviour (Carmody and Carrington, 2000). Carmody's (2003) analysis of these past approaches sheds light on the shaping of future intervention strategies, not least the totalising concept of femininity and the construction of all men as potentially violent. The demonising of men and the concomitant construction of women as victim are counter-productive to a programme of action that seeks to change community attitudes. This needs to be balanced with the evidence that shows that, while women are mostly at the receiving end of domestic violence, the solution lies in a whole-of-community response that acknowledges that most men also abhor violence against women (and men) (Pease, 1997, 2002, 2008; Carmody and Carrington, 2000).

Sullivan *et al.* (2005) reported on the results of one of the few participatory action research studies on interpersonal violence that involved the 'domestic violence community' comprising representatives from community service organisations and government agencies,

including advocates, activists, and survivors. Though the present study involved a partnership with a similar anti-violence network, and did involve building relationships with community members and engaging them in decisions relating to the production of the artworks, it was not a participatory action research study but rather an intervention research project that used some aspects of action research. Centrally the project sought community engagement. However, as Sullivan *et al.* (2005) found, local community residents are the most difficult to engage in such studies, especially women at high risk and perpetrators. They report that ‘the group that had the most limited participation in the research process [was] research informants’ (p. 990). In their study they constituted women from ethnic minority groups. In the same way, it has been extremely difficult to involve women from the disadvantaged community in which the study is situated. At best a small core of residents have participated thus far in the Safe at Home project. The focus was not on women telling their stories but on women working together to create artworks to raise awareness and change community attitudes about domestic violence. This activity needs to be seen in light of the partner agency support that ensured, not only the project’s legitimacy, but also increased the likelihood that the findings would have wider implications for the study community. As Sullivan *et al.* (2005) report, ‘it is only through the diligence of community partners and researchers that actions will result’ (p. 993). More importantly, however, for the purposes of the present paper, research of this nature transmutes art, practice, research, and experience into knowledge that has far wider implications. Hence in this formative intervention research study, the arts-based interventions served as a means of building trust with people who were already service users within the anti-violence network, which, it was believed, would lead to ‘better dissemination of research findings, and programs ... grounded in research and strengthened by evaluation’ (Sullivan *et al.*, 2005, p. 993).

Despite the Zero Tolerance campaign targeting abusive and controlling behaviours that mainly affect women and children in the UK, it is estimated that one in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime and one in eight annually, with police receiving calls for assistance every minute of the day. Yet, despite increasing reports, it is estimated by the Home Office that only 35% of incidents is reported. Most concerning is that one woman is killed every three days due to partner violence (Harwin, 2006). In the US between four and six million women experience domestic violence annually and 95% of all cases involve women (Abel, 2000). Yet despite this, '[i]nformation about the effectiveness of practice ... is scant ... [and] little research has been initiated on the effectiveness of intervention with battered women' (Abel, 2000, p. 55-56). Abel's (2000) overview of the empirical literature found several studies between 1986 and 1996, where group work was the main intervention and most of the results were inconclusive. Humphreys (2007) notes the absence of social work's contribution in the area of domestic violence despite the opportunities presented by their frontline roles in key positions in local areas. This study seeks to address this imbalance.

The common ground between social work and community arts practice

A targeted review of the literature examining the effectiveness of art interventions in relation to domestic violence revealed no studies indicating or exploring the effectiveness of art as an intervention with domestic violence. The common ground between social work and community arts practice was identified through an examination of an increasing shift by community and public artists away from the concept of 'art as object' to ideas and practices oriented toward process, relationship and community (Schubert, 2006). Commonalities are located across the work of a varied array of artists and theorists but predominately those whose work falls within contemporary *avante garde* practice (Gablik, 1991; Kaprow, 1993;

Lacy, 1995; Massey, 1995; Lippard, 1997; Bourriaud, 2002; Kester, 2004; Kwon, 2004). Focusing specifically on community-based practice - by which is meant a form of community involvement and participation where the process of engagement can vary dramatically in form from mobilising, conscientising, action, advocacy, empowerment, democracy, and citizenship - Schubert (2006) identified a range of arts practices that closely align with the everyday practice of social work. Artists and social workers share a common discourse pool. Hence it is not surprising that many artists working in the community arena are criticised for being like social workers, nor that many social worker practitioners view their work, including research which is considered integral to good practice, as an artistic or creative endeavour. The 'art' of social work has been explored in a variety of ways (England, 1986; Goldstein, 1988; 1992; 1999; Gray and Webb, 2008; Siporin, 2009). This creative approach, which focuses on both process and outcome, is evident in heuristic, phenomenological methodologies favoured in much qualitative social work research. It is an approach which has much to offer the creative disciplines as well.

Relationship to the theory of knowledge production

This literature documenting the synergies between art and social work stands in strong contrast to contemporary debates in knowledge production which are fueled by the pursuit of 'gold standard' scientific research and evidence-based practice, in which 'randomised controlled trials' are promoted as the holy grail of research in social work (Gray *et al.*, 2009). As already mentioned, the new theory of knowledge production offers social work strong support for pursuing methods of engaged research that ensure high levels of accountability (Nowotny *et al.*, 2003). Within Safe at Home these ideas led to the engagement of research participants with the researcher through dialogue within the public space of the community under study.

However, Gibbons *et al.*'s (1994) framework has not been without its critics with concerns expressed regarding the incorporation of political context, the promotion of value judgements in the process of knowledge production and the implied preference for Mode 2 seen as signaling an acceptance of neoliberalism (Pestre, 2000). Examples of this are evident in emerging knowledge production frameworks in the arts within Australia, which locate innovation firmly within a market context, where the social context is absent (Haseman and Jaaniste, 2008). A further example is the use of the term 'engaged research' in much Third Way discourse that hides the decrease in public funding for research which forces researchers to turn to alternative sources of funding. Thus Pestre (2000) describes them as 'characterising practices and arguments that have been around for a long time, whose respective weights vary with the course of time and whose merits are assessed differently depending on what they could potentially bring to the diverse actors in terms of economic efficiency or social and political values. Modes 1 and 2 are only extreme and highly simplified modes for analysis' (p. 177). Rather than being 'new', the value of Gibbons *et al.*'s (1994) contribution was in the simplicity of the framework they offered, which seemed a quite commonsensical, novel attempt to invent a new language of research (Nowotny *et al.*, 2003). Whether there is indeed a fundamental paradigm shift towards interdisciplinarity, internationalisation, collaboration, and engagement in knowledge production remains an empirical question. The idea that the aim of research is the production of socially relevant, accountable, transferable, and useful knowledge clearly jettisons the traditional idea that the purpose of research is to generate new knowledge through the testing of prior hypotheses and findings (Hammersley, 2003).

Research as a vehicle for experiential, action or problem-based learning

Recently, within social work, a wider survey of the ways in which the production of knowledge occurs has commenced (Gray, 2008; Kjørstad, 2008). This has led to a closer inspection of the two key modes of knowledge production with a particular focus on Mode 2 and its heuristic oeuvre, which draws crucially on lived experience, practice wisdom and tacit knowledge. Experiential or tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958, 1962, 1967) is important in creative social work and creative arts practice. It is implicit in the process of moving back and forth between theory and practice in a constant cycle of reflection, review and continuous development. The term ‘practice wisdom’ is used as shorthand for an extremely complex process of memory and pattern recognition which is receiving increasing scientific support (Varela, 1999; Goleman, 2003, 2006). This embodied form of knowledge is described in both the social work and art literature as ‘reflection-in-action’ (Schön, 1983, 1987) or expressed in the notion of ‘common sense’ (de Zeger, 1998; Baker, in Dybciz, 2004, Kester, 2004). Tacit knowledge is closely tied to the Aristotelian notion of *phronēsis* or practical moral reasoning (Habermas, 1972; Flyvbjerg, 2001, Hayes and Houston, 2007; Houston, 2009; Garrett, 2009a, 2009b). This embodied knowledge that grows out of experience, which Varela (1999) calls ‘readiness-for-action’ (see Gray, 2007), is critical to understanding the relationship between knowledge generation and practice. For Klein and Bloom (1995), practice wisdom involves both the process of translating theories and principles into action, in terms of one’s subjective experience of the situation, and of developing new knowledge as the practitioner-researcher learns from participant feedback. Thus the application and generation of knowledge is part of the same process. In the creative arts domain, too, there is an increasing recognition and exploration of the value of experiential knowledge (Barrett, 2007; Barrett and Bolt, 2007; Imani, 2007; Jarvis, 2007;

Niedderer and Reilly, 2007; Sutherland and Acord, 2007). This form of knowledge is valued in similar ways within both disciplines but the challenge now is to move towards a stronger research base to produce socially relevant, accountable, useable or transferable knowledge. There is a need to move beyond mere acknowledgement of the importance of the social aspects present in much creative arts and social work research (Barrett and Bolt, 2007; Crouch, 2007). What Mode 2 does is to demystify the research approach so as to give it a feel of being an extension of our ordinary, everyday practice and professional activity. Synergies are created when disciplines come together to engage in joint projects such as that herein described. It is this 'joining together' that unleashes the power of Mode 2 – crucially its interdisciplinarity, internationalisation, collaboration, and engagement. This challenge has existed for a considerable time within social work (McDermott, 1996).

In this study, the heuristic guidelines emerged from within the context of the research as the researcher, phenomenologically, made these heuristics present to the participants, helping them to see that the solutions were there all along, in the form of untapped resources. Social intervention research offers a way of thinking about research that is firmly embedded in concrete locations but which can draw on wider knowledge and prior research. It offers the opportunity for creative engagement and innovation and the incorporation of participants', practitioners' and researchers' lived experience. To this end, it coheres with the Mode 2 'knowledge transfer system' (McWilliam, 2007) in which the application of knowledge:

...is an ongoing interactive human process of critically considering relevant, quality research results and findings, whether factual or tacit knowledge or humanistic understanding, blending this broader research-based knowledge with experiential

knowledge and contextual appreciation, and constructing a shared understanding and knowledge application to advance the quality of ... care (p. 73).

Thus Mode 2 offers an ideal framework for social work and creative arts research that blends different forms of knowledge while systematically studying the effectiveness of practice thus informed.

Safe at Home and Mode 2

Within Safe at Home an informed, engaged form of knowledge – Mode 2 – has underpinned the *modus operandi* of the project at all stages from the development of the research partnership including:

- The identification of an issue of significance to the community on felt and substantiated need combined with an understanding of the secrecy often associated with complex processes of violence and control.
- The incorporation of beliefs and understandings about the community within the research site based on some fourteen years social work practice experience gained from one of the researchers working within this community in a health context.
- The importance and value placed by the community on an insider connection in working with the community.
- The collaborative approach to seeking funding and support for the project.
- The process taken with different groups within the community in the implementation of the various interventions.
- An individual approach to each group and artwork within the project.
- A non-threatening, non-confrontational, indirect approach to addressing domestic violence and to challenging prevailing attitudes within the community.

This multimodal, flexible approach might or might not combine qualitative and quantitative methods since Mode 2 knowledge production concerns itself with broader concerns of *inter alia* reflexivity and social accountability, quality control, interdisciplinarity, and industry and community partnership and collaboration.

Reflexivity and social accountability

Changing attitudes to domestic violence are influenced by diverse beliefs and opinions which touch community members, practitioners and researchers alike and cannot be answered by scientific and technical means alone. Any research within such a context requires high levels of social responsiveness and accountability. Social work's value-based approach is driven by a sound ethical stance involving a process of ongoing critical reflection. However, within Mode 2, social accountability extends beyond the personal reflective activity of researchers and their practitioner partners. It refers rather to the nature and purpose of the research undertaking and the extent to which it addresses a socially relevant problem and produces knowledge to solve concrete social problems.

Quality control

Mode 2 research extends traditional discipline and science-based models of research quality assessment, such as publication in peer-reviewed journals, to broader social accountability, as outlined above. It makes social relevance an ethical issue as well as an indicator of quality, arguing that spending research funds must be justified in terms of the useability of the research findings. It thus requires research targeted to industry needs. In this vein the Safe at Home study is a partnership with service providers in the community services industry who, in conjunction with the study community, closely monitor the research process. Thus the study's effectiveness is dependent on the expressed commitment to and

enthusiasm for the project by others (partners, peers and community members) and concrete measures of quality include the project's reach and impact in the community under study.

Interdisciplinarity

A core feature of Mode 2 research is its interdisciplinarity involving research teams from various fields engaging in boundary crossing (Klein, 1990, 1996). Safe at Home is interdisciplinary to the extent that it crosses boundaries between social work, fine arts and community practice.

Partnership and collaboration

The theory of Mode 2 holds that research that directly addresses social problems is best conducted with partners and collaborators who best understand the research context and are most likely to use and benefit from the research findings. For purists, this raises questions about the objectivity, reliability and validity of the knowledge produced but, for those who believe that social work and fine arts are practice-based professions, partnership and collaboration are essential to the generation of relevant and useable research findings aimed at practice improvement. The practice evaluation movement in social work has differed as to the nature of research methodologies that best generate data on which to base practice with advocates of evidence-based practice emphasising randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews. In social work there has been a tendency to include data generated by qualitative research. Whether employing a strict evidence-based practice approach or a more inclusive research approach, partnership and collaboration with service users remains uncontentionous in social work. In fact, evidence-based practice is an approach which implicitly involves clients or service users in order to ensure practitioner accountability (Gray *et al.*, 2009) and move social work away from authority-based approaches (Gambrill,

2001). The Safe at Home study thus represents an attempt ‘to negotiate a balance between developing valid generalisable knowledge and benefiting the community that is being researched and to improve research protocols by incorporating the knowledge and expertise of community members’ (Macaulay *et al.*, 1999, p. 774). To this end, the research embodies a strong emphasis on the relationship between theory and practice and a process of progressive learning and development in which knowledge develops and is informed by practice.

From the outset, the Safe at Home project has aimed to produce useful findings through partnership and collaboration in all aspects of the study from the development of the research goals and objectives to the choice of research methods, the duration of the project, the terms of the community-researcher partnership, its ethical principles and structures, the strategy and content of the evaluation of the project to processes for the joint dissemination of the study’s findings. The research methods thus developed are highly context driven and include a quantitative community-wide survey, face-to-face interviews with key participants, art-making activities with community groups, participant observation, and focus groups with community members and partner organisations. The evaluation of the project’s effectiveness, however, will be determined by the community-wide post-intervention survey to discern whether any evidence of changes in community attitudes towards domestic violence. At this intermediary phase of the project, statistics (ABS, 2009; 2006) reveal that the LGA under study has lost its status as the area with the highest incidence of domestic violence in New South Wales but it is too soon to claim that this has anything to do with the Safe at Home project.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the theoretical underpinnings of a social intervention research study that is seeking to provide empirically justifiable data on the effectiveness of arts-based community practice in changing community attitudes towards domestic violence. While using familiar quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study draws on the new theory of knowledge production to extend conventional arguments on the merits or otherwise of qualitative versus quantitative research familiar to social workers. It argues that the vast and growing broader intellectual scholarship on modes of knowledge production provides strong grounding for the engaged and collaborative forms of research much favoured in the practice-oriented disciplines of social work and fine arts.

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