

# Knowledge, experience and art in an innovative community-based study



**Mel Gray and Leanne Schubert,**

Institute of Advanced Study for Humanity, The University of Newcastle, Australia

## Abstract

This paper describes 'Safe at Home', a creative research project being conducted by social workers and artists and examines its theoretical underpinnings in light of contemporary theory on knowledge production. It uses the framework of Mode 1 - scientific research - and Mode 2 - problem-focused, practice-oriented, cross-disciplinary, and engaged research. The latter is portrayed as compatible with social work and creative - art - research, which recognises the importance of practical, experience-based knowledge and practice-based participatory action and intervention research. Using this framework, we explore research as a vehicle to develop useful knowledge to inform practice while also engaged in a form of experiential, action or problem-based learning. Such situated knowledge is more useful for professions which draw crucially on everyday tacit understanding and peoples' lived experience. We discuss the importance of practice wisdom in creative social work practice and illustrate its application in the 'Safe at Home' project, which employs a social intervention research approach and seeks to measure the effectiveness of a community arts intervention in changing community attitudes about domestic violence. It is a collaborative study, with partners from a community-based anti-violence network. It asks: 'Is art an effective medium for achieving attitudinal change in the community?' We offer the Safe at Home project as an example of Mode 2 research which has the potential for producing significant knowledge and practice outcomes for social work, as well as for relational and dialogical community arts practice.

## Keywords

Social work, knowledge production, community arts practice

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, 2007). 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:

- relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002)
- connective aesthetics (Gablik, 1991)
- dialogical art (Kester, 2004)
- 'Happenings' and the blurring of art and life (Kaprow, 1993)
- new genre public art (Lacy, 1995)
- art with increasing emphasis on space, place, time, and community (Kwon, 2004; Lippard, 1997; Massey, 1995).

Focusing specifically on community-based practice - by which we mean a form of community engagement and participation where the process of engagement can vary dramatically in form from mobilising, conscientising, action, advocacy, empowerment, democracy, and citizenship - Schubert (2007) identified a range of arts practices that closely align with the everyday practice of social work. The key areas of commonality operate across six domains, namely, values, concerns, skills, communication, context, and history. It is in this common

ground, through the accumulation of knowledge from different disciplines or transdisciplinarity (Gibbons et al., 1994) that a shared discourse pool which both disciplines draw upon has been identified. Perhaps then 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 latter views are supported by a body of literature that explores the 'art' of social work in a variety of ways (England, 1986; Goldstein, 1983; Gray & Powell, forthcoming; Gray & Webb, 2008). This creative approach, which focuses on both process and outcome, is evident in qualitative, heuristic, phenomenological methodologies favoured in much qualitative social work research. It is an approach which has much to offer the creative disciplines.

An unexpected historical connection between art and social work was found in the community art literature, where Grant Kester (2004, p. 131) described Jane Addams' influence on artists working in the Settlement House Movement in Chicago in the late 1880s. Jane Addams is important in this context as she is often referred to as the mother of modern social work. Through her commitment to emancipation, empowerment and participatory democracy, Addams' work was a trigger for the development of similar values and practices across these disciplines. Within the social work literature, Addams' influence on artists is not the centre-point but rather her sociological focus. Also significant are her relationships with 'progressive' intellectuals and reformers - the most notable being John Dewey (discussed below) - and their 'advocacy of an idealized notion – or ideology – of community' (Mowbray, in Thorpe & Petruchenia, 1992, p. 54). Further, some authors note that the settlement house and 'local reform associations' movement showed extraordinary similarity with community action today (Gans, in Thorpe & Petruchenia, 1992; Weil, 1996). A key shared value between social work and art stems from Addams' and her colleagues' advocacy of grassroots democracy within communities.

Within the social context, the work of Addams and others at Hull House has been described as an archetype of practice with and in communities that moved from a focus on 'planning for these communities to planning *with residents* for social and economic development and to combined physical and social planning strategies to build stronger communities' (Weil, 1996, p. 9 *emphasis added*). It accords with much contemporary Third Way discourse. Kester (2004) inadvertently identifies Addams' influence significantly beyond that traditionally acknowledged within social work, most notably in terms of her impact on the development of social planning and sociology, in addition to social work (Deegan, in Weil, 1996). Her pioneering work developed methodologies and set standards for research within communities for social work. This methodological approach, however, does not seem to have transferred to arts practice. The 'Safe at Home' project is conducted on a similar social work research model developed at Hull House by Addams and her colleagues that directly involved residents - community members. Findings were used to extend community education and the planning of community-based action projects (Deegan, in Weil, 1996). We would posit that not only have models of community work such as organizing, planning and development that grew out of the Settlement Movement and Addams' work had a vast influence on community practice within social work (Weil, 1996) but it has also had a significant, but to date unacknowledged, influence on the community, dialogical and relational arts arena as well. Further we would suggest that the methods and methodologies developed within social work for research are, on the basis of this history and the identified shared discourse pool, applicable to research in the arena of arts practice. This is highly relevant for arts research which has a strong social element, particularly community-oriented arts research. Examples of socially oriented art research that would potentially benefit from social work methods and methodologies are just beginning to be documented, for example Barrett (2007), Barrett and Bolt, (2007) and Crouch (2007).

## 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 'randomized controlled trials' are promoted as the holy grail of research in social work (Gray, Plath, & Webb, 2009). Contemporary theorists on knowledge production (Gibbons et al., 1994) have labeled this form of 'scientific' research Mode 1. It is juxtaposed against a more flexible, practice-oriented, experiential, cross-disciplinary, and engaged form of research known as Mode 2. Coined in 1994 the terms Mode 1 is defined as 'the complex of ideas, methods, values and norms that has grown up to control the diffusion of the Newtonian model of science to more and more fields of enquiry and ensure its compliance with what is considered sound scientific practice'. It contrasts with Mode 2 knowledge production 'carried out in the context of application and marked by its: transdisciplinarity, heterogeneity; organizational heterarchy and transience; social accountability and reflexivity; and quality control which emphasises context- and use-dependence' (Gibbons et al., 1994, p. 167). On revisiting their original thesis, Nowotny et al. (2003) built a new argument to support their original ideas about knowledge production making important additions such as reconceptualising research as a dialogical process which takes place in the agora<sup>1</sup>. The description of research as 'a dialogic process, an intense (and perhaps endless) "conversation" between research actors and research participants' (p. 187) is important for ensuring high levels of accountability. And the idea of the agora is important to the 'problem-generating and problem-solving environment in which the contextualisation of knowledge production takes place – a domain of primary knowledge production – through which people enter the research process, and where Mode 2 knowledge is embodied in people and project' (p. 192). 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.

In short, Gibbons et al.'s distinctly differing approaches to the production of knowledge, i.e., the key features of both Modes within this framework are summarised in Figure 1. Critical issues for social work practice are outlined in Figure 2. The 'Safe at Home' project demonstrates almost all of the features described within Mode 2 as they are outlined in these diagrams and explored below.

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 hides the decrease in public funding for research which forces researchers to turn to alternate sources of funding. (This is reminiscent of the piecemeal way in which funding for the 'Safe at Home' project has eventuated). Thus Pestre suggests that both Modes need to be located in a much stronger historical perspective. He 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' (2000, p. 177). We would suggest that rather than the Modes being 'new', the value of Gibbons et al.'s contribution was in the simplicity of the framework they offered, which

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<sup>1</sup> An ancient Greek word that means the public space used for assemblies and markets within a community

seemed quite commonsensical. It was a novel attempt to invent a new language of research (Nowotny, 2003).

In light of Pestre's critique, however, viewing social work research through an historical lens, we might conclude that Mode 2 reaches as far back as the 1880s and the research practice of Jane Addams described above. The development of the welfare state and the consequent emergence of the professions, particularly the professionalization of social work, could account for the separation that grew between art and social work and the unique influence of each while 'social change and our knowledge have evolved in parallel' (Pestre, 2000, p. 180). This might account for current pressures on the creative disciplines to engage in research.

A longer history of Mode 2 in social work is also indicated in the work of Herbert Simon who, during the 1970s, described 'a social system of science and a social system of practice'. He further identified that 'scholars in professional schools such as education, management and social work were separated and increasingly alienated from practitioners in their fields by the gap between these two systems' (cited in Yorks, 2005, p. 111) causing the rise of a significant tension that still endures within social work. Crouch (2007) has identified the potential for researchers within the creative disciplines to look to the social research used within nursing that incorporates the framework of praxis as a productive approach. We would speculate that, on the basis of the shared discourse described earlier, social work research methods could hold even greater potential, particularly research located within community or social change contexts.

Gray et al. are currently engaged in research exploring social work as the 'gold standard' of Mode 2 knowledge production in the human services. They seek to test whether there has been a fundamental paradigm shift towards interdisciplinarity, internationalization, collaboration, and engagement within human services research in Australia (Gray, Webb & Kavanagh, 2008). Of relevance for social work, and the creative arts, is the increasing pressure on researchers to produce socially relevant, accountable, transferable, and useful knowledge. This jettisons the idea of research aimed primarily at the generation of new knowledge or the testing of prior hypotheses and findings (Hammersley, 2003).

In this project, we seek to examine whether Mode 2 might also be an appropriate fit for other creative endeavours. Hence we have engaged community partners, local residents, artists, and social workers in developing the collaborative 'Safe at Home' project. Figure 2 identifies the key issues for consideration in examining Mode 2 in relation to the creative practice of social work. It illustrates the issues raised within our description of a research project that reflects Mode 2 in action.

## A HEURISTIC FRAMEWORK THAT EXPLAINS THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MODES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

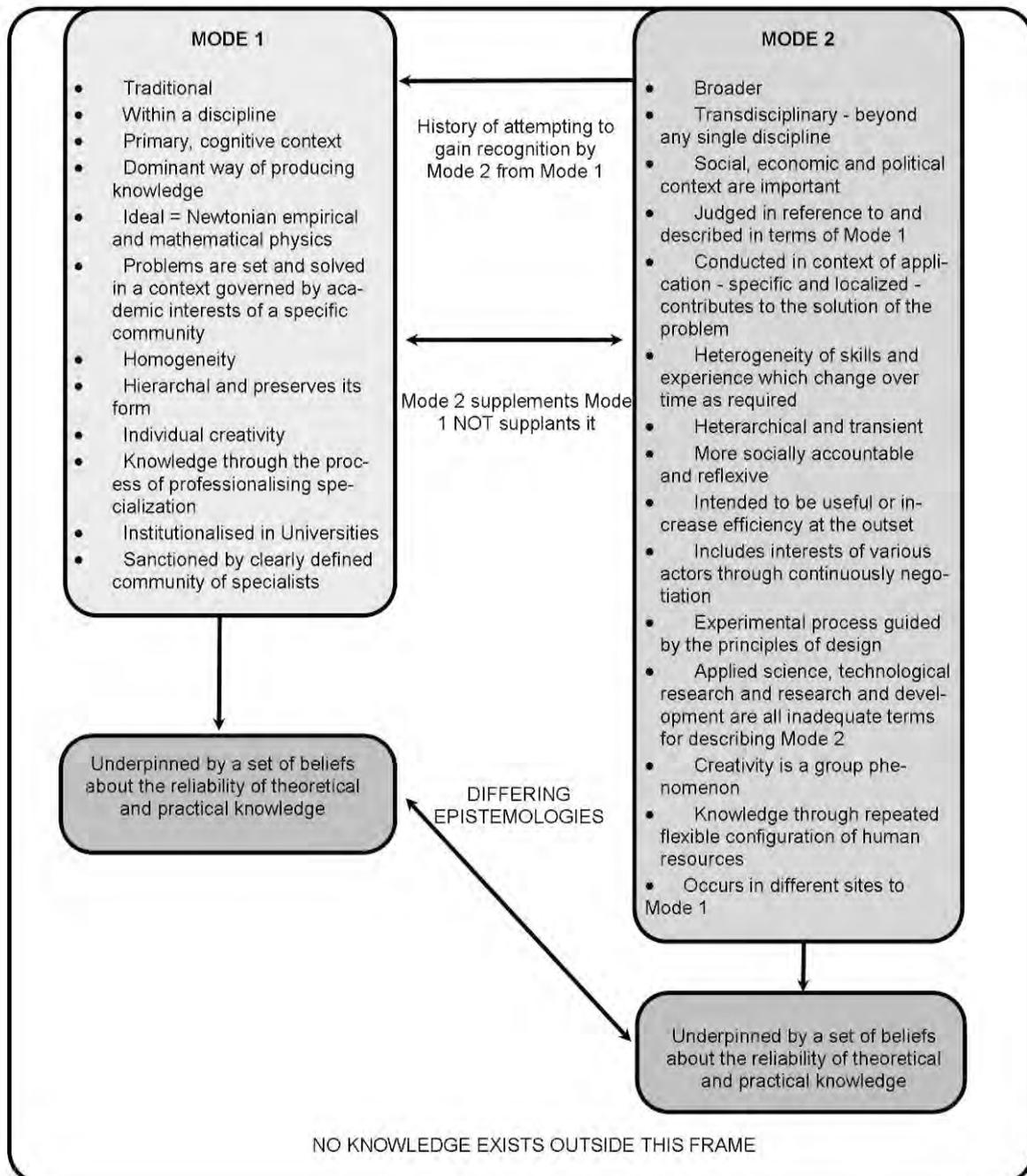


Fig 1. Diagrammatic representation of key concept of Gibbons et al (1994)

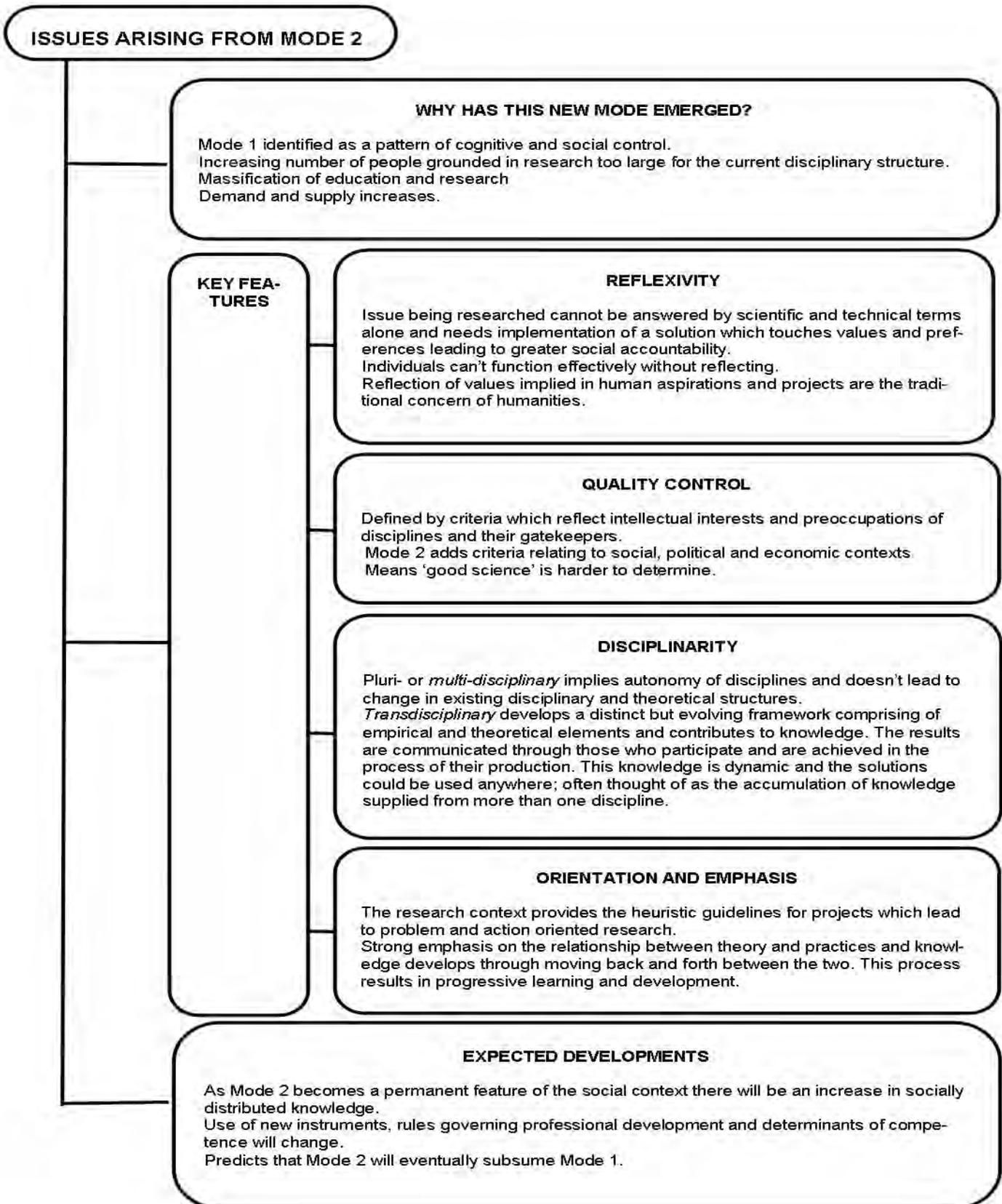


Fig 2: Key issues arising for social work in relation to Mode 2 knowledge production.

## 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 et al., 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, 1938: 1962, 1967) is important in creative social work practice 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 'emergence of novelty and ingenuity ... bring(s) out the creative dimension of practice wisdom' (Tsang, 2008). The term 'practice wisdom' is unique to social work (Dybciz, 2004; Krill, 1990) and used as shorthand for an extremely complex process of memory and pattern recognition which is receiving increasing scientific support (Goleman, 2003, 2006; Varela, 1999). 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' (Baker in Dybciz, 2004, Kester, 2004; de Zeger, 1998). Tacit knowledge is closely tied to the Aristotelian notion of *phronēsis* or practical moral reasoning (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Habermas, 1972).

This embodied knowledge that grows out of experience, which Varela (1999) calls 'readiness-for-action' (see Gray, 2007), is critical to understand 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 the process 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, 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 within the creative disciplines is to move towards a stronger research base to produce socially relevant, accountable, useable or transferable knowledge. There is a need to move beyond the acknowledgement of the importance of the social aspects present in much creative arts research. For example, it is emergent in the work of Barrett and Bolt (2007) and Crouch (2007). Perhaps social work is a little further ahead in this respect, but only marginally. 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).

Mode 2 holds that the heuristic guidelines emerge from within the context of the research. The researcher, phenomenologically, makes these heuristics present to the participants, helps them see that the solutions were there all along, in the form of untapped resources. Mode 2 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, for innovation and the incorporation of participants', practitioners' and researchers' lived experience. To this end, Mode 2 serves as a 'knowledge transfer system' (McWilliam, 2007) in which knowledge transfer:

...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.

## **The "Safe at Home" project**

We now outline a research project which uses research not only for knowledge production – the generation of new knowledge – but also the opportunity for the research process to constitute a context for ‘experiential learning’ through the participation and engagement of community members. "Safe at Home" is an innovative, participatory, social intervention research project located in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales, Australia. It is transdisciplinary in that it engages artists and social workers who share an interest and focus on working in and with communities to address social issues, problems or concerns. In this instance, the concern is that of raising of awareness (and therefore hopefully preventing) domestic violence. The project functions in partnership with the Cessnock Anti Violence Network (The Network) thus creating a research site outside the academy and within the broader community. By taking a whole-of-community approach to raising awareness of domestic violence across the research site – the Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA) – the intention of the project is to investigate the effectiveness of using art and creative activities to change community attitudes within a medium-sized rural community. As research ‘Safe at Home’ aims to augment the evidence base regarding the effectiveness of art as a method of social intervention – based on the understanding that this is part of the common ground between disciplines – for which there is only anecdotal evidence within the community services and community arts sectors. In effect, the creative arts-based element of the project becomes part of the broader social intervention research method – that is, the art is effectively embedded within the research process and simultaneously part of the mode of research and the intervention that is being researched.

The study of intervention is integral to social work research and informs the design and development of strategies for change (Fraser, 2004). The social intervention research approach (Rothman and Thomas, 1994) actively involves community members in line with the work of Addams outlined above. Within this approach ‘Safe at Home’ uses a multi-method approach to data collection and analysis which proceeds through six stages:

- problem analysis and project planning;
- information gathering and synthesis;
- design of intervention;
- early development and pilot testing;
- evaluation and advanced development;
- dissemination (Rothman and Thomas, 1994).

These steps were used to shape ‘Safe at Home’ which involves: mastery of substantive and interventive knowledge in the area of domestic violence; skills in translating tacit knowledge into intervention protocols; partnerships and collaboration with The Network in implementing arts-based programs; and expertise in developing measures of program process and outcome (based on Fraser, 2004, p. 220).

By working collaboratively to conduct pre-and post-intervention surveys of community attitudes, researchers and practitioners (artists, community and social workers) involved with ‘Safe at Home’ have established a baseline from which to measure the degree of change that the intervention (art) will make in terms of changing attitudes and diminishing the impact and consequences of domestic violence. The intervention phase of the study, which has recently commenced with community members, consists of some twelve strategies that use art as the mode of intervention to address community attitudes that support and encourage

the prevalence of domestic violence identified through the pre-intervention survey. These community-generated strategies include activities as diverse as:

- installation works within local playgrounds;
- a mosaic work within one of the local housing estates promoting healthy, positive family relationships;
- t-shirt, poster and coaster, bookmark and billboard campaigns that incorporate works created by community members;
- collage and printmaking workshops coupled with anti-violence messages;
- community art competitions with the prizewinner's art to be reproduced on cereal packaging;
- a dramatic performance using verbatim theatre;
- a range of other smaller art-making activities that form a series of exhibitions within the community.

The number and size of the identified strategies will be determined by the degree of funding that the research team can collectively attract to the project from a variety of sources.

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 the issue as an issue of significance to the community on felt rather than substantiated need combined with an understanding of the secrecy often associated with processes of violence and control;
- the incorporation of beliefs and understandings about the community within the research site based on some fourteen years of social work practice wisdom 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 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 and non-confrontational and indirect approach to addressing the issue of domestic violence and the need to challenge negative prevailing worker attitudes within the community.

This range of experiential knowledge is the essence that sits at the core of the process through which the project is transversing. Without this tacit knowledge on how to galvanize the research partner and community this project would not have taken on the dimensions it has. We now consider knowledge production and the key issues arising in relation to Mode 2 that were identified earlier in relation to "Safe at Home".

### ***Reflexivity***

The potential or actual changing of attitudes regarding domestic violence is not an issue that can easily be answered by scientific and technical terms alone. Views on violence are influenced by diverse principles and opinions which touch community members, practitioners and researchers alike. Any research within such a context requires high levels of social accountability. To ensure this, an awareness of the values and attitudes involved and a sound ethical approach is required in addition to a process of constant critical reflection and thinking. This project would not operate or proceed effectively without deep reflection at a number of levels and involving a number of actors in the form of researchers, supervisors, peers, partners and community members. The reflection of the value positions held within this project are essential to acknowledge given the sensitive nature of the topic, the associated power dynamics and taboos surrounding it.

### ***Quality control***

Like all Mode 2 research the criteria that ensure quality present within 'Safe at Home' is reflected across a variety of criteria that stem from and reflect the intellectual interests and preoccupations of both disciplines and their respective gatekeepers – most notably in this instance through the process of supervision and regular peer review and consultation in relation to particular skill sets (e.g., survey design and data analysis techniques) at various stages of the research process. In addition, there are a number of criteria that reflect the social, political and economic context and have indeed been set by the research partners and the community – and are closely monitored by several key people with a keen interest in domestic violence. We agree with Gibbons et al. (1994) that this complex mixture does indeed mean that 'good science' within Mode 2 is harder to determine. Within 'Safe at Home' this seems to be best measured through the expressed commitment to and enthusiasm for the project by others (partners, peers and community members) rather than any form of concrete measure of quality. We believe this to be an arena that requires significant further exploration.

### ***Disciplinarity***

To clearly determine where 'Safe at Home' sits in terms of its disciplinarity is difficult for in different guises it can be described by almost all of the terms that refer to more than one discipline – interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, pluri-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary. Without a complex review of the definition and usage of each term, which is beyond the scope of this paper, it is difficult to make any clear determinations regarding Mode 2 and the feature of transdisciplinarity. We would certainly argue that the notion of boundary crossing (Thompson Klein, 1990, 1996) between social work and fine art in this project is present. The jury remains out however, in terms of the degree of transdisciplinarity required to ensure a piece of research is Mode 2 under the schema of Gibbons et al. (1994). We suspect that it is possible for research to be Mode 2 with only minor traces of this present, but at this stage must be acknowledged as tacit knowledge.

### ***Orientation and emphasis***

As described throughout this paper the context for this research has provided the heuristic guidelines which have led to using problem and action oriented research that is also participatory. These are consistent with Mode 2. In relation to the participatory aspects of the research process, the 'Safe at Home' study represents an attempt by the researchers '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). Thus 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 through moving back and forth between the two.

In keeping with Mode 2, from the outset, 'Safe at Home' as research has aimed to produce useful findings (Gibbons et al. 1994). The collaborative approach has shaped:

- the development of the research goals and objectives,
- the choice of methods and duration of the project,
- the terms of the community-researcher partnership,
- the degree and types of confidentiality based on ethical principles and structures,
- the development of the strategy and content of the evaluation of the project,
- the framework for how the data is filed, stored, interpreted, controlled and used,
- the development of strategies and methods of resolving disagreements with the collaborators,

- a process for the incorporation of new collaborators into the research team which has as a result expanded and changed across the duration of the life of the project and finally,
- a process for the joint dissemination of results in lay and scientific terms to communities, clinicians, administrators and funding agencies.

Further the range of research methods developed through the process of community consultation is highly context driven and includes:

- data gathering and linkage;
- a largely quantitative community-wide survey instrument to determine current attitudes and level of awareness of domestic violence to serve as a baseline for comparison after the intervention phase of the research;
- physical arts-based activities with community groups;
- audio and video-taping of the development of the artworks;
- visual documentation of the development of the artworks;
- exhibition and documentation of the created artworks and related processes;
- observation of non-identified people in public places to assess their reaction to the artworks;
- face-to-face interviews with key participants, and
- focus groups with community members and partner organisations.

Through this process evaluation becomes possible, tacit knowledge becomes more visible and further learning occurs.

## Conclusion

'Safe at Home' is an example of research which draws on shared values and history between social work and art that stems from Addams' and her colleagues' advocacy of grassroots democracy within community social work and art. We have proposed that this participatory action-oriented approach to research is consistent with the notion of Mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons et al. 1994). On the basis of this shared historical and social science discourse, social work research methods could hold a potential path for research in the creative disciplines located within communities and concerned with social change.

The current exploration of social work as the 'gold standard' of Mode 2 knowledge production in the human services is an attempt to substantiate and strengthen the voice of practice-led researchers within a practice-oriented discipline that values the place of experiential or tacit knowledge or practice wisdom within the research process. Such substantiation offers the potential for greater validation of this mode of research.

We have provided one example of a social work methodology that employs a social intervention research approach and incorporates both social workers and artists in the process in an attempt to demonstrate its potential relevance for the creative disciplines. For, it is the threads of history that run between social work and art that provide not only the reality of a shared past, but also the possibility of a shared future within the context of research.

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### **Mel Gray**

Mel Gray is one of the world's leading international researchers in the field of human services and a pioneer of international social development research. Her areas of interest include Indigenous and international (comparative) social work; Social work and art (artful practice and creativity in social work); Experience-based learning in social work education; Health needs of children in foster care; Social entrepreneurship and community-business partnership development; Homelessness; Social work ethics and politics (moral and political theory for social work).

Since 2003, she has written one co-authored book, two edited collections, 9 book chapters, and 35 journal articles. She has an established international track record in publishing highly acclaimed research on knowledge formation strategies and experiential learning. She also has a wide international network and serves on the board of several major international social work journals.

### **Leanne Schubert**

Leanne Schubert is a social worker with over twenty-five years of direct practice experience in fields as diverse as child protection, out of home care, disability services and community health. She has an interest in and commitment to the practice of narrative ideas within social work. In 2003 she commenced teaching at the University of Newcastle in the Bachelor of Social Work Program's innovative experience based learning model. Her teaching strengths lie in the area of direct practice skills.

Schubert has a long standing interest in the arts and culture. She holds a Graduate Diploma in Cultural Heritage Studies and is a practicing artist. In 2005 she commenced a research higher degree at the University of Newcastle with the intention of combining her major areas of interest – Art, Social Work and Social Change.

