Building a community of critical researchers: regenerating the academy

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Abstract

We attempt to 'practice what we preach' by writing a jointly authored paper in which we begin by describing the evolution of a programme which supports postgraduate students in Applied English Language Studies, some of whom are, or have become, staff members in the division, in other parts of the University of the Witwatersrand, in other South African universities or in universities elsewhere in Africa. This account is followed by three apprentice researcher stories which are used to support our main arguments about the value of new and more established researchers working together, about the value of working together within a common theoretical framework and about the possibilities each of these ways of working affords researchers to respond to important South African and African questions.

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Introduction

The theme of the 2010 Kenton conference, 'A new era: re-imagining educational research in South Africa', challenged the authors of this paper to critically reflect on and to theorise the research community-building practices which the division of Applied English Language Studies (AELS) at the University of the Witwatersrand has developed over almost two decades. When the division was established in 1992, none of the South African staff had doctorates. In eighteen years the division has qualified itself at the same time as producing 34 academics who currently work in seven South African institutions of higher learning and a further nine who work in universities on the continent. Given the reported concerns about shortages of 'next generation' academics, we suggest that it is important to understand how this has been achieved.

Our argument is threefold. First, we stress the importance of establishing a community of researchers all working at different levels and at different stages of the research process. What this enables is a pedagogy of 'each one teach

one', synergies across research projects and an understanding of a wide range of research in the field beyond one's own project. A community of practice is not a new idea (Lave and Wenger, 1991); how one creates one that is effective and ongoing, is worth considering. Second is a commitment to the educational exigencies of South African and African contexts and recognition that research and theory generated at the centre is often not adequate for addressing 'local' questions. For example, we take seriously the implications of teaching a powerful language in a multilingual context. Finally, by limiting ourselves to one over-arching theoretical framework – a socio-cultural framework for language and literacy education (e.g. Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Pahl and Rowsell, 2005; Prinsloo and Baynham, 2008), we have been able to achieve depth and coherence across our courses and our research production. By insisting on research that sees theory and practice as mutually constitutive, our work at the margins has been able to write back to the centre.

The paper begins with Hilary Janks' description of the research course offered to all AELS Honours, Masters and PhD students and of the weekend seminars to which all contribute. This is followed by three emergent researcher stories, each of which responds to one or more of the strands of our argument. These vignettes are written as reflective narratives and as voices from within the AELS research community. In the final discussion section we return to the arguments outlined in this introduction.

Developing a research community in Applied English Language Studies (Hilary Janks)

The research course, which is compulsory for all postgraduate students, has evolved over time. It used to be designed around research methods and data analysis but is now structured around stages in the research process. The latter structure enables the course presenters to introduce the material relating to research design, research methods, data analysis and research writing at points in the process when they are most useful to students. The focus on socio-cultural theory enables both coherence and depth: coherence in that this research paradigm provides a framework for course content and projects that are related to one another; depth in that we are not trying to include the full range of literacy research, thus allowing more time and more focus. During the academic year each student makes a mandatory presentation of his or her research proposal and receives feedback from external readers. The course is a

space in which it is established that becoming a researcher involves more than just writing a research report, dissertation or thesis. It is currently structured into four quarters and designed to dovetail with the research process as indicated in the table below.

Table 1: The AELS research course

	Structure of the course	**How the course dovetails with the stages in the research process**
Quarter 1	What is research? Formulating research question(s). What? Why? Where-Who-When? How? (How do I get data to answer the research question?)	Students formulate topics and think about research design. They are assigned a supervisor who suggests reading related to the topic.
Quarter 2	Choose research methods that will provide the relevant data: read and discuss. Ethics clearance procedure.	Students complete ethics clearance, literature review and proposal. Methods explored relate to all the projects in a particular year.
Quarter 3	Coding and managing data. Transcription methods. Methods of qualitative data analysis together with on-going analysis of actual research data.	Students collect data and start analysing. Write sections of data analysis.
Quarter 4	Research writing. Genre of the research report. Positioning oneself.	Students transform bits of writing done throughout the year into research report, dissertation, etc.

The course is underpinned by six 'principles':

1. It is multi-level and includes Honours, Masters and PhD students. This enables students working at different levels and at different stages of their projects to help one another. For example, students working at different levels but in a similar area, sometimes form their own reading or writing groups outside the course.

2. Everyone learns from everyone else's project. This enables everyone to emerge from the course with knowledge of research in the field that extends well beyond their own project. Students have opportunities to read and comment on each other's work.

3.   Cohort and individual supervision models are combined. Working with a cohort saves supervision time as one or two staff members work with all the students and the students also assist one another. Students work one-on-one with a supervisor on the particularities of their project.

4.   Students belong to a community of researchers. For those no longer doing course work or who are registered for research only degrees, the course offers a regular way of staying in touch and helps to address problems of isolation. Students can form sub-groups in relation to shared concerns and knowing each other's interests, they can, and do, share information and resources.

5.   The curriculum is organic in relation to students' projects: there is space for students to have some control over what is included and there is space for input from visiting academics.

6.   Students have opportunities to present their work and to prepare for the discipline of conference presentations with their imposed time limits. They also learn how to present with flair and to respond to questions.

In addition to the course, three times a year students and staff members meet over two days for the presentation of students' research. These presentations may be proposals, chapters, work in progress or conference papers. Students and supervisors use these weekends as writing deadlines. The presentation space offers opportunities for practice in presenting research and in dealing with questions and suggestions. Here students learn how to disseminate ideas in a standard conference format of 20 minutes and how to field questions. These weekends give out-of-town Masters dissertation and PhD students an opportunity to reconnect with fellow students. Honours and Masters students who have completed course work in the previous year have an on-going point of contact with a research community.

Some years ago, at the request of students, staff members were allocated some time during these weekends to make presentations on their research with students being invited to question and critique this work.

In the vignettes below, three former AELS postgraduate students describe and reflect critically on research journeys which illustrate each of the arguments outlined in the introduction.

Vignette 1: A research apprenticeship and its consequences for exploring postmethod pedagogy with Mozambican secondary school teachers of English (Susan Walden)

My apprenticeship as a researcher began early in my Honours year in a small reading group which was addressed at its first meeting by an AELS doctoral student. She had been researching the effectiveness of study groups and shared ideas on how to make a reading group work to each member's benefit. That evening I learned a valuable lesson as I observed how other students in the group quickly found and extracted the most salient points in the text we were reviewing. Many of the assignments designed by AELS lecturers, and the assessment rubrics which accompanied them, enabled students to choose our own focus of interest so in much of my reading I was able to explore EFL teaching and EFL teacher education. Before the end of the first semester, while reading and selecting articles for one such assignment, I came across a topic which was to become the focus of both my Honours and Master's research projects: context-sensitive postmethod EFL pedagogy.

I became a more experienced apprentice as a result of being paired, in some of the research course sessions, with a student who was beginning work on a second MA degree. Her ideas and guidance were invaluable as we worked together to fine tune our topics and to design research questions. Further sessions took us slowly through the research process and provided the support that we needed to manage the various stages of our projects. The interest that both fellow students and lecturers showed in my project was a great encouragement.

Each of the weekend research conferences was a valuable time and space for learning: learning about theories and their possible implications for my own research; learning about research designs; extending my knowledge of literature in the broad field of language and literacy education; learning how to make a presentation. I learned how researchers use such occasions to try out ideas and to get feedback to inform their research.

I turn now to a brief account of what the support I have just described enabled me to investigate firstly, for a small scale Honours project and secondly, for a more substantial MA project.

The term 'postmethod' coined by Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003) refers to a pedagogy which rejects the concept of 'one best method' (Bax, 2003;

Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1989; Phillipson, 1992; Prabhu, 1990) for all contexts and places the onus on the teacher to develop a context-sensitive pedagogy. At the International House Language Lab (IHLL) where I was director of language teacher education, intensive courses are offered to cohorts of English teachers from Mozambique. For my Honours research project I spent time in Mozambique in the classrooms and communities of two teachers in order to understand the contexts in which they worked and to investigate how, if at all, pedagogies from the IHLL courses were informing their teaching. Findings from this small study suggested that it might be useful to adapt the IHLL teacher education course to include Kumaravadivelu's (1994, 2003) macrostrategic framework which aims to develop strategic thinkers and practitioners.

Kumaravadivelu (2001) suggests that teacher educators adopt a postmethod pedagogy of "particularity, practicality and possibility" in their work with teachers. A pedagogy of particularity engages teachers in developing context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge through cycles of observation, reflection and action in order to understand what works and what does not work with learners in a particular context (2001, p.541). A pedagogy of practicality seeks to overcome the theory (of the academy) versus the practice (of the teacher) dichotomy by enabling teachers to "theorise from their practice and to practise what they theorise" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.543). A pedagogy of possibility taps into socio-political consciousness in a "continual quest for subjectivity and self-identity" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.543). It should empower participants and "develop theories, forms of knowledge and social practices that *work with* the experiences that people bring to the pedagogical setting" (Giroux. 1988, p.134).

In the IHLL course my colleagues and I attempted to use the ten macrostrategies outlined by Kumaravadivelu to prepare teachers to conduct collaborative, exploratory projects in their classrooms and to become reflective practitioners. My MA research investigated whether and if so how, two teachers were able to enact such a process of exploration and reflection. Their exploratory projects included the following activities: the teacher teaching a lesson with a colleague observing; the teacher and the observing colleague meeting both before and after the observed lesson to discuss and analyse the lesson; and the teacher inviting a group of students to discuss their perceptions of selected episodes in the lesson.

While acknowledging that Kumaravadivelu has opened up new possibilities for language teacher education programmes, analysis of data from observation notes, interviews, classroom artefacts and advice memoranda led me to

conclude that although the teachers' exploratory projects provided a frame of reference and point of departure for postmethod pedagogy, the teachers' abilities to "develop a systematic, coherent, and relevant personal theory of practice" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 40) were limited by their contexts, the surface level application of the macrostrategies and the backgrounding of the critical in the postmethod macrostrategies. For example, teachers who expressed interest in collaborating with observation partners were not able to find time to do so because they either worked two teaching shifts (daytime and evenings in the same or different schools) or did other work in addition to teaching in order to earn enough money to support their families. The macrostrategic framework introduced to the teachers in their IHLL course did not give them sufficient guidance on how to critique existing curricula and how to introduce and support curriculum change that is responsive to local context.

The findings from the research project suggested the following to the IHLL teacher education team: (i) we should continue to place negotiation discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) at the centre of our work with teachers from Mozambique (and elsewhere) so that everyone learns about each other's lived classroom experiences and is supported in developing context-sensitive rationales for practice; (ii) while Kumaravadivelu's macrostrategies can inform our course design, we need to mediate these and to offer teachers a range of detailed strategies from which to make an informed selection for their classroom contexts.

When I registered for post-graduate study in AELS I hoped to extend my knowledge and skills as a language teacher educator working in southern African contexts. I did not anticipate that my research apprenticeship would not only give me new knowledge and skills but also the confidence and the critical orientation to knowledge which would lead me to question the current 'grand narrative' in EFL teaching.

Vignette 2: Making space, finding a place, being located in a research community   (Kerryn Dixon)

In this vignette I draw on my memories (with all of the pitfalls of relying on them) of being a postgraduate student in two departments (English Literature and AELS) and, with hindsight, attempt to theorise what my experiences in these departments taught me about academic disciplines, research, research communities and the degree to which one can be located in them (or have a

space). So, as flagged in the title of this vignette, the three words that are key to this reflection are: space, place and being. In taking some liberties with the concepts of space and place I draw on several theoretical positions which enable me to explore the ways in which **being** a researcher is (and is not) realised.

In order to do this I align myself with Leander, Phillips and Taylor's (2010) argument that a great deal of work that considers the spatial in educational settings is expressed in the dominant discourse of 'learning space as a container'. This discourse affects the ways in which teachers and researchers 'expect learning to take place'. It does not take into consideration mobility and movement which are fundamental in contemporary social life. Leander *et al.* (2010) propose what they call three expansive metaphors with which to consider learning in space-time: learning-in-place, learning trajectories and learning networks. It is these three metaphors that frame this vignette. It must be noted that these metaphors are a useful lens for exploring the relationship between place and burgeoning research identities, that they are used on a modest scale here and do not reflect the scale and complexity of Leander *et al.'s* (2010) work.

Learning-in-place

I argue, drawing on Foucault (2000) and Soja (1996), that thinking about space and place as alive and dynamic rather than fixed and immobile allows for the development of a set of perspectives about the ways in which we come to constitute ourselves.

Gruenewald (2003, p.621) argues powerfully that

> places are profoundly pedagogical. That is, as centres of experience, places, *teach* us about how the world works and how lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further, places *make* us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped.

> Places produce and teach particular ways of thinking and being in the world. They tell us the ways things are, even when they operate pedagogically beneath a conscious level (p.627).

Leander *et al.* (2010) describe place as the ways in which locales are constructed of and through a nexus of multiple relations (e.g. the participants, resources and the way in which people and resources are spatially positioned). Places of learning also have distinctive qualities that recruit or draw learners to them (2010).

In this vignette I examine the construction of the locales of two academic departments (English and AELS), in other words I examine the ways in which real spaces are constituted which are indicative of the particular world views held in these departments. I discuss these in relation to the ways in which these world views reveal beliefs about the disciplines, research, postgraduate students and ultimately what it means to participate in a research community.

The first issue I examine is positioning and spatial organisation in regard to the teaching space. At the time of my postgraduate studies each department had a postgraduate teaching room. In both rooms students no longer sat in rows, taught by the lecturer standing in the front of the class. Rather we sat around a table, or tables facing each other. I have written about the implications of a circular configuration before (Dixon, 2011)**:** this configuration works in an inclusive way and positions individuals as part of the whole that enables contributions to a conversation rather than listeners being spoken to from a podium.

In the English department the postgraduate seminar room was kept locked when it was not in use. The presence of this room was an indicator of the distinction between the mass of undergraduates and the small select group who were now marked as post graduates. It also revealed a particular world view organised in a very hierarchical way. When I think back, this was evident in the access we had to spaces in the department. Access to the seminar room was limited because it was locked. Although students could get the key from the secretary to open the door, it was only before class, and we often waited for the staff member who was teaching us to open the door for us. If place is profoundly pedagogical then it taught us that there were many places where we did not have the status and prestige to enter and where we were not welcome. We knew our place. Interestingly, it was the liminal space of the corridor where we spent a fair amount of time. So we placed ourselves **in** the department but we did not quite get through the door.

AELS also had a teaching space that was used for postgraduate teaching. It was a far more welcoming space with walls lined with posters and work that students had produced. This was in contrast to the English room which contained multiple copies of set works that no-one ever seemed to use. AELS was a department where traces of students were obvious, and where their work was valued enough to display it, but which also taught in ways that produced such material resources. And the hierarchical power relations were less obvious. Where undergraduate classes were smaller in the later years of the

degree, undergraduate students were sometimes also taught there, as were students enrolled for a PGCE programme in English teaching. AELS also had another small teaching/meeting room down the corridor that was open to students to use to meet with each other and to work individually or collaboratively immediately before classes or throughout the day.

At that time there was a resource centre opposite the teaching/meeting room. This was a small library with a rich collection of current and classic books and articles in the field of language and literacy teaching and learning. What it enabled was access to specialised knowledge of the field, handpicked by lecturers and continually added to. There was space to work in this centre and we could take books out because it was run as a mini-library. The centre provided direct access to the discipline with texts that addressed theoretical, seminal, research and practical examples from the field. It was also a space that was invaluable for novice researchers. It was the first port of call when doing research for essays and it was a repository for gathering literature for Honours, Masters and PhD research projects. It was a space where students often shared what they had found or recommended books or articles that they found useful.

Postgraduate students were constructed as independent: the books and articles were referred to in the classes and we were expected to take them out and read them. While I cannot speak for all the postgraduate courses AELS offered, in my experience there was a direct and explicit link between what we were being taught and the research that informed it. It was also clear that we were being taught by people who were involved in research, or projects, who had published work, and who collaborated with each other.

AELS has always had a social justice agenda, has always worked hard to provide access and support to students and whether this was commented on disparagingly or with approval within the institution, it was something that was well known. I would argue that the socio-cultural approach that underpins what AELS does has meant that there is a far greater awareness of what students come to class with, and what they do not, than is common across all departments. And, not coming with a particular set of practices or knowledge does not negate the ways of knowing and being in the world that students do come with.

The prominence of research is something I now take up in relation to trajectories.

Trajectories

Leander *et al*. (2010) describe trajectories as being like intersections that people pass through. They ask how people are afforded access to trajectories across resources for learning that include discourses and forms of representation. Given these affordances, how do individuals create their own trajectories?

What I want to focus on here is the discourse and the way in which trajectories go back into other parts of our lives. In a recent discussion with a colleague from the English department she commented on how some staff members had cloaked what they did in mystique. They modelled a particular view of the world that placed literature students in an exalted position. These attitudes and values are then likely to be taken on by students.

What this discourse (in Gee's (1996) sense of the word) does is to include and exclude particular kinds of students. When a deep literary knowledge that is expressed through excellent writing is what is valued, then the spaces to ask questions and to admit ignorance are extremely limited. This means that the kind of community that is created is not one that shares because sharing sometimes means admitting one does not know something, or being shown that one has made an incorrect assumption. It took a long time in my English Honours year to build relationships that were supportive. Keeping quiet is not necessarily a bad thing – because over the course of a year one does gain access to discourses that shape the field, that enable a literary critic to emerge through the written word, to see the unacknowledged play of signifiers in a meta-reflective postmodern text and to have one's moment of jouissance.

After completing a Post-graduate Certificate in Education, when I became a Masters in English Education student I had currency to trade – I had new knowledge about education, new theory and the discourses with which to express myself in academic writing; my classmates had the pedagogy, experience and classroom practice. And I was finally working out what research was and what mistake I had made in my Honours year. Although learning and education were valued at home and in the school I attended, there was not a great deal of experience of the practices of the academy on which I could draw. Moving into an Honours degree was uncharted territory (a new trajectory) and so I had no idea that when we were given the option of writing a long essay or choosing another course, that choosing the former constituted research and was the smart option if I wished to proceed to a Master's degree.

In my ignorance, by choosing the latter, I had potentially moved at full speed into a brick wall. I wondered for many years why no-one had explained the consequences of these two options very clearly. Now I know that in a discipline where hierarchy, power, and elite status are fostered very carefully, making sure some doors are closed rather than open is a way of maintaining the mystique, and controlling who has access to the inner circle. If you don't already speak the language fluently you are not going to get the translation.

My experiences as an Honours student raise the question of how many university departments behave in similar ways by giving students a place but not space so that the place that they find is outside not inside.

Learning networks

The third metaphor I want to discuss is the network. I focus on one aspect which comes from Latour (1987) which is the 'obligatory passage point' – the officially designated gateway one passes through in order to be considered a particular kind of person.

Becoming a researcher requires passage through a number of these gateways. Some are related to the differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students. Only those with good enough marks become postgraduate students. In addition, the kinds of degrees one comes with (what one did and where one studied), are imbued with symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Our individual abilities are evaluated in terms of the places we come from. I realised how being located in the space of the English Department as an Honours student provided me with 'up-to-date' theoretical perspectives that were valued.

Being part of this learning network provided a foundation for learning to do research. Learning networks are not only localised. Both English and AELS regularly hosted visiting academics who spoke at seminars specifically for postgraduate students or to which we were invited. When students produced interesting research, AELS staff were particularly good at networking them into wider communities of practice by encouraging these students to attend local and international conferences. (Of course, what cannot be underestimated is the impact that digital networking now has in enabling contacts between novice researchers and the more experienced working in other institutions.) Alongside conferences come publications. To be considered the right kind of person in the academy the publications threshold

needs to be crossed. In my own experience as a postgraduate student and as a lecturer, the terror associated with publishing is alleviated somewhat when a staff member co-publishes with a student. Co-authoring is especially valuable for learning what it means to write a journal article, learning how to deal with peer reviews (and rejections) and learning where to publish in order to make space for oneself as a researcher in a field.

Places make us – a literary degree in the English department taught me to read, AELS taught me that sitting with two sets of disciplinary knowledge is valuable even if I did not come with all the right cultural capital. I discovered that working collaboratively is a crucial part of being located in a learning network that impacts on both one's own trajectory and on others in the network. It is rewarding when students share work in progress because they want feedback and they are in a space that values them as growing researchers. University departments are powerful places that can 'make' researchers and provide them with tools to navigate into new spaces.

Vignette 3: A research journey as an endurance race rather than a grand prix   (Yvonne Reed)

In this vignette I use metaphors from motor racing discourse to reflect on identify shifts during a research journey best described as an endurance race. Gee (2001) argues that one of our identities is an 'institutional identity' which may be either a calling (e.g. a vocation to be a teacher) or an imposition (e.g. if one is sentenced to become a prisoner for a period of time). I suggest that our institutional identities may combine both. In 1993, when I was employed as a short-term contract lecturer in AELS, research was not part of the brief: I was positioned as a temporary teacher, invisible in the academic community. I include this positioning in this reflection because in many universities in South Africa and elsewhere the employment of academics on short-term contracts is on the increase, often with negative consequences for their development as researchers in terms of access to research leave, funding, etc.

By 1995 I had a permanent appointment and the 'first lap' of my research journey began when the 'team leader' in AELS nominated me to participate in a national audit of distance education programmes for teacher education. At workshops led by researchers from the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE) and the UK Open University I began to learn how to devise theoretically informed critical questions to frame research and to

develop an interest in distance education which continues to this day. In terms of identity, for the first time I was positioned as a co-researcher though I was conscious that my apprenticeship had only just begun.

The second lap in this apprenticeship involved collaboration with AELS colleagues in the development of a position paper on languages in the school curriculum titled *English with or without g(u)ilt* (Granville, Janks, Mphahlele, Reed, Watson, Ramani and Joseph, 1998). In a series of round table discussions and paired writing of sections of the paper, all contributions were valued, with the more experienced academics supporting the less experienced in shaping the paper.

From 1996 to 1999 I was a member of an NRF-funded research team which investigated teacher take-up from the Further Diploma in Education programme offered at that time by the University of the Witwatersrand. This was another collaborative process of designing the research, collecting and analysing data and writing for publication. The team was led by a senior academic and over the life of this project I found myself positioned variously as apprentice, co-researcher and lead researcher. As the journey continued I gained a measure of confidence as a practice-based researcher to the point where I felt able to work under the guidance of the team leader in co-editing a book based on this project. For the next collaboratively developed paper in AELS I was positioned as able to lead the writing process (Reed, Granville, Janks, Makoe, Stein and Van Zyl, with Samuel 2003).

After years of research apprenticeship I set off on the 'practice laps' for a doctoral research project. The distance education literature (e.g. Evans, 1995; Hounsell, Day and Tait, 1997) advises using feedback from students as a guide to the redesign of teaching materials. To continue with the motor racing metaphors, when I attempted to work with former students to redesign some of the materials they had used, I crashed out of the race. They responded to the materials as satisfied customers rather than as critics for reasons that I should have anticipated (see Reed, 2005) and I went back to driving school.

I joined the AELS research class, taking up a new subject position as student in a class which included Honours and MA students whose research I was supervising. On this new journey each research weekend pit stop (from proposal presentation to presentation of aspects of the data analysis) was an occasion for a fuel injection, while individual sessions with my supervisor combined fuel injections with repairs.

The learning which resulted from participation in a series of collaborative research projects, the intellectual and emotional support of colleagues and fellow students in the AELS research community and the expertise of my supervisor resulted, eventually, in the chequered flag being waved: the thesis was completed and its completion has enabled me to write back to the established distance education literature. The thesis claims that critical pedagogic analysis affords materials designers and evaluators the critical distance needed for evaluating the mediation of knowledge(s) and the constitution of readers' subjectivities in teacher education materials. It claims that such an analysis can be a productive alternative (or addition to) reader feedback for informing redesigning for original contexts of use or for reversioning for use in new contexts.

With one long journey finally ended another has begun, as a co-supervisor of PhD students' research. As part of our evolving research practice in AELS we see co-supervision as supportive for new supervisors and as offering students the benefit of a range of perspectives on their research.

Discussion

While a likely criticism of this paper is that it is too celebratory or even self-indulgent, we argue that the research practices of many academic departments are largely invisible and that these practices need to be made visible if we are to take seriously the call for educational research to be re-imagined. Feedback from our audience at the Kenton conference highlighted the important distinction between what it means to do research and what it means to create the conditions in which research is possible. We argue that paying attention to these conditions is crucial in producing communities of researchers.

The three vignettes show that a productive community of practice allows for multiple trajectories for individuals that take into account different points of entry into a community, different positions that these individuals take up on entry and positions to which they move once more established. More established positions are not necessarily permanent: Yvonne Reed describes movement from established, practice-based researcher in one context to novice PhD student in another.

For these moves to happen, a learning network that is multidimensional needs to be in place because the people who constitute it have different repositories

of knowledge. For example, at the beginning of her apprenticeship Susan Walden learned from more senior and experienced postgraduate students and then subsequently from staff who led the research course, from her supervisor and from participants in the weekend seminars. Findings from her MA project gave her knowledge with which to write from the periphery (Canagarajah, 1999) to leaders in the field of EFL pedagogy. As indicated by Hilary Janks, communities of practice are not just about academic knowledge but also about the accumulated practical knowledge/wisdom which enables navigation through the administrative procedures associated with research degrees, research projects, conferences and research publications.

Establishing the conditions in which research communities of practice can thrive takes time. An academic department needs to develop a research 'identity' and it has taken AELS almost two decades to evolve a coherent postgraduate research course and programme of research seminars that are underpinned by a particular theoretical framework. As stated in the introduction, staff development has been central to the evolution of AELS. In South African universities in general, and in Schools or Faculties of Education in particular (partly as a result of lecturers from former colleges of education moving into university spaces), there is increasing pressure on academics to obtain higher degree qualifications and to become research active. We argue that it can be productive for the research of an academic department to be located within a particular theoretical framework as this enables postgraduate students and staff to support one another's work and to produce research which adds to and develops a particular body of knowledge.

What we have tried to do in this paper is to take our experiences seriously and to think about the ways in which a particular set of research practices has shaped the research identities, practices and research agendas of postgraduate students and staff. What we have described and reflected on is not offered as a blueprint but as the starting point for a conversation about how research communities are (being) developed in different ways in different places and spaces.

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