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**Becoming an academic: a study of learning
to judge student performance in three
disciplines at a South African university**

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Acronyms

- CHE – Council on Higher Education
- CoP – communities of practice
- HEQC – Higher Education Quality Committee
- HOD – Head of Department
- LPP – legitimate peripheral participation
- MCQ – multiple choice questions
- SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority
- SAU – South African University
- UCT – University of Cape Town
- USA – United States of America

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Declaration

I declare that *Becoming an academic: a study of learning to judge student performance in three disciplines at a South African university* is my own work, except where indicated, and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.

Jeff Jawitz
August 2007

Abstract

This study seeks to understand how new academics learn to judge student performance in complex assessment tasks, i.e. tasks that allow students substantial initiative and latitude in their response. It was conducted at a research intensive historically white university in South Africa and involved case studies in three academic departments. Thirty one academics were interviewed across the three departments.

The analysis of these cases was conducted in two parts, using a framework developed from Bourdieu's theory of practice and Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory. In the first part, I analysed the academic workplace in each case and identified three different configurations of communities of practice that formed key dimensions of the fields within which these departments were situated. In the second part, I applied the concepts of *habitus* and legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) to understand how new academics engaged with the communities of practice in their departments and learnt how to judge student performance of complex assessment tasks. The study revealed limitations in the explanatory power of social learning theory in contexts where the stability of communities of practice was uncertain, where there were no opportunities for LPP and where knowledge was deemed to reside in the individual rather than to be distributed in the community.

In contrast to the view that learning in the workplace is informal and unstructured, in each of the case studies it was possible to identify a learning to judge trajectory, which, in some cases more than others, provided a structured "learning curriculum" (Wenger, 1998) for new academic staff. Learning to judge student performance happened through participation in a series of assessment practices along this trajectory. The experience of following a learning to judge trajectory was closely associated with the identity trajectory of each individual academic and depended on three factors: the particular configuration of communities of practice within each field, the capital valued within this configuration, and the nature of the capital that the newcomer brings into the department. However, the existence of these trajectories did not mean that learning was unproblematic, as they appeared to support the dominant relationships of power within each field and posed particular challenges for those individuals who embarked on alternative trajectories.

The concept of legitimate peripheral participation was unable to explain how learning to judge student performance developed within the academic workplace, as in most cases new academics were required to make these judgements in contexts with very little peripherality and with a substantial degree of perceived risk to their reputation as academics. The notion of harmonization of *habitus*, developed from Bourdieu's theory of practice, provides a more comprehensive explanation of how academics develop a "feel for the game" and an understanding of the embedded rules that govern assessment practice within communities of practice.

In the three case studies learning to judge occurred as part of the process whereby newcomers developed their academic *habitus* in the field within which the department was situated. In the process, two things were found to happen: the individual *habitus* was harmonized in relation to the "collective *habitus*" of the communities of practice, and, to a certain extent, the collective *habitus* adjusted to the concerns and interests that new academics brought with them.

Strategies adopted by academic staff development practitioners need to be sensitive to the complex and context dependent nature of the process of learning to judge student performance. This study highlights the importance of understanding the nature of the academic workplace in terms of the particular configuration of communities of practice in relation to research, teaching and the profession, the range of identity trajectories available to academics and the learning to judge trajectories that form part of the collective *habitus*. Academic staff development initiatives should provide opportunities for new academics to access the knowledge about teaching and assessment embedded within their communities of practice through the engagement of the individual *habitus* with the collective *habitus*. This can only be achieved by working in partnership with the academic leadership in the department, to identify and make explicit the range of learning trajectories available within particular disciplinary fields, to work with the opportunities offered by these trajectories, and to address the obstacles and challenges they pose for new academics.

Chapter 1: Introduction

A curious feature of modern academic life is the presumption that new faculty members arrive on campus having previously acquired virtually all the habits, knowledge and skills required for on-the-job success.

(Lucas & Murry, 2002, p. x)

Academics are responsible for teaching and producing graduates with the knowledge and high-level skills needed by the communities they serve. They are also required to produce knowledge in their disciplines through research, to manage and develop the institutions within which they work, and to respond to the accountability and quality agendas universities increasingly have to address.

1.1 How do academics learn?

This study attempts to understand how academics learn to do this work, in particular the work related to teaching. It addresses the broad research question: How do academics learn in the academic workplace?

Newcomers to academic life cannot be viewed as a homogenous group as there are substantial differences in the career and entry paths across the different disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Clark, 1987). Applied disciplines such as Engineering, Law, Architecture, Graphic Design, Drama, Physiotherapy and Nursing have always valued practical experience in private practice, industry, corporations or government in their selection of new academic staff. In contrast, the traditional route into the academy in disciplines such as Mathematics, Physics, History and Philosophy has been via postgraduate studies, with the experience of working on the doctorate under a supervisor forming a rite of passage and primary induction process into the academic world (Becher & Trowler, 2001). It has been argued elsewhere that this induction process relates primarily to the academic-as-researcher and does little to prepare new academics for their role as educators (Austin, 2002).

In contrast to the extensive system of teacher development that has evolved at the primary and secondary school levels of the education system, there has been very little support for the development of teaching at the tertiary level. Despite this lack of formal support, academics have somehow learnt how to develop and deliver educational programmes that by and large meet the needs of the communities they serve. The outcomes of the educational programmes that have evolved in this way are regularly reviewed by the accreditation systems in professional disciplines such as Engineering, Accounting and the Health Sciences. However, such systems are not available for the more formative programmes in the Humanities and Sciences in South Africa. Recent examples of shifts towards the professionalization of the development of teaching amongst academics include the requirement that all new academics in the United Kingdom (UK) complete an accredited teaching certificate (Knight, Tait & Yorke, 2006), and the introduction of teaching programmes in the United States of America (USA) to strengthen the support for doctoral students in their role as teaching assistants (Austin, 2002).

I work in the area of academic staff development at a higher educational institution in South Africa, and my responsibilities include observing, supporting and working with other academics in their efforts to improve the effectiveness of their teaching. Learning to teach involves developing abilities in a range of tasks including the design and effective delivery of learning experiences for students, the development of curricula, and the assessment of student learning and performance. In an earlier study I identified a range of practices in the management and assessment of final year engineering projects within the engineering departments at the University of Cape Town (UCT) (Jawitz, Shay & Moore, 2002). In none of these departments were there procedures in place to help new academics learn how to assess final year projects. One new academic interviewed at the time reported that, despite his repeated requests to senior academics for help, he had found no advice on how to mark these projects. The expectation was that new staff would simply “learn by doing”.

The outcome of this earlier study had an important influence on the shape and focus of this study. It stimulated my interest in how new academics learnt to assess complex student performance when the general practice across a range of departments did not provide them with any obvious support, and resulted in the formulation of the following research question for this study:

How do new academics learn to judge student performance in complex assessment tasks?

Phrasing the question in this way provides this study with two windows through which to view the process of learning in the academic workplace. The one is an “assessment window” to explore the process of learning to make judgements about student performance in complex assessment tasks, by which I mean, tasks that allow students substantial initiative and latitude in their response. The other is a “newcomer window” which takes advantage of the experiences and perspectives of new academics to throw light on “taken for granted practices” that are often “invisible to the more experienced staff” (Trowler & Knight, 1999, p. 189).

Sections 1.2 and 1.3 provide two vignettes that further explain the rationale for constructing my research focus in this way. The first vignette is based on observations arising from my work in academic staff development, reflecting the highly personal dimension of what it feels like to be a new academic and the expectations this position carries with respect to the ability to assess student performance. The second vignette draws on a debate arising out of a proposal for the introduction of assessor training in higher education in South Africa, and highlights opposing perspectives on the process of learning to assess student performance.

1.2 The new academic: what it feels like not to know

Joseph Starr¹ accepted his first lecturing post at UCT in the department he had graduated from directly after completing his PhD². He had been encouraged by his lecturers to pursue an academic career because of his excellent performance in postgraduate research.

In his first year he was assigned to teach a large undergraduate class, which he felt confident doing as he had done well in the course as a student not long ago. He was surprised that there was no help or advice available on preparing and delivering lectures or setting exam papers. In that year he attended one of my workshops on teaching and informed me afterwards that while he had thoroughly enjoyed the workshop, it had raised more questions than it had

¹ Joseph Starr is a fictitious academic constructed from my own observations of and work with new academic staff prior to this study.

² The abbreviation PhD is used throughout this thesis to refer to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy awarded entirely by thesis.

answered. He still felt very unsure about whether or not he was doing the right thing in his classes.

Towards the end of his first year as an academic, Joseph, along with all the academics in the department, was required to supervise and mark a number of final year projects. A marksheet was provided listing the categories against which marks were to be allocated. The department used a system of “double marking” with the supervisor and one other academic marking each project. If their marks differed by more than 10%, a third marker was appointed from amongst the rest of the staff. The three markers met afterwards to negotiate a mark, and reported their recommendation to all their colleagues at a departmental marks meeting where the decision was taken on what final mark to award each student.

Joseph found this process extremely stressful as he did not understand the basis for deciding on a mark. In his first year he awarded marks that were higher than those of the second marker, resulting in his marks being discussed at the departmental marks meeting. In his second year, to avoid a repeat of this experience, he was particularly conservative in his marking and found that he gave substantially lower marks than the second marker. Once again he had to justify his marks in front of his colleagues. At the subsequent departmental marks meeting, a frustrated Joseph asked his colleagues how he, as a newcomer, was expected to know how to mark final year projects, admitting that after two years he still felt at a loss as to how to judge student performance in these assessment tasks. His comments were greeted with silence – then a senior member in the department turned to him and said reassuringly, “Not to worry Joseph, we’ve all been there. It gets better with time – just give it time”.

1.3 The assessor training debate

This interaction between Joseph and his colleagues took place at the time of major structural re-organisation in higher education in South Africa. After the first democratic elections in 1994, the new South African government committed itself to transforming the unjust, fragmented and skewed educational system, inherited from apartheid, into an educational system capable of providing quality education to all the country’s citizens. As part of this process the newly established South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) proposed

introducing assessor registration and accredited assessor training to ensure that anyone who was required to assess student performance at any level of the educational system was competent to do so (SAQA, 2001).

A heated discussion on this proposal took place at the Second National Symposium on Assessment in Higher Education at the University of the Western Cape in 2002. Speaking from the floor, several academics expressed their unhappiness with this proposal, arguing that a generic assessor-training course would add little to an academic's understanding of the complex nature of assessment in higher education. Members of SAQA, who were present in the audience, responded that there was no basis for excluding academics from formal obligations to develop their assessment competence, and cited the failure of higher educational institutions to provide opportunities for academics to develop their abilities to assess student performances in either simple or complex assessment tasks.

A year later the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) issued a communiqué placing the responsibility for assessor training in the hands of higher education institutions. These institutions would in future be required to ensure that "assessors have the requisite competencies and necessary training to undertake assessment in higher education" (CHE, 2003, p. 3). Through its newly established institutional system of audit it undertook to "scrutinize institutional arrangements for assessor choice and training" (CHE, 2003, p. 4).

These two vignettes reveal two views within the public discourse of the South African academic community on the process whereby new academics learn to assess student performance.

- a. SAQA and the HEQC both argue for some form of assessor training, with SAQA's proposal for a generic, formal and certified training process being rejected by HEQC in favour of assessor training that is tailored to the particular higher education context.
- b. Conversely, in the view of Joseph Starr's colleagues, no formal training is required as new academics learn "with time" and experience.

These two views can be mapped onto two perspectives that are evident in the literature on assessment practice. In the one perspective, assessment involves the measurement of student learning and requires knowledge of the appropriate set of skills and tools. Training must

ensure that academics are competent in these skills and understand what tools are available and how to use them. This approach is evident in the call by SAQA for assessor training, and to some extent in HEQC's endorsement of this call. According to Eraut (2004) this perspective is characteristic of a discourse in which "problems are treated as well defined and readily soluble, and therefore susceptible to formal, standardized types of training to clearly specified targets". He argues that "public discourse about training not only neglects informal learning but denies complexity by oversimplifying the processes and outcomes of learning and the factors that give rise to it" (Eraut, 2004, p. 271). Butler spells out the limitations of the training perspective, describing it as containing "the seed of its own limited effectiveness because it is an externally prescribed skilling process rather than a problem-correcting process focussing on personal beliefs, values and experiential knowledge" (Butler, 1996, p. 266).

The second perspective, and the one that informs this study, views such an approach as inappropriate for dealing with the complex assessment tasks valued in higher education. It regards assessment as a social practice that involves interpretation and engagement with a community, requiring a high degree of professional academic judgement (Gipps, 1999; Knight, 2002; Shay, 2003). According to this perspective, academics need to understand and develop their own interpretive framework and be able to make professional academic judgement in ways that others, including colleagues and students, can understand and accept. This involves a process which requires more than just "training". It requires immersion in the practices of the workplace, and, in the words of Joseph Star's colleague, it needs "time".

1.4 Being a new academic in higher education in South Africa

This study was conducted in the "social space" (Bourdieu, 1998) of higher education in South Africa between 2003 and 2006, a time of significant restructuring and transformation. One aspect of this transformation aimed to achieve employment equity, ensuring that, amongst other things, the racial composition of staff at higher education institutions throughout the country mirrored that of the broader South African society.

Given South Africa's apartheid history, during which employment opportunities were restricted by racial classification³, white males, until relatively recently, made up the overwhelming majority of academic appointments at universities, black academics having been excluded from such work opportunities. This was particularly the case at historically white institutions⁴ such as the South African University (SAU⁵) where this study was undertaken. Just over ten years after the first democratic elections, efforts to transform the racial and gender profile of academic staff were regarded as priority by the leadership at SAU. As a result an increasing number of the new lecturers appointed at SAU around the time of this study were black or female academics.

The intention of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of how new academics learn to be effective in their roles as educators within higher education institutions in South Africa, and how they develop in their confidence and ability to make judgements about student performance. This research aims to inform the work of those who, like myself, have the responsibility for designing and delivering systems of support for new academics in the development of their teaching practice, so that in future, Joseph Starr's experience of not knowing how to do what was required of him, and having no assistance, will be the exception rather than the norm.

1.5 Layout of the thesis

Chapter 2 presents a brief review of the literature on the nature of the academic workplace and learning in the workplace. An explanation of the two theoretical perspectives drawn on in this study, Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice, is presented in Chapter 3.

³ The major categories of racial classification were white, African, coloured and Indian. During the course of the struggle against apartheid, the term 'black' emerged as a unifying concept to refer to all people who were disenfranchised. I have chosen to use the term 'black' to collectively refer to people who would previously have been classified either African, coloured or Indian, and 'white' to refer to those who would have previously been classified as such.

⁴ The term "historically white" institution refers to the legislative constraints on such institutions only permitting them to register students classified white. Until the mid 1980s when the legislation ceased to be implemented, although it remained on the statute books until after 1994, a very limited number of black students were permitted to register at such institutions with special ministerial permission.

⁵ The South African University (SAU) is a pseudonym used to conceal the identity of the institution where this study took place.

Key aspects of my research journey during this study are presented in Chapter 4 where my choice of case study is explained, and the research design and data collection described. Chapter 4 also explains how some of the complexities associated with the analysis of the data and ethical issues associated with a study of this kind have been addressed.

Chapters 5 and 6 cover the findings of this research but at different levels. In Chapter 5 the nature of the academic workplace in the contexts of the three academic departments is analysed using the concepts of communities of practice and field. In the following chapter a more detailed analysis of the process of learning to judge in each of the three cases is presented.

The two final chapters contain a discussion of the findings of the study and a presentation of some of the implications of these findings for the practice of academic staff development.

University of Cape Town

Chapter 2: Learning in the academic workplace

2.1 Introduction

As explained in the previous chapter, the lack of formal educational opportunities to prepare or assist academics with the development of their teaching suggests that new academics are expected to learn to teach through informal processes within the academic workplace. This chapter will discuss the nature of the academic workplace, introduce some of the key concepts related to knowledge in the workplace, explore what a social practice perspective on learning has to offer a study of this kind and discuss the findings of studies involving new academics and the learning of assessment practice in higher education.

2.2 The academic workplace

The academic workplace in this study is the academic department, the place within the university where the discipline is developed and reproduced through research and teaching (Becher, 1994). Several authors have highlighted the dominance of the discipline in shaping the culture in academic departments (Austin, 1990; Clark, 1987; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Henkel, 2000; Neumann, 2001; Toma, 1997) while some have also acknowledged the role of the institution (Austin, 1990; Henkel, 2000).

The discipline and the . . . higher education institution [are] the main . . . communities within which academics construct their identities, their values, the knowledge base of their work, their modes of working and their self esteem. (Henkel, 2000, p. 22)

A study by Becher and Trowler (2001) of the nature of disciplinary difference in academic life focussed on research within the disciplines but left unanswered questions about the teaching within the disciplines or the relationship between teaching and research. The assumption of a positive relationship between these two aspects of academic work, as seen in

the expression “good researchers make good teachers”, has often been used to justify the appointment of academics on the basis of their research record alone (Jenkins, 2000).

The relationship between teaching and research within academic communities has been the subject of on-going debate (Neumann, 2001; Shulman, 1993; Clark, 1987; Jenkins, 2000; Jenkins, Breen, Lindsay & Brew, 2003). Neumann (2001) found that in almost all disciplines teaching was viewed as a generic activity that “lay on top of” the “real” academic work and was “unconnected with the disciplinary community at the heart of being an academic” (Neumann, 2001, p. 144). Clark (1987) makes the point that teaching is essentially a private, individual affair, while research in the discipline often provides the central point of engagement within the academic community. Shulman (1993) agrees that the primary focus of the community of academics is on research, with teaching activities being conducted in relative isolation by individual academics.

[W]e close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude, whereas in our life as scholars, we are members of active communities: communities of conversation, communities of evaluation, communities in which we gather with others in our invisible colleges to exchange our findings, our methods, and our excuses . . . The reason teaching is not more valued in the academy is because the way we treat teaching removes it from the community of scholars. (Shulman, 1993, pp. 6-7)

A study of academics from a range of natural science disciplines found that they displayed surprisingly similar conceptions of teaching and learning (Handal, Lauvas & Lycke, 1990). Since the “content of teaching” was natural science, Handal and colleagues concluded that “the dominant rationality of the content invades thinking about the process of teaching” (Handal et al., 1990, p. 326). They argued that new academics were inducted into a “specific ‘type of discourse’ characteristic of the discipline”. This “type of discourse” in turn becomes the newcomer’s “natural way of thinking and talking about crucial phenomena in their role as academics”. As a result, the view on teaching held by academics in the sciences is “strongly influenced by the dominating rationality within the discipline they ‘belong’ to” (Handal et al., 1990, pp. 329-330).

Several studies have found significant difference by discipline in aspects of teaching such as curriculum, methods of delivery and assessment (Neumann, 2001; Neumann, Parry & Becher, 2002; Marincovich, 1995). Neumann (2001) found “different values and emphases” evident

in the assessment practice of different disciplines. Warren Piper and colleagues, cited in Neumann (2001), concluded that discipline was a major factor in shaping the nature of the assessment practice. For example, that

. . . marking guidelines are used more in soft pure⁶ fields and less in hard pure ones (mathematics least of all). The same pattern was found in relation to guidelines on the distribution of grades and the practice of double marking. This would suggest that there is less contention about ‘right and wrong’ and the presentation of the evidence in fields with a strong paradigm. (Neumann, 2001, pp. 138-139)

The next section presents a brief review of how knowledge in the workplace is described in the literature and how the knowledge of assessment practice may thus be understood. This is followed by a discussion of learning as the process whereby newcomers gain access to the knowledge of social practice.

2.3 Knowledge in the workplace

One of the challenges facing newcomers to the academic workplace is how to access the knowledge required to judge student performance in complex assessment tasks. It is this knowledge of the assessment practice in the department that is the focus of this study rather than the knowledge associated with the discipline.

A distinction is often made in discussing knowledge in social contexts between “explicit knowledge”, that can be described, and “tacit knowledge” that exists only in use (Polanyi, 1967). According to Polanyi these forms of knowledge are inter-linked and performance of a task entails moving between a focal awareness of one and a subsidiary awareness of the other. He argues that to learn a new practice to the point where it can be used instinctively, one needs to “dwell in it” (Polanyi, 1967, p. 16). Giddens (1979) makes the distinction between “discursive consciousness” which can be expressed at the “level of discourse”, and “practical consciousness” referring to knowledge that cannot be described (Giddens, 1979, p. 5). Similarly Eraut (2004) distinguishes between cultural knowledge and personal knowledge in

⁶ The categorization of disciplines as hard pure, soft pure, hard applied and soft applied originated from the work of Biglan (1973) and was developed by Becher (1994). It formed the initial basis of my selection of case studies and is explained in Chapter 4.

workplace practices. Cultural knowledge is “acquired informally through participation in social activities. . . .[It] is often so ‘taken for granted’ that people are unaware of its influence on their behaviour” (Eraut, 2004, p. 263). Personal knowledge is “what individuals bring to situations that enable them to think, interact and perform”. This form of knowledge

. . . includes not only personalized versions of public codified knowledge but also everyday knowledge of people and situations, know-how in the form of skills and practices, memories of episodes and events, self-knowledge, attitudes and emotions. (Eraut, 2004, p. 264)

A second distinction often made is between knowledge that “resides in the brains and bodily skills of the individual” and knowledge that is distributed amongst the members of an organisation or community (Lam, 2000). Lam (2000) uses both these distinctions to put forward a typology of knowledge in an organisational context based on two axes (Table 1). Along an epistemological axis, knowledge is divided into explicit and tacit knowledge, while along an ontological axis, knowledge is classified in terms of its primary location, either in the individual or in the collective.

Table 1: Typology of knowledge (Lam, 2000, p. 491)

		Ontological dimension	
		Located in individual	Located in collective
Epistemological dimension	Explicit	Embrained knowledge	Encoded knowledge
	Tacit	Embodied knowledge	Embedded knowledge

The typology defines four kinds of knowledge:

embrained knowledge – explicit knowledge that exists in individuals as “conceptual skills and cognitive abilities”. Lam argues that this constitutes the formal theoretical disciplinary knowledge that “enjoys a privileged social status within Western culture” and explains in part the hierarchy of disciplines that traditionally places Science above applied disciplines such as Engineering;

encoded knowledge – explicit knowledge that is recorded and stored in the form of rules, manuals, textbooks, procedures and policies within the collective;

embodied knowledge – tacit knowledge within the individual that is context specific and has a strong “automatic and volutaristic component”;

embedded knowledge – tacit knowledge within a community of practice that resides in “its rules, procedures, routines and shared norms” and is “relation specific, contextual and dispersed” (Lam, 2000, p. 493).

It is accessing the embedded knowledge within the collective that is the greatest challenge for any newcomer. Examples of embedded knowledge in the context of an academic department include the following:

- the recognised institutional norms and counter-norms “prevailing within the scientific community” and the knowledge of “when to invoke one and perhaps practice the other”;
- the “special folklore thriving in most departments . . . the recipes for action . . . that it contains and the kind of excuses and rationalisations . . . that it offers”, and
- the identity of one’s own discipline and how it relates to other disciplines. (Gerholm, 1990, p. 265)

An academic newcomer also needs to gain access to the embedded knowledge of how to operate within the multiple discourses that exist within an academic department. These include the formal discourse presented to the outside world, the less formal discourse associated with internal meetings and seminars, and the discourse of the students within the department (Gerholm, 1990).

All four types of knowledge are present to some extent in every context, although particular organisations, or contexts, might privilege some forms above the others. For example, in a university department, academics are valued for their embrained knowledge, the disciplinary knowledge that they accumulate through formal study and research. They make use of encoded knowledge in the form of laboratory tables, data sheets, assessment rubrics and curriculum statements. It could be argued that the ease with which a senior academic performs a particular research task, or delivers a lecture, is evidence of embodied knowledge of these procedures while embedded knowledge might play a significant role in the way academics at a departmental examiners’ meeting decide on the top student presentations.

Newcomers to an academic department will bring with them their skills and experiences of assessment as students in the form of embrained and embodied knowledge. While they may

have access to some encoded knowledge in the form of assessment guidelines and explicit criteria, the substantial challenge they face in their workplace learning is to access the embedded knowledge of the assessment practice within the department.

Gonzalez Arnal and Burwood (2003) describe assessment practice in higher education as involving “practical knowledge that has tacit, unspecifiable core aspects” with a range of factors from within the “disciplinary genre” providing “tacit clues”.

These clues are only meaningful within a context . . . Their application requires an act of integration by a practiced assessor who indwells in the knowledge, and whose judgements are normatively constrained in the practice. (Gonzalez Arnal & Burwood, 2003, p. 386)

They argue that the emergence of the quality assurance agenda in higher education has privileged the “explicit codification of knowledge” in the area of teaching and learning (Gonzalez Arnal & Burwood, 2003, p. 379). The increased demand for explicit statements of procedures and criteria used to assess students provides a challenge for academics to convert knowledge that is embedded or embodied into encoded knowledge in the form of learning outcome statements, rubrics and assessment criteria. They suggest that a key assumption behind the demand for explicit assessment criteria is that “such a process of ‘exteriorization’ makes judgements publicly grounded and thus objective” (p 380). They contend that the resistance of academics to this process is not simply due to their “in-built professional conservatism” but is primarily due to the fact that it is not possible to present these tacit assessment practices in an explicit form as rules because “*the assessor’s knowledge exists in the practice of the skill*⁷ and not in a set of published maxims” (p. 383).

The notion that the knowledge needed to judge student performance is primarily tacit and embedded within a particular community suggests that learning in this context needs to be understood in terms of the social interaction between the individual academic and the rest of the academic community. The next section considers theories that might help to explain learning in this context.

⁷ Emphasis in original.

2.4 Learning in the workplace

Reviews of theories of learning have adopted various frameworks to describe and categorise them. One such review groups theories of learning into four clusters: behaviourist, cognitivist, constructivist and social practice theories (Reynolds, Caley & Mason, 2002). While behaviourist models of learning have been applied in skills development programmes, they have not helped to explain learning that requires high levels of integration and synthesis in order to solve problems, and have therefore not been used in this study. Beckett and Hager (2002) have argued that cognitive theories of learning focus on the process of changing “contents of the individual mind” using “abstract ideas . . . that are context-independent (universal) and transparent to thought” (Beckett & Hager, 2002, p. 98). They claim that while cognitive theories have been useful as a “standard paradigm of learning” within formal systems of education, they have been less helpful in explaining the nature of practice-based informal learning in the workplace.

Early writings on learning in the workplace drew largely on the constructivist perspective in developing the concept of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1983a; Kolb, 1984; Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1996; Watkins & Marsick, 1992; Mezirow, 1990). Experiential learning arises from an intentional act involving an individual reflecting on concrete experience. An example of work that has been particularly influential in theorizing workplace learning from this perspective is that of Schön (1983, 1987), who focused on understanding how professionals learn in practice using critical reflection. Schön’s “reflective practitioner” made use of “knowledge-in-action” in the development of professional “artistry” or the ability to “handle indeterminate zones of practice” (Schön, 1987b). He explored the manifestations of this professional artistry and the ways in which people acquired it and advocated the teaching of professionals through “coaching” them in various forms of reflection on their practice.

A second model of learning in the workplace from within the constructivist perspective is provided by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) who describe the transition from novice to expert in five stages: novice, advanced beginner, competent performer, proficient performer and expert. In their model, initial dependence on encoded knowledge as a novice gradually shifts to a total dependence on embodied knowledge as an expert.

A novice depends on rules and instructions that are context independent, but shifts to the level of advanced beginner as experience is gained in implementing the rules, and the recognition of contexts begins to play an increasing part in decision-making. Increased experience and recognition of contexts enable the learner to shift to the level of competent performer and begin to use interpretation and judgement in deciding how to act. At the level of proficient performer, decision making no longer involves objective choices. The overwhelming confidence in experience and the memory of what has happened in similar situations ensure that decisions are made “via spontaneous interpretation and intuitive judgement” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 16). At the level of expert, the “skill has become so much part of him that he need be no more aware of it than he is of his own body” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 30).

While the Dreyfus model provides a way of understanding how individuals construct their knowledge of practice, it has little to say about the social dimension of the workplace and how it shapes learning. This separation of the process of learning by the individual from the community within which that individual works and learns, forms the basis of many of the critiques of the individual constructivist perspective (Fenwick, 2001).

Sfard (1998) argues that theories of learning are “caught between” the acquisition metaphor and the participation metaphor. In the acquisition metaphor, learning involves making knowledge one’s own, through the process of transmission, construction or internalization, depending on one’s theoretical perspective. As such, the metaphor is evident in a wide range of theoretical frameworks. In the participation metaphor, learning is about participation in “certain kinds of activities” and “is conceived of as a process of becoming a member of a certain community” rather than “acquiring” knowledge (Sfard, 1998, p. 6). These two metaphors do not naturally align with any of the perspectives on learning described above. For example, both the cognitive and constructivist perspectives make use of the acquisition metaphor in the models they have developed to explain how learning occurs. However, Sfard acknowledges that more recent writings on learning, such as those from a social practice perspective, mainly work with the participation metaphor of learning. Given the social nature of the academic workplace, and the tacit nature of aspects of the knowledge of assessment practice, it is the theory of learning as social practice this study mainly draws on.

2.5 Learning as social practice

Researchers using the social practice perspective focus on understanding how learning arises out of the social relationships within the workplace or learning environment (Alvesson, 1993; Billett, 2001; Billett, 2004; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Eraut, 2004; Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Tierney, 1997; Toma, 1997). They have critiqued traditional theories for viewing learning as being achieved primarily through the transmission of existing knowledge. In contrast, they view learning as “an integral part of our everyday lives”, and, working within the participation metaphor, describe learning as the result of a process of active participation “in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). This perspective highlights how knowledge and the “contexts for learning” are socially constructed with the resources for learning being provided by a range of “cultural practices and products” (Eraut, 2004). In the academic workplace

. . . the most prominent of these resources are the codified academic knowledge embedded in texts and databases and the cultural practices of teaching, studentship, scholarship and research. (Eraut, 2004, p. 263)

Wenger (1998) defines all practice as social practice operating within a particular historical and social context, involving both explicit and tacit knowledge. The tacit knowledge includes

. . . all the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions and shared world views. (Wenger, 1998, p. 47)

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), as the mechanism whereby newcomers learn the practice of a community, has widened the understanding of learning beyond the relationship between student and master, to include issues related to participation and identity transformation in a community of practice. As situated learning theory is one of the central theoretical perspectives of my study, it is presented in detail in the next chapter.

Beckett and Hager (2002) define “practice” as more than the application of a set of skills and techniques, describing it as “a body of knowledge, a capacity to make judgements, a

sensitivity to intuition, and an awareness of the purposes of the actions” (Beckett & Hager, 2002, p. 92). They argue that a person forms part of the workplace culture through a “complex network of relationships”. Within the workplace, critical knowledge resides in groups and an essential aspect of individual learning is in becoming part of these groups. Their notion of “organic learning” highlights what they regard as the central aspect of the work of a professional; namely, the making of judgements “in the heat of action”. The time available for making judgements is critical in determining the way in which workers learn. Where there is no time to deliberate, workers increasingly depend on embodied and established routines which result in “knowledge becoming less explicit and less easily shared with others” (Eraut, 2004, p. 261). This lack of time means that codified knowledge, in the form of an assessment rubric for example, is only used if there is a “high expectation of getting a valuable payoff almost immediately” (Eraut, 2004, p. 262).

Learning opportunities in the workplace

Several authors (Eraut 2004; Billet 1999, 2001, 2004; Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2004) describe learning as arising out of the opportunities provided by the structure of work activities and the nature of relationships in the workplace.

Eraut (2004) found that the majority of learning experiences in the workplace were informal, consisting of both “learning from other people and learning from personal experience” (Eraut, 2004, p. 248). Learning happens in two ways: through the “semi-conscious” process of socialisation through which the workplace culture shapes “norms, values, perspectives and interpretations of events”, and through the “conscious learning from others, and with others” as individuals engage in “cooperative work and tackle challenging tasks” (p. 254). He highlighted the following challenges facing research into informal learning in the workplace:

- informal learning is largely invisible, because much of it is either taken for granted or not recognised as learning; thus respondents lack awareness of their own learning;
- the resultant knowledge is either tacit or regarded as part of a person’s general capability, rather than something that has been learned;
- discourse about learning is dominated by codified, propositional knowledge, so respondents often find it difficult to describe more complex aspects of their work and the nature of their expertise. (p. 249)

Eraut identified workplace activities such as participating in groups, working alongside others, and tackling challenging tasks, as being particularly suited to learning. However, working in groups did not automatically result in learning, as a “group climate for learning has to be created, sustained and re-created at intervals” and individuals seldom spent a substantial amount of time in any particular group. Over time, each individual develops “a distinctive learning career” that can be tracked “through a sequence of work groups: in some groups it flourishes, in others it stagnates and regresses”.

Particularly when there is little mutual observation, the discourse of practice serves its manifest function of sharing practical knowledge only at a fairly superficial level. Its latent function is often to protect individual practitioners from criticism and to maximize their autonomy. (Eraut, 2004, p. 266)

Two sets of relationships in the workplace were found to be central in facilitating learning of both novices and older workers. The first arises out of the link between the challenging nature of the work, collegial support and the development of confidence. While “confidence arose from successfully meeting challenges in one’s work,” the “confidence to take on challenges depended on the extent to which learners felt supported” by their colleagues (Eraut, 2004, p. 269). The second relationship centres around the structuring and allocation of work which facilitates “the opportunities for meeting, observing and working alongside people who had more or different expertise, and for forming relationships that might provide feedback, support or advice” (p. 270).

Billett (2001) describes workplace learning as the “inevitable product of everyday thinking and acting, shaped by workplace practices in which individuals participate”. The quality of learning is determined by the “affordances” of a workplace, or those opportunities made available to individuals, such as the nature of the activities that they can engage in, the support and guidance they receive and the opportunities to work with others. These affordances are influenced by the levels of contestation and conflict that surround workplace practices. In many instances the structuring of workplace practices is driven by a need to ensure the continuity of the practice itself and to protect the interests of particular groups, rather than the interests of the individual learner. Hence the distribution of learning opportunities often reflects the power relations between groups in the workplace.

Individuals will experience different kinds of affordances, depending on their affiliation, associations, gender, language skills, employment status and standing in the workplace. (Billett, 2004, p. 116)

Billett (1999) argues that to understand how learning happens in the workplace one must investigate how opportunities to participate in workplace activities are distributed. It is this distribution and the affordances offered by the workplace that shape how individual workers choose to engage in activities and to seek guidance from peers. He distinguishes between direct interaction between experts and novices, for “learning knowledge that would be difficult to learn without the assistance of a more knowledgeable partner” and the more indirect guidance offered by the opportunity to watch and listen to others in action. He advocates the bringing together of factors that influence workplace learning into a workplace curriculum with the following four elements:

- a. a pathway containing tasks that move from peripheral activities to full participation in workplace activities;
- b. access to products and processes of the workplace activities;
- c. direct guidance from more expert others;
- d. indirect guidance provided by others and the physical environment. (Billett, 1999)

Billett (2004) challenges the description of workplaces as “informal, non-formal or unstructured learning environments”, arguing that such descriptors framed in the negative, fail to highlight the positive opportunities inherent in the workplace. In many workplace contexts, structured pathways of activities exist for newcomers that are “inherently pedagogical” and provide “workers access to the knowledge needed to sustain those practices” (Billett, 2004, p. 119). He further argues that the division of learning into formal and informal “promotes situational (social) determinism and ignores the role of human agency in the construction and further development of their knowledge” (p. 120).

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004a) provide a classification of the kinds of learning that arise in the workplace based on whether it is planned or not, and the extent to which the knowledge learned is already known by others in the workplace (Table 2). They warn, however, that “workplace learning is complex and rarely falls into such categories” (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004a, pp. 260-261). In their view the “standard paradigm of learning” values learning resulting from planned activities above the unplanned “everyday learning” as it

occurs in the workplace. On the other hand, they argue that the value of planned learning activities is often underestimated by the situated learning theorists. In Table 2, “planned learning” activities are grouped into three categories:

- learning from others what they already know (1), through conscious activities that are easy to identify and to analyse, such as, participation in courses, using books or the internet, or consulting a more experienced colleague;
- learning resulting from planned efforts to improve practice through, for example, action research or Kolb’s reflective cycle (4); and
- planned innovation to find new ways of doing things (5).

Table 2: Types of learning

	Planned learning	Unplanned learning
Learning what is already known to others	(1) of that which others know	(2) Socialisation into an existing community of practice
Learning that develops existing capability	(4) to refine existing capability	(3) improvement of ongoing practice
Learning something new to the workplace	(5) to do that which has not been done before.	(6) learning of something not previously done

Adapted from (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004a, p. 261)

Unplanned learning is also categorized in the same three groups:

- learning from others as part of becoming a member of a community (2);
- learning that results in improved practice emerging out of unplanned “reflection in action” (Schön, 1983) or the “organic learning” of “embodied judgements” in practice (3) (Beckett & Hager, 2002) ; and
- learning that addresses “new challenges as an ongoing part of their everyday lives” (6) (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004a, p. 268).

Learning in the academic workplace is a complex phenomenon consisting of aspects that are planned and explicit as well as those that are unplanned, tacit and form an integral part of everyday life. Making a distinction between formal and informal learning or between planned and unplanned learning is less helpful than understanding how they relate to each other in the workplace. While it is clear how planned learning activities might help new academics in their learning of encoded and embrained knowledge, a key challenge facing academic staff development practitioners is planning learning activities that also facilitate the acquisition of

embodied and embedded tacit knowledge (Lam, 2000). Such planned learning might itself seek to generate unplanned learning opportunities to achieve this end.

Agency and learning opportunities in the workplace

Despite the influence of workplace structures, individual agency is also involved in shaping workplace learning opportunities (Billett, 2004; Fuller, Munro & Rainbird, 2004; Knight & Trowler, 2000). Each individual's experience will be unique due to "the inevitable negotiation between the workplace's norms and practices and the individuals' subjectivities and identities" (Billett, 2004, p. 114). The way in which both learning and participation occur also results from individuals exercising their agency in the workplace.

Fuller and colleagues argue that "there are pitfalls in adopting an overly deterministic view of the impact of structure on learning. However rich or impoverished the opportunities for learning appear, individuals themselves can make decisions about the extent to which they wish to engage" (Fuller et al., 2004, p. 3). Knight and Trowler argue that the academic department "is the primary location of the operation of agency" and that academics have choices and can take actions to "maximise work satisfaction in the face of structural changes" (Knight & Trowler, 2000, p. 72).

The work of Bourdieu (1990, 1998) informs many writers within the learning as a social practice perspective. According to Flyvbjerg (2001), Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* provides a way of addressing both structure and agency without having to choose between the two. Bourdieu's concepts of field, *habitus* and capital provide the tools for taking into account the structuring aspects of the environment and the agency of the individual learners in the process of workplace learning and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

2.6 Studies of learning in the academic workplace

As explained in the introductory chapter, my research question focuses on understanding how new academics learn to judge student performance in complex assessment tasks. This focus provides me with two "windows" into the process of learning in the academic workplace; namely, through the experience of the new academic, and the experience of learning to assess

student performance. This brief review of the literature on learning in the academic workplace has been divided to reflect these two aspects.

Learning as a new academic

Most studies into the experience of new academics have focussed on the process of socialisation. Some authors view the process of socialisation as one in which the newcomer has to adapt to the culture of their new environment. Clark (1987) maintains that what newcomers bring by way of their personal background, experience or beliefs has very little impact on the culture in the disciplines. Reynolds (1992) distinguished between the process of socialisation and that of “acculturation”. He defines socialisation as the process whereby “an individual acquires the norms, values and behaviour of the group” and “acculturation” as the process resulting in either forced assimilation, the development of coping strategies to survive, or the decision to leave. In his study of new academics at a research intensive institution, he found that for socialisation to occur there needs to be a large amount of agreement between the individual’s worldview and that of the group they were joining. If the difference in worldview between the newcomer and a group is substantial, then the newcomer is likely to experience a process of acculturation. He notes that acculturation is most often experienced by individuals who form a minority within a culture and argues that while gender does not necessarily determine the nature of the socialisation process, it is “not surprising to find women’s experiences in the research university . . . reflective of acculturation more often than socialization” (Reynolds, 1992, p. 649).

Tierney (1997) critiques the above description of the socialisation process as representing a modernist perspective in which organisational culture is accepted as given and new entrants are expected to assimilate by internalising “what it takes to be a good faculty member”. From a postmodern perspective, everyone, including newcomers, contributes to the culture of the workplace (Tierney, 1997; Trowler & Knight, 2000; Alvesson, 1993). From this perspective socialisation is regarded as “a joint enterprise to create a situation in which the new academic appointee will become fully involved in the social constitution of work practices, values and attitudes” (Trowler & Knight, 2000, p. 38).

Becher and Trowler (2001) make a further distinction between perspectives on the socialisation process:

Constructivist approaches influenced by postmodernism tend to stress the role of individual agency in identity and cultural construction, . . . while culturalist ‘situated practice’ approaches place more emphasis on context specific socialisation and learning within ‘communities’ of practice”. (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 48)

Alvesson (1993) argues that the academic workplace can not be characterised as forming a single culture, that “cultures overlap in an organizational setting” and that there are “multiple cultural configurations” present within a university and departmental environment (Alvesson, 1993, p. 118). Rosch and Reich (1996) make the same point when they state that the “concept of one academic profession has obscured the cultural differences of higher education institutions, the subcultural variations within and among disciplines” (Rosch & Reich, 1996, p. 115).

According to Alvesson (1993) individuals actively construct and maintain culture. An older generation guiding newcomers will find them active participants in the process, making sense of what they experience and in the process transforming the culture they are becoming part of. He distinguishes between the “great culture” prevalent in society as a whole, and the “local culture” developed within an organisation, with the movement of “cultural traffic” between the two resulting from individuals belonging to both the organisation and the world outside. Becher and Trowler (2001) support the view that newcomers contribute to a “flow” of culture into the universities. Newcomers’ contributions include aspects of national culture and features such as gender, ethnicity, class and experience in industry. They bring these “cultural patterns” with them from the “wider environment and do not lose them simply because of the power of disciplinary epistemology” (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 24).

Through their participation in several activity systems, academics contribute to the “enactment, consolidation and construction of cultures” in different sites across the university (Trowler & Knight, 2000, p. 30). In this way “different social practices, norms, values, predispositions and taken-for-granted knowledge become instantiated at different locations in the university” (p. 30). Communities of practice emerge when activities are repeated so often that they became a natural part of institutional life and are taken for granted. When new academics enter an existing activity system, their main task is to engage with “the common sets of understandings and assumptions held collectively in the community of practice” (p. 31). This process is not a straightforward one as “sometimes this ‘coming to know’ is

impeded because neither members of the activity system nor the [new academic appointees] have come to know what they don't know" (p. 31). Furthermore newcomers bring with them "cultural 'currents' . . . from professional and gender socialisation, social class location, ethnicity, political or religious affiliation" (p. 33).

Given the tacit nature of much of the knowledge that newcomers need to acquire, the acquisition of this knowledge favours newcomers with particular forms of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and a frame of reference within which to make sense of the knowledge and use it in making judgements.

[A]ny person entering a new group with the ambition of becoming a fully fledged competent member has to learn to comply with its fundamental cultural rules. . . . Most of it will be acquired slowly through the interaction with others and . . . without anyone ever making a deliberate effort to teach the newcomer the rules of the game. (Gerholm, 1990, p. 263).

Rosch and Reich (1996) tested the "explanatory power" of a four stage model of "enculturation" in their study of the socialisation of three new academics in three different departments. The four stages consisted of the pre-arrival stage, the first encounter, adaptation after arrival and the final commitment stage. They observed that the information provided to new academics on the performance standards for teaching in the adaptation stage was very vague. As a result the three new academics were forced to draw on their experiences as students and were dependent on "imitating [and] modelling the teaching styles" of their own lecturers. They ended up adopting "attitudes and values or performance characteristics they most admired and hoped to impart" (Rosch & Reich, 1996, p. 126).

In those departments where the morale and work environment were rated highest the new academic adapted most easily. In departments where they were rated lowest the experience of assimilation was most difficult as there were fewer opportunities for "sharing, supporting, and stimulating an intellectual environment" (Rosch & Reich, 1996, p. 127). In all three departments, the HODs regarded a simple indication of being available for help as sufficient support for new academics. However, the new academics did not take advantage of this help for fear of having to share their experiences of adjustment and as a consequence being judged as inadequate for the job.

The final commitment stage of Rosch and Reich's model was where the real "cultural learning" began; the newcomers settled down into the routine aspects of their work and focussed "on establishing their niche or place in the department". The three new academics in the study reported on the differences between their preconceptions and the actual reality of working in the departments, describing how reflecting on experiences that they had not expected to encounter had helped them learn about "the assumptions, beliefs and practices of the academic community they had joined" (Rosch & Reich, 1996, p. 127). The model predicted two possible outcomes of this socialisation process: "attachment", where new academics are able to "assimilate and support the norms and values of the local culture", or "individuation", where new academics contribute their own norms and values to the local culture "resulting in new or blended cultural patterns" (p.129).

Recent studies into the experience of staff at historically white universities in South Africa highlight the impact of race and gender on the socialisation of academic staff (Daniels, 2001; Ismail, 2000; Ismail, 2002; Mabokela, 2000; Mapesela & Hay, 2006; Van Zyl, Steyn & Orr, 2003). In these studies black as well as female academic staff described the academic culture as alienating and isolating. The findings of most of these studies are echoed in the following conclusion of a study of two historically white universities:

There is a need to examine the institutional culture of historically White universities to determine what it is that makes these institutions so comfortable for White academics and yet inhospitable to Blacks. It is not sufficient to expect Black faculty to adjust to historically White universities, the universities also have to adjust to the presence of Black faculty. (Mabokela, 2000, p. 111)

Barkhuizen (2002) investigated the experience of a new lecturer at a South African university during a period of rapid transformation. The new lecturer had entered academic life with a desire to help students and had tried to establish relevance in his teaching. After two years he resigned as a result of an experience of intense acculturation. He had conflicted with his colleagues on issues of teaching style, interaction with the students, politics and linguistic philosophy. He had disliked the "managerial style" of the HOD and had interpreted the HOD's advice to teach a course "as it was taught before" as an order rather than a recommendation. On one occasion his marks had been unilaterally changed without consultation. During the course of his study, Barkhuizen's amended his initial analysis based on the three behavioural patterns of coping, conforming and generating, to include the

categories of opposing and resisting, as he found that the new lecturer “was not merely ‘fitting into’ a pre-planned, pre-wired destiny which had been assigned to him by academia” (Barkhuizen, 2002, p. 97).

Learning of assessment practice

Few studies have focussed on how new academics learn to judge student performance. This might be linked to the fact that the dominant paradigm for thinking about assessment of student performance is as a type of measurement (Gipps, 1999), and that the knowledge and skills required for this measurement are therefore regarded as relatively unproblematic. The view that assessment requires interpretation and judgement within a community of social practice implies, however, that the knowledge required is complex (Gipps, 1999; Knight, 2002; Shay, 2003).

Over time the ways of thinking about assessment practice in a department can become “invisible to the members of those departments” yet these same practices “can seem odd, novel, exciting or just plain wrong to others”, such as newcomers (Knight & Trowler, 2001, p. 48). Therefore the study of assessment practice involving newcomers may help to surface some of the assumptions behind such assessment practices. Gipps (1999) argues that sociocultural theories of learning provide a valuable way of analysing the process whereby academics learn to assess as they enable learning to be described in terms of apprenticeships and engagement with “more knowledgeable others”.

Social practice theorists argue that the knowledge of assessment is acquired through participation in the practice of assessment (Gonzalez Arnal & Burwood, 2003; Hager, 2000). Learning to assess involves “participating in relevant social practices, observing, copying, imitating, until we begin to grasp the sense of the activities and are able to integrate different elements” (Gonzalez Arnal & Burwood, 2003, p. 386). Assessment practice relies substantially on the making of professional judgement acquired through practice.

The development of the specialist knowledge and its application in which such judgement consists is like the development of connoisseurship. . . . Academic assessors do not learn which assessment criteria are appropriate for any given piece of work in any particular context by looking them . . . up in a book and then mechanically applying them: they have to be acquired by practice. (Gonzalez Arnal & Burwood, 2003, p. 383)

The publication of a list of assessment criteria would not in itself help new academics to understand what was expected of them as the “ground rules of a disciplinary genre” can only be made explicit “*from within the practice*”⁸ (Gonzalez Arnal & Burwood, 2003, p. 387) .

Hager (2000) investigated how novices become “highly proficient practitioners” through the “experience of practice”. He argued that newcomers faced the challenge of being able to make “workplace judgement” as “part of a community of practice”. These judgements were “inherently social and political” and embody the person who judges by integrating the “full gamut of human attributes . . . the cognitive, the practical, the ethical, the moral, the attitudinal, the emotional and volitional” (Hager, 2000, p. 291). Hager argued that while practical judgement is learnt through the experience of practice, not all experience of practice leads to effective learning.

In a study of the professional training of occupational therapists, Ilott and Murphy (1997) concluded that emotions formed an integral part of the assessment process, with feelings of failure and guilt on the part of the lecturer, together with the fear of the student reaction to failing, all influencing the final judgement. New lecturers tended to identify with the students as they themselves were “inexperienced assessors” in the process of “negotiating the transition from evaluated to evaluator” (Ilott & Murphy, 1997).

This review of literature has described the key features of the academic workplace and the nature of the knowledge associated with assessment practice. My choice of learning as a social practice for this study has been explained, and examples from the literature have been presented of the kinds of insights that this perspective provides into learning in the academic workplace. The next chapter builds on this perspective in developing a framework for theorizing learning in the academic workplace.

⁸ Emphasis in original.

Chapter 3: Theorizing learning in the academic workplace

Learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind.

(Foreword by William F Hanks, Lave & Wenger 1991)

3.1 Introduction

There are many competing theories that can be used to help understand workplace learning as participatory practice. In this research I am concentrating on two: the situated learning work of Lave and Wenger, and Bourdieu's theory of practice. The quotation above signals the participation metaphor (Sfard, 1998) that dominates both Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice. These two theories are used to develop the theoretical framework for this study and provide the conceptual tools for exploring the relationship between individuals and their social contexts. The concepts of field and capital (Bourdieu 1990, 1993, 1998) and the concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) are used to theorize the academic workplace. Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and capital and Lave and Wenger's notions of "legitimate peripheral participation" and "identity trajectories" are used to explore how academics learn in the academic workplace.

Bourdieu's theory of practice is used to analyse the relationship between individual academics as agents and the structuring potential of the academic fields they occupy, while Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory is used to explore how learning is shaped by the interaction between individuals and the communities of practice they participate in.

The two theories share a number of similarities in their perspectives on learning (Table 3). They both view learning as a social activity arising out of the interaction between an individual and his or her surroundings rather than something that happens within an

individual, and both recognise that the form learning takes as a social activity is dependent on the past experiences of individual learners.

Table 3: Similarities in notions about learning

View of Learning	Bourdieu's Theory of Practice	Lave and Wenger's Situated Learning theory
Learning is not only located in the individual but is also situated in the relationship between the individual and the social context within which the individual works.	Learning occurs through the engagement between an individual <i>habitus</i> and a field.	Learning occurs through the participation of an individual in a community of practice.
Learning in the workplace involves becoming part of the workplace community.	Participation involves the development of <i>habitus</i> through responding to and generating possibilities within the field.	Participation involves a process of identity formation through establishing forms of membership within communities of practice.
In their interaction with context individuals follow strategies that are shaped by their personal histories and past experiences.	Past experience is embodied in an individual's <i>habitus</i> .	The trajectory of identity development links past experiences with future possibilities.

3.2 Bourdieu's theory of practice

Pierre Bourdieu's major project was to construct a theory of social practice and society. He however rejected characterisations of his work as an attempt to develop a "grand theory" of practice (Jenkins, 2002). He argued that his ideas provided a "method" and not a "general theory" and that in each context one had to "study how the situation works" (Bourdieu interviewed by C Mahar in (Mahar, 1990, p. 36)). Educationalists wanting to use Bourdieu's ideas need "to work out the method in relation to their own social space and the particular 'field' of education within it" (Harker, 1990, p. 99). Bourdieu describes a social space

. . . both as a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other . . . according to their position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 32).

Central to this definition is the notion that conflict within a social space derives from the struggles between “agents” aimed at either “conserving or transforming” the social space, based on their “position” within the field. The quotation above also highlights the way structure “imposes” on agents while at the same time agents “conserve or transform” the structure. In this way Bourdieu transcends the division between structure and agency by incorporating both.

The social space in which this study takes place is a historically white, research intensive, university in South Africa, the South African University (SAU), just over a decade after the country’s first democratic elections. It is a social space in which transformation is a dominant theme deriving from an explicit national political agenda. This social space encompasses a “field of forces” located within the field of higher education in which several sets of agents participate including academics, students and administrators.

Bourdieu’s concept of field

The notion of field is central to Bourdieu’s work.

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital) . . . , a relational configuration . . . which it imposes on all the objects and agents which enter in it. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 16-17)

Fields can contain subfields. In the context of this study, the field of education has higher education as a subfield, which itself consists of several subfields, including those centred on the different disciplines. The field of higher education also connects with other fields such as those associated with the professions, industry, government and the media. Each field will have its “own way of doing things, rules, assumptions and beliefs” (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 20).

Within the field the position of each agent is a result of both their own efforts and the effects of the field. These positions are dynamic and depend on the changing forms of capital that individuals have to offer and the changing nature of the capital valued by the field. Bourdieu argues that in research, “it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is . . . and to determine what species of capital are active in it” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Agents establish their positions in the field through the capital they possess on entering the

field. New academics entering an institution such as SAU experience the effects of the fields associated with that social space in ways that are largely determined by the nature and volume of the capital that they bring into the field. The nature and hierarchy of capital forms a fundamental aspect of a field.

A field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition . . . in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of capital effective in it To alter the distribution and relative weight of forms of capital is tantamount to modifying the structure of the field. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 17)

Bourdieu identifies four forms of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Social capital refers to the “network of lasting social relations” that agents have established and continue to build. Cultural capital is accumulated through the process of education, and is “connected to individuals in their general educated character . . . ; connected to objects – books, qualifications. . . ; and connected to institutions” (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 21). Symbolic capital includes “culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority” (Mahar, Harker & Wilkes, 1990, p. 13). Symbolic capital in the form of academic reputation is highly regarded in the academic community (Becher, 1989, p. 52).

A significant sub-field within the field of higher education is that associated with the discipline. James (1998) describes an academic discipline as a “field within which there are relative positions of dominance, subordination and equality with regard to the holding of different . . . forms of capital” (James, 1998, p. 114). For example, at research intensive institutions such as SAU, it can be argued that there is a greater valuing of the cultural capital associated with research, than that associated with teaching.

Departments and their associated disciplines do not necessarily constitute a single field, but might consist of multiple fields. Alvesson’s (1993) study of an academic Department of Psychology highlighted the differences between the practice of psychology as a profession, and the teaching and research of psychology as an academic discipline. Despite similarities between the academic field of psychology and the field of the profession in terms of knowledge and interests, he found significant differences in the “cultural and symbolic competence required [by these fields]” (Alvesson, 1993, p. 102). This suggests that several

forms of cultural capital, in particular that associated with research, teaching and the profession, are evident in the academic workplace and are valued to differing degrees.

Alvesson argues that the existence of multiple fields within the field of higher education, at both institutional level and within disciplines, necessitates a model which acknowledges “multiple cultural configurations” in order to understand how members of a department develop a set of common understandings and avoid conflict.

The concept of *habitus*

It is precisely the question of how common understandings emerge, are sustained and conflict resolved or avoided, that Bourdieu seeks to explain with his concepts of field and *habitus*. He describes the *habitus* in two ways. On the one hand, it arises out of an accumulation of expertise from working in a particular field.

The *habitus* . . . is all at once a ‘craft’, a collection of techniques, references, a set of ‘beliefs’ . . . that derive from the history . . . of the discipline and it’s . . . position in the hierarchy of disciplines. (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 72-3)

On the other hand, *habitus* is more than just “experience”. It also provides the basis for generating the strategies that determine the actions that agents perform in the field.

The *habitus*, a system of dispositions acquired by implicit or explicit learning . . . generates schemes which can be objectively consistent with the objective interests of their authors without having been expressly designed to that end. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 76)

Each agent in a field carries a *habitus* formed out of past experiences and socialisation processes, which includes the embodied and embrained knowledge they have acquired. New academics bring with them their unique *habitus* and the forms of capital they have accumulated as part of their personal histories, including that associated with their family, schooling and class positions. The *habitus* is responsible for producing “individual and collective practices”. In so doing it

. . . ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the

‘correctness’ of practices and the constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54)

The history of experience, through practice, is therefore incorporated both within individuals, as *habitus*, and within institutions, as fields, or as Bourdieu puts it, the effect of this history is felt through the “objectification in bodies and objectification in institutions” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 57).

The *habitus* of individuals exposed to the same fields and the same “logic of action” over an extended period of time generates practices that are “mutually intelligible and immediately adjusted to the structures”. This common experience resulting from the “homogeneity of conditions of existence” gives rise to a “class *habitus*” which “enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any calculations or conscious reference to a norm” and without any “direct intervention or . . . explicit co-ordination” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 58).

However, Bourdieu argues that the notion of class *habitus* allows for individual difference. Each individual travels along a unique “social trajectory” and “brings about a unique integration . . . of the experiences statistically common to members of the same class”. In this process, however, the individual *habitus* tends to play a conservative role in defending itself against the threat of dramatic change “by rejecting information capable of calling into questions its accumulated information . . . and . . . by avoiding exposure to it” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 60).

At the same time an individual’s practice is defined by the relationship between the *habitus* and what is “possible”. This relationship is “founded on and therefore limited by power”, as the *habitus* tends to incline agents “to become accomplices of the processes that tend to make the probable a reality” (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 64-5). In this way the *habitus* and field work in ways that generate actions that serve to reinforce what is possible, and hence conserve the field rather than transform it. This process happens in ways the agent is often not aware of.

When people only have to let their *habitus* follow its natural bent in order to comply with the immanent necessity of the field and satisfy the demands contained within in it . . . they are not at all aware of fulfilling a duty, still less of seeking to maximize their (specific) profit. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 76)

In explaining the relationship between *habitus* and field Bourdieu uses the metaphor of a game:

In order for a field to function, there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the *habitus* that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field. (Bourdieu 1993:72-3)

The engagement between the *habitus* of the new academic and the field of higher education would appear to be central in shaping how new academics learn the “rules of the game”. However, given that the capital which each newcomer brings differs in form or volume, it may not, in each case, always match the requirements of the game. In some cases it might not even be appropriate to the game defined by the field.

Some individuals . . . already possess quantities of relevant capital bestowed on them in the process of *habitus* formation, which makes them better players than others in certain fields. Conversely, some are disadvantaged. (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 20)

As individuals become aware of the limitations of their capital within their new contexts they may, through the generative schemes embodied in their *habitus*, seek strategies to “maximize their capital” to ensure their continued participation in the field. However, the field itself may impose limits on what strategies and actions a newcomer may adopt. The time and effort newcomers have invested in entering the field, according to its own rules, serves further to protect the field against major challenges being launched by these newcomers (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 73-4) .

Bourdieu notes that there is a specific form of struggle that occurs in every field between the newcomer and older members who “try to defend the monopoly and keep out competition” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 72). The older members of the field exert power by their monopoly of the appropriate capital and tend to be conservative towards changes to the field that could threaten that capital, while newcomers who are those “least endowed with capital . . . are inclined towards subversion strategies” (p. 73).

The behaviour of individual academics and their relationships with other members of the department may be understood by investigating the particular forms of capital they hold (James, 1998). James analysed the behaviour of a senior academic who spent most of his time doing research and was only interested in working with the brightest students. He

argued that this academic's *habitus* could best be understood in the context of an academic field "in which research activity almost eclipses teaching activity" and research capital was valued above teaching capital. His behaviour arose out of the "situational and structural" limits imposed by a field in which "the pedagogical elements of his practices are entirely subordinated" and cannot simply be "reduced to a psychological construct like 'orientation to teaching'" (James, 1998, p. 119).

Bourdieu regards assessment practice as forming part of "systems of classification" that establish the relationships of power within an education system. While assessment practice appears to be primarily concerned with classifying students, it also divides the students, who are assessed, from the academics, who do the assessing. Furthermore, it classifies academics in terms of their competence and authority to assess. As such assessment practice also serves to define the relationship between academics, divided as they are by differences in seniority, experience, discipline, race and gender, as "natural and necessary rather than as historically contingent fallouts of a given balance of power between classes, 'ethnic' groups, or genders" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 13-4).

Shay (2004) argues that an individual academic's assessment practice is constituted both objectively, through the field, and subjectively, through *habitus*. At the objective level, the positions that academics occupy in the field as a result of their accumulated expertise depend on the forms of capital valued by the field. This capital determines the "professional authority" they hold as well as the principles constituting the assessment system. In explaining how the knowledge of making judgements about student performance develops, Shay refers to Goodwin's notion of "professional vision".

In contrast to a formal explicit process of being told how to mark, it appears that members of faculty learn to mark by marking This acquisition of mastery poses significant challenges for newcomers to the field who are required to perform these classificatory acts without having had time to develop the necessary professional vision. (Shay, 2004, p. 317)

Through their experience of marking within a particular community of practice, newcomers internalize the objective conditions of the field that sustain these classificatory systems. At the same time, however, they use their subjective experience in assessing student performance. This subjective experience, Shay argues, is shaped by the influence of the

academic's discipline, their experience of marking, and their level of "involvement" with the student being assessed. It is this subjective experience, evoked by the individual academic *habitus*, which often results in differences of interpretation in judging student performance.

Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and *habitus* provide a framework for understanding the relationship between individual academics and their academic contexts. Academics learn the practices they are required to master through a process of engagement between their *habitus* and the academic field. The next section explores how the view of learning as participation within communities of practice together with the notion of *habitus* development might be applied to analyse the process of learning in the academic workplace.

3.3 Situated learning theory

Situated learning theory views knowledge, such as that required in judging student performance in complex assessment tasks, as being distributed amongst the community of practice of academics (Lave 1996). The knowledge developed within such a community of practice can only be understood with the "interpretive support" provided by participation in the community of practice itself (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). In this perspective, participation is more than a metaphor for learning.

[P]articipation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning. The social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e. legitimate peripheral participation.) (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98)

In the process of participation, newcomers' identities change and they are increasingly recognised as belonging to and contributing to the community of practice. The concept of learning as participation therefore provides a mechanism through which to explain "the evolution of practices and the inclusion of newcomers [and] . . . the development and transformation of identities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 13).

Communities of practice

Lave and Wenger acknowledge that they relied, in their early work, on an “intuitive notion” of communities of practice as “a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). In his later work, Wenger (1998) defined a “community of practice” as constituted by the way people interact with each other in “enterprises of all kinds” and through this interaction establish and “tune” their “relations with each other”.

[T]his collective learning results in practices that . . . are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of shared enterprises. It makes sense, therefore to call these kinds of communities *communities of practice*⁹. (Wenger, 1998, p. 45)

This explanation resonates strongly with Bourdieu’s description of the relationship between *habitus* and field. Wenger defined membership of a community of practice in terms of three aspects:

- *mutual engagement* connecting participants in a variety of ways and defining membership.
- participation in a *joint enterprise*, a negotiated way of working together to achieve something.
- a *shared repertoire* of “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things . . . which have become part of its practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83).

While several communities of practice might exist alongside one another and even share physical space and membership, as separate communities of practice they would differ in one of these key aspects. Over time boundaries evolve that distinguish where participation in one begins and participation in the other ends.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) note the similarities between the notions of “community of practice” and “field”.

The argument could be that we need to belong to learn, and whatever it is that we belong to can be called a community of practice. Looked at in this way, the notion of community of practice resembles Bourdieu’s concept of ‘field’. (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004, p. 29)

⁹ Emphasis in original.

Legitimate peripheral participation

Drawing on, amongst others, Bourdieu's theory of social practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) to explain how newcomers gain access to both the knowledge and activity of social practice through "growing involvement" within a community of practice. Through LPP newcomers are given the opportunity to move from being a novice within the community of practice to positions of advanced participation. This could be regarded as a period of transition during which time the *habitus* of the newcomer is exposed to what the community of practice values, and in the process positions itself and is positioned by the field. While Bourdieu's theory provides a way of understanding practice, particularly in relation to the role of capital within a field, Lave and Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation provides a way of understanding the process of *habitus* development as arising out of engagement with a community of practice.

Within situated learning theory, the role of language is not primarily understood as a medium of instruction or communication, but rather as serving to signal a passage to full membership. Newcomers do not need "to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation" but rather, as their identities change, they need "to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 109). This description of the role of language resembles Gee's notion of Discourses, defined as ways of "being in the world . . . which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities . . . so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (Gee, 1996, p. 127). Discourses are ways of displaying membership of particular communities and are mastered, not through formal teaching, but by "exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups" and by apprenticeship "into social practices through . . . interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse" (Gee, 1996, pp. 138-139).

In their studies of Yucatec midwives, Lave and Wenger described how newcomers were able to learn even where there was no intervention of language.

If masters don't teach, they embody practice at its fullest in the community of practice. Becoming a 'member such as those' is an embodied telos too complex to be discussed in the narrower and simpler language of goals, tasks and knowledge acquisition. There

may be no language for participants with which to discuss it at all. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 85)

The embodied practice, and “embodied telos”, can be understood as examples of the *habitus* that Bourdieu credits with enabling individuals to develop a “feel for the game” and to perform within the field. Over time, forms of participation and identities change as newcomers themselves become old-timers with respect to the next set of newcomers (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 56). In this way LPP helps to develop the knowledge and identity of newcomers and provides a framework for the continued reproduction of the community.

In contrast with traditional theories of learning that assume homogeneity and agreement in the goals and motives of learners, Lave and Wenger argue that conflict is always present and participants work together in the context of disagreements and power relations. For example, in situated learning theory, underlying the process of reproduction of the community are tensions inherent in the competitive relationship between newcomers and the old-timers they will eventually replace. As newcomers move towards full participation, the community of practice itself changes, as do the power relations between newcomers and old-timers. Forms of practice may be introduced featuring aspects which may be new to some of the old-timers, positioning them, at least temporarily, as newcomers.

Newcomers are caught in a dilemma. On the one hand they need to engage in existing practice which has developed over time: to understand it, to participate in it, and to become full members of the community in which it exists. On the other hand they have a stake in its development as they begin to establish their identity in its future. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 115)

Another aspect central to understanding the learning opportunities enabled by participation, is the notion of access. Newcomers need access to a “wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation” in order to become full members of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 101). An analysis of power relations is needed to understand the forms of access available, or not available, in any particular community. Lave and Wenger acknowledged in their early formulation of LPP that “unequal relations of power” needed to be incorporated more thoroughly into their analysis, a point that has formed the basis of several critiques of their theory presented below. They acknowledged that conditions

surrounding participation within certain contexts might not support learning in practice and might limit the possibilities available to newcomers in constructing their learning trajectories.

Conditions that place newcomers in deeply adversarial relations with . . . managers; in exhausting overinvolvement in work; or in involuntary servitude rather than participation distort, partially or completely, the prospects for learning in practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 64)

While Lave and Wenger's reference to conflict and power is at the local level, as illustrated above, the potential tension between newcomers and old-timers in the context of SAU draws on power relations within the broader social context. For example, the majority of newcomers are black and have an interest in, and in some cases bear responsibility for, transformation, while the majority of old-timers are white, and some may harbour feelings of ambivalence towards the transformation agenda.

Identity trajectories

As the experience of participation increases, so the newcomer's identity settles into one or another trajectory which links past experiences with future possibilities of membership of the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Wenger describes several forms these trajectories can take including:

Inbound trajectories – where newcomers' "identities are invested in their future participation" and they are on track to become full members.

Boundary trajectories – where newcomers aim to sustain participation and membership across the boundaries of different communities of practice.

Peripheral trajectories – where newcomers do not aim for full membership but where participation provides "access to a community and its practice that becomes significant enough to contribute to one's identity".

Outbound trajectories – which despite being directed out of a community may involve "developing new relationships, finding a different position with respect to a community, and seeing the world and oneself in new ways" (Wenger, 1998, pp. 154-155).

The notion of a newcomer moving along a trajectory within a community of practice resonates strongly with Bourdieu's concept of shifting positions in a field. The starting point

and developmental paths of these trajectories are shaped by the interaction between the individual *habitus* and the field. Learning occurs as part of activities along the trajectory and contributes to a growing identity within the community of practice. The opportunities open to participants shape and are shaped by the particular path of an individual's trajectory. Wenger suggests, however, that certain "paradigmatic trajectories" take on greater significance than others as they "embody the history of the community through the very participation and identities of practitioners".

Exposure to this field of paradigmatic trajectories is likely to be the most influential factor shaping the learning of newcomers. . . . [N]ewcomers are no fools: once they have access to the practice, they soon find out what counts. (Wenger, 1998, p. 156)

In Bourdieu's language "what counts" is the capital valued by the field. But newcomers also have agency that might result in them developing along an identity trajectory that combines particular forms of participation and non-participation. Participant preference for a peripheral or boundary trajectory reflects the power of "individuals and communities to define and affect our relations to the rest of the world" (Wenger, 1998, p. 167). Non-participation may in some cases be enabling, such as when newcomers choose a peripheral trajectory and accept elements of non-participation as part of their identity. However, non-participation may also be problematic, such as when it is imposed to prevent certain members from achieving full participation, as occurs with the "glass ceiling" experienced by women within certain workplace contexts.

The combinations of participation and non-participation that evolve are not only determined by personal choice but are also influenced by the relationship between different communities of practice, their boundary relations, and the demands of multi-membership, that is, by the field itself. For example, participation in one community of practice might require non-participation or "marginalization in another" (Wenger, 1998, p. 168). The relationship between research and teaching can often be described in this way as will be evident in the case studies to be presented in Chapter 5.

3.4 Situated learning theory in studies of the academic workplace

Several studies have used the notion of learning in communities of practice to analyse how new academics learn to do academic research (Brown et al., 1989; Kvale, 1996; Malcolm & Zukas, 2000). Traditionally the tacit knowledge associated with research has been passed on through the apprenticeship of a postgraduate student to an experienced academic researcher. Once appointed new academics “work under ‘master’ academics to attain their own mastery of disciplinary research” (Malcolm & Zukas, 2000, p. 54). The new academic “gradually acquires the context sensibility and the wisdom of mature ethical behaviour . . . through practice and interaction with more experienced members of the profession” (Kvale, 1996, p. 122).

Recent studies of the academic workplace have acknowledged Lave and Wenger’s contribution in situating academic work “in a cultural, historical and social context” and in enabling the consideration of “forms of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in a community of critical scholar-educators” (Malcolm & Zukas, 2000, p. 56). They have, however, also raised several concerns in relation to situated learning theory (see, for example, Malcolm & Zukas 2000; Knight & Trowler 2001; Hodkinson & Hodkinson 2004; Viskovic 2005). In this section three concerns are highlighted.

The first relates to the definition of a community of practice. Knight and Trowler (2001) argue that Wenger’s criteria for the existence of a community of practice are too vague to be useful in the context of the academic workplace. In their view academics participate in several activity systems, and communities of practice emerge when activities get repeated so often that they become a natural part of institutional life. They acknowledge, however, that the study of these activity systems and communities of practice can provide important insights into how academics learn.

If we are to understand how they ‘come to know’ about the rules of their new workplaces, we need to treat localised activity systems or communities of practice as important sites in the acquisition, enactment and creation of culture and knowledgeability, and to reflect upon the processes of identity construction. (Trowler & Knight, 2000, p. 28)

In a study across three academic institutions, Viskovic (2005) found that academics learned to teach through working with “colleagues in local work groups” which appeared to function as communities of practice but did not view themselves as such. Within these work groups there were no

. . . acknowledged ways of integrating newcomers and sharing ongoing practice among all members. Things tended rather to happen, sporadically, without . . . any deliberate process for making tacit attitudes and practice more explicit (Viskovic, 2005, p. 401).

The second concern raised by some authors is that situated learning theory does not provide sufficient grounds for “dismissing abstract, decontextualised learning as valueless” (Tennant, 1999, p. 175). It assumes that only “situated” knowledge is of importance and undervalues forms of knowledge that are not directly accessible through workplace activity (Fuller et al., 2004).

As indicated earlier, and partly acknowledged by Lave and Wenger, a third concern is that situated learning theory does not adequately address issues of power. Knight and Trowler (2001) contend that the process of reaching agreement within a community of practice is more complex than the theory implies, and that while acknowledging issues of power at the rhetorical level, the theory does not provide a mechanism for incorporating broader societal relations of power in understanding the process of learning within communities of practice. They are supported in this view by Fuller and colleagues.

To conceive learning solely as a participative activity risks trivialising power relationships and ignoring significant barriers to participation which originate in the work organization, the employment relationships and in the organizational structures. (Fuller et al., 2004, p. 6)

On the other hand, Contu and Wilmott (2003) argue that situated learning theory is a “radical analysis of learning practices” in which the concept of power is central, but claim that Lave and Wenger have focused primarily on “functionalist and interactionist illustrations of their thinking, in which consensus and continuity are assumed” (Contu & Wilmott, 2003, p. 292). In their view greater attention needs to be paid to the role of power in the formation and

workings of communities of practice. They imply that there needs to be a broadening of the theoretical bases of situated learning theory.

Consistent with Contu and Wilmott, I argue that Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and *habitus* can be used to broaden the scope of situated learning theory. Conceptualising communities of practice as forming "subsets within a field" and as behaving like fields, strengthens the social practice dimension of Lave and Wenger's theory. Such an approach has been adopted by Hodkinson and Hodkinson.

Learning involves complex and often reflexive interrelationships between community of practice, individual dispositions to learning, inequalities of position and capital, and wider influences upon and attributes of the field. . . . Workplace learning cannot be understood through the abstraction of any one of these elements at the cost of excluding the rest. (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004b, p. 180)

The task of the researcher is not "to see whether [communities of practice] exist or not, but to identify their characteristics in relation to learning" (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004, p. 29). A view of the relationship between the community of practice and the individual "developing dispositions" of participating members is needed to understand the learning that takes place. But the wider context also influences opportunities for learning by providing "both tensions and opportunities for communities and their individual members" (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003, p. 17).

3.5 A framework for my study

Academics do not work as isolated individuals. Even in instances where they might appear to conduct much of their work on their own, they are tied into a network of relationships with colleagues in departments, in disciplines, within their institutions and beyond. This study uses the Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and *habitus*, together with the concepts of communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation and identity trajectories from situated learning theory, to explore the academic workplace at two levels. A description of how these tools have been applied in my data analysis is provided in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5 the academic workplace is analysed at the level of the department and associated discipline. The analytical potential of the concepts of communities of practice, field and capital are explored in helping to understand the nature of the academic workplace and providing a contextual frame for the analysis of how new academics learn to judge student performance. In each of the three case studies, the main communities of practice are identified as well as their relationships to each other, which define a key dimension of the fields that newcomers enter.

In Chapter 6 the focus shifts to how newcomers develop confidence in the judging of student performance in complex assessment tasks. The relationship between increasing participation in particular communities of practice, and the development of competence and confidence in this work, is explored. Of particular interest are the interactions between academics that give rise to or deny opportunities to discuss and verbalise the judgement process, and the evidence of and impact of power relations in framing the discussions that happen around assessment.

Reference has been made in earlier chapters to a broader level of analysis of the academic workplace, one associated with institutional and societal dimensions of change. While acknowledging the significance of this level, particularly within the transformative context of South African higher education, it is only dealt with as raised by the participants in this study in their reporting of their experience of learning to judge student performance. A fuller engagement with the issue of race and learning in the academic workplace in South Africa is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

Chapter 4: Issues of method and methodology

Just as people studied are part of a context, research itself also constitutes a context, and the researchers are a part of it.

(Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 33)

4.1 Introduction

A major difference between research in the natural sciences and the social sciences is that the “former studies physical objects while the latter studies self-reflecting humans” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 32). Not only do the objects of study engage in “self-interpretations” but so too do the researchers. I approached this study mindful of these two levels of “self-interpretation”. This chapter begins with an acknowledgement of how I form part of the context studied and how my particular view of research shaped the methodological approach adopted. I motivate for my choice of the case study method in research design and provide details of how the data was collected and analysed, and what steps were taken to address issues of ethical concern.

4.2 Positioning myself as researcher

This research involves the study of a real world context, the academic workplace, with its individuals, structures and power relations. It seeks to understand how academics learn in this workplace in order to help improve practice. As such my approach draws on both the broad interpretive camp of social research as well as the critical research perspective (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

I recognise that I am researching a field of which I am a member, namely, higher education, and that this membership itself needs to be acknowledged as a source of “bias” that may “blur the sociological gaze” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 39).

When *habitus* encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like “fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about it for

granted. . . . It is because this world has produced me, because it has produced the categories of thought that I apply to it, that it appears to me as self-evident. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 127-8)

In the process of this research I have tried to disrupt my sense of what is “self evident” and construct a degree of unfamiliarity with the contexts studied. In two of the three case studies I chose disciplinary contexts that I had little prior knowledge of, and in my interactions with people, I suppressed my role as staff developer and fore-grounded my role as researcher, one that I felt less comfortable in.

According to Bourdieu, another source of bias might be my “*social* origins and coordinates (class, gender, ethnicity etc)” and my position in the “*academic* field” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 39). As a middle-aged white male academic I occupy a position at a historically white university in South Africa, that is associated with past, and present privilege and what has been called “the ideology of whiteness” (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001, p. 68). This forms part of my *habitus*. Most of the interviewees, who met me for the first time as part of this study, might have inferred such an association, and I made no specific efforts to convince them otherwise. However, my personal journey has helped me to break through some of the barriers created by my “social origins”, and to develop the ability to listen to and for voices that represent a range of challenges to the “ideology of whiteness”.

The interviewees related to me in a range of ways: as an educational specialist, a researcher, a fellow colleague and academic, an academic staff developer, a middle-aged white male, and as a stranger. As someone “doing a PhD”, I experienced a sense of empathy and encouragement from many of the interviewees in Departments A (Social Science) and C (Design) where many members, including the head of Department A, had themselves not completed a PhD. In contrast I sensed a distant curiosity from members of Department B (Natural Science), where a PhD was the requirement for entry into the lowest level of the academic hierarchy.

When analysing a set of research interviews, one needs to make clear which “members’ resources” are being drawn on “in the production and interpretation of meaning” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 80). The resources drawn on in this study include my experience of teaching, working as an academic staff development practitioner, and my own research journey

including my masters dissertation, the articles and books I have read, conversations with my supervisors, research activities with other colleagues and my participation in courses and workshops on aspects of the research process. I view myself as an educationalist with almost 25 years of experience teaching in higher and secondary education. I have chosen the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education as my area of research and practice, and as a result my work transcends the conventional division between teaching and research that characterises much of higher education.

My academic staff development activities have included discussions with colleagues that have at times involved playing an advising or informing role. An initial concern was that my familiarity with this role might interfere with my role as researcher; yet I recognised the value of this experience, as it included years of listening to the experience of others, and becoming familiar with a range of academic contexts. I consciously tried to construct the interview as something different from my usual conversations with academic colleagues, constructing myself “as a stranger to the workplace setting, to whom even simple acts and circumstances” needed to be explained (Eraut, 2004, p. 249). Except for one occasion, in my first interview with a new academic, it was relatively easy to adopt a research identity and simply listen, resisting giving advice or responding to requests for advice, and, most important, resisting making judgements as to what constituted acceptable practice. I found the process a liberating one and learned a great deal with which to reflect on my own practices and assumptions about academic staff development.

4.3 Using Case studies

In his review of research methods used in studies of informal learning, Eraut (2004) found that most relied on interviews, with some incorporating ethnographic methods. The attraction of ethnography is that it is “not far removed from the sort of approach that we all use in everyday life to make sense of our surroundings” (Hammersley, 1994, p. 4). I have used elements of an ethnographic approach within a set of case studies. The case study is particularly suited to research “when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed” and, as in this study, “when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real life context”

(Yin, 2003, p. 1). My study involved academics in their everyday work situations, contexts over which I as researcher had no control.

Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that research is a form of learning; it is the study of the “particular” that has the greatest potential in helping researchers in the social sciences to understand human behaviour beyond the rule-bound lower levels of learning. The case study is suited to produce “concrete, context dependent knowledge”. It is also able to provide both the “nuanced view of reality” in the process of answering specific research questions, and to contribute towards helping researchers develop the skills required to “do good research”. He argues that the development of “context dependent experience” through case study research is as important for the development of researchers as “professionals learning any other specific skills” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 72).

Using the case study method involves uncovering volumes of detail and developing a “thick description” of practice (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The decision not to reduce this information to rules and theories allows the “case narrative to unfold from the diverse, complex and sometimes conflicting stories that people, documents and other evidence tell”, thus leaving room for the reader to participate in the process of interpretation (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 86). This approach strengthens the “credibility” and facilitates the “transferability” of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Initially influenced by a study of the socialisation of new academics (Rosch & Reich, 1996), I planned to conduct three case studies in different disciplinary contexts, and to interview two new academics in each study about their experience of learning to assess student performance. For my first case study I approached the head of Department A, a large department in the Faculty of Social Science, where several new academics had recently been employed. It was associated with a discipline of which I had little knowledge and had a good reputation nationally for producing quality graduates and research. The HOD was keen for the department to be part of the study and suggested that I discuss my research with several academics in the department who also displayed great interest. The decision to proceed with

Department A (Social Science)¹⁰ as my first case study was finally made when a new academic in the department, Cindy, agreed to serve as a primary subject for my research.

However, not long after the first interview with Cindy, she accepted an offer to study overseas and left the department. When a second new academic in the department declined an invitation to participate in the study¹¹, it became clear that my plan to focus primarily on the experience of new academics would not be feasible within Department A (Social Science). However, given the enthusiasm for the study amongst several of the other academics in the department, I decided to proceed with the department as my first case, re-designing the study to reduce the focus on new academics and to draw on the experience of a broader range of academics.

Stake (1994) argues that the choice of case study should centre on the “opportunity to learn” and take into account issues such as variation and access (Stake, 1994, p. 244). Given the strong link between teaching and discipline (Neumann, 2001; Neumann et al., 2002), my initial plan was to choose cases representing maximum variation (Flyvbjerg, 2001) in disciplinary contexts using categories in a typology based on the work of Biglan (1973) and developed by Becher (1989) (Table 4). In the typology, the categories of “hard” and “soft” refer to the level of definition of the boundaries of the discipline and the existence of a clear paradigm that “provides a consistent account of most of the phenomena of interest in the area” (Biglan, 1973). The descriptors, “pure” and “applied”, refer to the social applicability of the knowledge produced.

Table 4: Biglan-Becher typology of disciplines (Becher, 1994)

Biglan’s categories	Disciplinary areas
Hard/pure	Natural Science
Soft/pure	Humanities and Social Sciences
Hard/applied	Science based professions
Soft/applied	Social Science based professions

¹⁰ In the interests of anonymity, I use a format when referring to the case studies, that combines the department ‘name’ (A, B or C) with the faculty i.e. Department A (Social Science), Department B (Natural Science) and Department C (Design).

¹¹ This was the first of only two individuals over the three case studies who declined to participate in the study.

Department A (Social Science) was associated with a discipline characterised as soft/applied in the Biglan-Becher typology. In search of maximum variation, Department B in the Faculty of Natural Sciences, but associated with a hard/applied discipline, was chosen for my second case study. It was also a department with a good reputation for producing quality graduates and research. However, the experience of the first two case studies highlighted the central role of the relationship between the research and teaching communities of practice in shaping the experience of new academics. The significant difference in this relationship between the first two case studies suggested that it could be used as the basis for achieving substantial variation in my third choice of case study.

Given the significant role played by research in the first two case studies, a third case study was sought in which the role of research was a less dominant one. Disciplines in which professional work was a significant factor in departmental life were explored. Examples of such disciplines can be found in areas such as the Health Sciences, Commerce, the Fine Arts, Design and the Built Environment. Department C within the Faculty of Design met this criterion. It had recently appointed several new academics, and members of the department were keen to participate in the study. Furthermore, it was subject to frequent professional accreditation visits and was regarded as the strongest department in the discipline in the country.

Through the substantial difference in the relationship between teaching, research and the profession, these three cases represent a dimension of “maximum variation” in context. All three departments are regarded as amongst the best in their fields, with strong national, and in some instances international reputations. As such they also represented a set of best cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Basic descriptive statistics for each of the case studies is presented in Appendix 1. Department A (Social Science) had three times more full time academic staff than Department C (Design) and had the largest number of undergraduate students. Department B (Natural Science) lay midway between the other two departments in size, but had the largest proportion of female academics (50%), and all academics had completed their PhDs. Department C (Design) had the largest proportion of black academics (40%) with only 10% of academics having completed a PhD.

4.5 Data Collection

Data collection in the case studies primarily took the form of interviews and the study of documents including departmental self reviews, research reports, marking memoranda and course handbooks. In two of the cases observations in the field were also conducted.

Interviews

Given the context of transformation in higher education in South Africa, one of the challenges of this study was to capture the experience of black and female academic staff. Basic information about the interview data set is presented in Appendix 2. Purposive sampling was used in Department A (Social Science), and eight academics, including two black and two female members of staff, were interviewed. Two postgraduate students who assisted with marking were also interviewed. As the other two departments were much smaller than Department A (Social Science), as many full time academics as possible were interviewed. In Department B (Natural Science) one academic declined to participate and two others were not available at the time of this study. All but one of the academics in Department C (Design) was interviewed. This particular academic, despite volunteering to be interviewed, failed to respond to my requests to set up an appointment. Pseudonyms have been used in all written transcripts, labels and reporting of interviews to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

In each case a part of the interview centred around the experience of judging student performance on one or two complex assessment tasks that most, if not all, academics had participated in. The interviews were loosely structured and aimed to collect the following information:

- Brief biographical information.
- Perceptions of strengths and weakness of the department.
- Networks of support and collaboration in teaching and research, if any.
- The experience of being a newcomer in the department.
- The experience of judging student performance in complex assessment tasks for the first time and there after (if appropriate).
- Support mechanisms and practices that facilitated the learning of assessment practice in the department.

While most interviews lasted about an hour, on a few occasions it was not possible to complete the interview in the available time and follow up interviews were arranged. All interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed into a written form. Any process of capturing interview data involves transforming and interpreting the data. The transcript texts that were analysed represent transformed versions of the interviews, and not the interviews themselves (Kvale, 1996). The transcripts only contained the data that was audible on the tape. Except for a few occasions, visual data communicating emotions such as enthusiasm, anger, frustration or surprise was not noted in the interview for further analysis. Pauses and changes in intonation and emphasis were not captured. The tapes were transcribed verbatim and included repetitive and often incoherent language.

In reporting directly from the interview text, repetition has been removed where it was not felt to be relevant in making sense of the text. For example the repeated use of “I mean” and “You know” were removed from the quotations used without indicating omission of text. The convention of “. . .” has been used to indicate where other text has been omitted, and square parenthesis have been used to indicate an inserted word to help with meaning, or a changed word to protect anonymity. Where a block of text is quoted from an interview, the name of the interviewee is indicated along with the number of the paragraph in the interview transcript, e.g. [Cindy 78]. Where more than one interview was conducted, the number of the interview is indicated in curved parentheses behind the name. For example, text from paragraph 233 in the second interview with Julius is indicated as [Julius (2) 233].

In the initial stages of this research, while working in Department A (Social Science), I transcribed all of the interviews myself. The interviews in the two remaining case studies were transcribed by an assistant, and then checked twice against the audio tapes.

Observation

In each case study, the interviews and visits conducted were spread out over approximately a year, with the entire study being conducted between 2004 and 2006. After each visit to a department to conduct an interview, look for documents, or observe, I wrote field notes documenting information and my impressions of the work environment. The only department with a regular morning tea time in a communal tearoom was Department B (Natural Sciences). On several occasions during my study of this department, I joined them during tea time, making notes afterwards of my observations of the interactions between the different

groups that populated the department. A tea time presentation by one of the research groups in the department was also observed.

Data was collected through the observation of the following set of collective assessment events in Departments B (Natural Science) and C (Design).

- Department B: Assessment of Honours oral presentations (public event)
- Department C: Assessment of Exercise 1 in second year design (public event)
- Department C: End of year assessment of the second year design portfolio (panel)
- Department C: End of year assessment of the first year design portfolio (panel)

Each of these occasions provided me with the opportunity to collect ethnographic data. While some of this data did not directly assist in answering the research question, it helped me to understand some of the broader dynamics of the departmental communities of practice.

4.6 Data analysis

In my data analysis many of the procedures and strategies suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were used. For example, after each interview, 'site visit' or reading of specific documents, short summaries were written up. A journal was used to keep track of thoughts, plans or ideas to follow up, although not in as structured a way as they suggest. Regular use was made of data display techniques on whiteboard or newsprint to find new relationships, and my two research supervisors served as sounding boards at regular intervals as the case analysis developed.

My initial approach to data analysis was influenced by Rosch and Reich's (1996) use of grounded theory in developing their "enculturation model" to explain the socialisation of new academics. In their study of three new academics in different departments they used the "constant comparative method of naturalistic inquiry, simultaneous data collection and analysis" to "inductively" develop, test and refine their model (Rosch & Reich, 1996).

My interview transcripts were entered into QSR's NVivo Version 2™ qualitative data analysis software. The plan was to analyse the interview data for themes and patterns with

which to construct an explanation of how academics learn, and my initial coding of interview data was strongly influenced by this approach. However, as the coding progressed I became aware of categories that were being generated by influences outside the data.

Dey (1993) argues that researchers draw on a range of resources in the data analysis process. As an academic staff developer with many years of experience, my knowledge of this area provided a rich source of categories with which to analyse the data. Furthermore, the theoretical frameworks I was exploring influenced the categories that emerged and the relationships between categories that I was looking for. For example, the use of situated learning theory meant that my analysis often focused on what the data had to say about communities of practice and how newcomers were inducted into such communities. So in reality I came to the formal data analysis phase with a “provisional ‘start list’ of codes” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58).

In my first reading of the data, themes were identified that arose out of the way the interview was structured, the questions asked or the specific interests and concerns of the interviewee. My first attempt to code these resulted in a descriptive list of categories and I had doubts that anything useful would emerge. However, in subsequent readings I was able to identify “units of meaning”, i.e. phrases, sentences or paragraphs that convey “an intelligible and coherent point which is in some sense self-sufficient” (Dey, 1993, p. 114). These “units of meaning” were initially stored as separate categories.

My focus shifted to understanding how these separate categories related to each other using “pattern coding” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After several iterations, two major sets of relationships between the different categories began to emerge; namely, that associated with context, and that associated with learning. It was at this point that I was able to apply the key analytical tools derived from situated learning theory and Bourdieu’s theory of practice. The Context relationship linked data that referred to the key notions of “field” and “communities of practice”, while the Learning relationship organised data specifically related to the process of learning in general and learning to judge student performance in particular. The analysis of data around these two themes is presented in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

4.7 Applying my theoretical framework

While implementing the process of data analysis described above, I applied the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3. The range of conceptual tools provided by Bourdieu and Lave and Wenger needed to be tested and if necessary adjusted or re-defined, given the particular context and nature of my study. This section describes how this set of conceptual tools was developed.

Working with field and communities of practice (CoPs)

Field and CoPs provided the key conceptual tools for analysing the academic workplace. Within the academic department, individual academics work alone or in groups to perform specific tasks. Some have argued that these work groups, varying in size and importance, form the basis of communities of practice (Knight & Trowler, 2001). I chose to analyse the workplace at a level above these work groups, and focussed on the two key work categories in academic life, teaching and research. I defined the joint enterprise of a teaching CoP as the delivery of an educational programme, and a research CoP as the production of knowledge through research. But these two CoPs might not be the only ones that operate within an academic workplace. In some contexts academics are involved in professional practice of various kinds and form part of a broader professional CoP.

These CoPs function within fields, but also behave as fields, valuing particular forms of cultural capital, such as that deriving from research, teaching or professional work that individual academics accumulate along their life trajectories. In Chapter 5 I identify and analyse the relationship between the key CoPs in each case study and argue that this relationship forms a central feature of the field within which the department is situated.

Working with habitus

At the level of the individual academic, my method of analysis explored the relationship between the individual *habitus* and learning in the academic workplace, and the role legitimate peripheral participation played in this process, if any.

I initially used the concept of *habitus* “formation” in the new workplace environment but this approach seemed to imply that the *habitus* of a new academic was being formed for the first

time. Newcomers bring their *habitus* with them as their embodied experiences and dispositions accumulated up until that point. The academic *habitus* develops as the newcomer interacts with the academic workplace, and it is this notion of *habitus* development that replaced *habitus* formation.

To help me explain the nature of this development I defined two new concepts: “collective *habitus*” and “*habitus* harmonization”. The “collective *habitus*” of members of a community of practice is akin to Bourdieu’s “class *habitus*” but operates at the local level rather than the broader social level. It is within the collective *habitus* that the “*shared repertoire* of . . . ways of doing things” resides (Wenger, 1998). “*Habitus* harmonization” describes the process whereby the *habitus* of a newcomer and the collective *habitus* of the community of practice that the newcomer seeks to join, adjust to each other. I suggest that newcomers arrive, each with their individual *habitus*, and that learning involves the process whereby their *habitus* and the collective *habitus* are “harmonized” as they participate in the particular communities of practice that form part of the field within which the department is situated.

The notion of *habitus* harmonization has its limitations. For one, it suggests that there are well formed communities of practice. What if the communities of practice are fraught with division and undergo frequent change? What if there is no collective *habitus* with which the individual *habitus* can be harmonized? In analysing the data across the three case studies, I needed to entertain the possibility that the communities of practice might be relatively weakly formed and that they might not include agreed “ways of doing things”. So while always on the lookout for instances or mechanisms that promoted “*habitus* harmonization”, I also needed to find a way of explaining instances where such harmonization was problematic.

Working with stories

This study focuses on understanding a particular aspect of practice in academic life, namely, the judgement of student performance in complex assessment tasks. In each case data was collected about the experience of one or two key complex assessment events. In the initial case study where purposive sampling was used, several individuals who had participated in the assessment of the same complex tasks were interviewed, to give me the opportunity to “triangulate” the data emerging from individual interviews. In the case of the second and third case study, the majority of full time academics in the department were interviewed and hence there was ample opportunity to view aspects of academic practice from a range of

experiences in the department. However, at no stage was I interrogating interviewees to confirm one or other detail of practice. The interviews were structured to facilitate the interviewees own reflections on their experience rather than the detailed recalling of events. It is this “collection of storied experiences” (Polkinghorne, 1995) that emerged in the course of this reflection that formed the units of data available for analysis.

Polkinghorne (1995) identifies two kinds of inquiry involving narratives. In the first kind, which he called “analysis of narratives”, data is collected in the form of stories, often interviews, that are analysed to identify the common themes and concepts. In one approach to this analysis, the “concepts are inductively derived from the data”, as in the case of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In another approach, “concepts are derived from previous theory . . . and are applied to the data to determine whether instances of these concepts are to be found” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). In both approaches analysis of narratives provides a “method to uncover commonalities that exist across the stories” and has the “capacity to develop general knowledge about a collection of stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15).

In the second kind of narrative inquiry, termed “narrative analysis”, the outcome of the research is a story. The researcher collects “descriptions of events and happenings” and “synthesizes” them into stories. The role of the researcher is to “develop, or discover a plot that displays linkages among the data elements”. The data is often not in the form of stories, but could consist of information collected in interviews, documents or observations. The central process of analysis is one of “synthesizing of data rather than a separation of it into its constituent parts”.

The researcher begins with questions . . . and searches for the pieces of information that contribute to the construction of a story that provides an explanatory answer to the questions (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15)

In this research study, these two kinds of narrative enquiry have been regarded as representing different levels of analysis rather than different methods of analysis. Initially I engaged with an analysis of narratives and was guided by “paradigmatic reasoning” (Polkinghorne, 1995), identifying “networks of concepts that allow people to construct experiences by emphasizing the common elements that appear over and over”. At this level the usefulness of the key theoretical concepts from Bourdieu and Lave and Wenger in helping to answer the research

question was examined; themes and concepts across the individual interviews within each case study, as well as across case studies, were identified.

However, at some point within each case study I began to construct an interpretation of the typical career and learning trajectories and how these related to the process of learning to judge. This process involved engaging in narrative analysis using “narrative reasoning” to notice the differences in people’s behaviour.

Narrative reasoning does not reduce itself to rules and generalities across stories but maintains itself at the level of the specific episode. . . . The cumulative effect of narrative reasoning is a collection of individual cases in which thought moves from case to case instead of from case to generalization. (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11)

I iterated between the process of analysis of narrative inquiry, using paradigmatic reasoning, and narrative analysis, using narrative reasoning, both within and across the three case studies until I was able to formulate an answer to my research question. The interpretations which emerged have been constructed by me, the researcher, rather than by my informants, and form the primary outcome of the study. The strength of these interpretations lies in their ability to provide a plausible explanation of the process of learning in the context of the academic workplace across the three case studies.

Understanding the interviews

Kvale (1996) makes the point that the aim of interviews is “to understand . . . what the interviewees say” and he cautions that interviewers need to be “sensitive to what is said – as well as to what is not said” (Kvale, 1996, pp. 31-33).

The context of this study at a historically white university in South Africa could be described as a racialized space in which participants continue to be labelled, and in some cases to label themselves and others, using the racial constructs of “black” and “white”. The discourse of transformation in higher education has introduced new terms with which to refer to race, terms such as “equity”, “disadvantaged background” and “designated groups”. The term “black” has a complex history which has left it with multiple meanings. In the vocabulary of transformation it refers to one of the “designated groups” defined in the Employment Equity Act; namely, persons of indigenous African descent. However, it also has a political history and is used, as I have chosen to use it in this study, to refer inclusively to all persons who

were previously disenfranchised from the political process; namely, those classified coloured, Indian or African. While it was possible, at times, to discern both meanings even within the same interview, on some occasions it was not clear which meaning the interviewee was using.

In this study I interviewed 31 academics including nine black academics. Only two of the 31 interviewees, Zaid and Joe¹², both black male academics, referred to any experience involving race within their departments, while one other black academic, Julius, denied when questioned, that race played any role in his experience as an academic. How do I understand this silence about race? Ball, cited in Pennycook (1994), argues that the central concern of discourse analysis is “why, at a given time, out of all the possible things that could be said, only certain things were said”. While it was not my intention to undertake a discourse analysis of the interview data, I am in full agreement with Pennycook that

. . . as we urge our students [or interviewees] to speak and write, and as we listen or read, we need also to consider what discourses are constructing those moments of speaking and understanding. (Pennycook, 1994, p. 132)

Within Department B (Natural Science), the silence of black academics, Clara and Dash, around issues of race in their interviews with me, contrasted markedly with Joe’s openness about his concerns that black students perceived the department to be “racist” (see Chapter 6). His inability to raise these concerns with his colleagues suggests that a powerful discourse dominated the practice in the department, one that made little room for discussion of issues of race. Such a discourse would fit within Steyn and van Zyl’s (2001) “ideology of whiteness” and would tend to deny the impact of race, particularly in the post-apartheid era. His inability to talk about this issue with his colleagues, bar one, served to reinforce both his identity as a black academic, and his sense of isolation within the department. It appeared that he was using the interviews with me, and my research, to find a way of communicating his concerns to the rest of the department.

In contrast Zaid, in Department C (Design), together with another black external examiner, had openly discussed his concerns with his white colleagues about the way in which they assessed black students (see Chapter 6). The relatively high proportion of black academics in

¹² The openness of both Joe and Zaid around the issue of race in their interviews may have been facilitated by the fact that, in the period just prior to their interviews, they had each had the opportunity to discover that they shared social perspectives with me that placed me outside the “ideology of whiteness”.

Department C (Design) may partly explain the fact that the discourse in that department allowed such discussions. However, both Majdi and Pat, two black academics in the same department, were silent about race in their interviews.

There was a similar silence in the interview data in Departments A (Social Science) and C (Design) with respect to gender. This silence might be explained by a “masculinist bias” in the higher education discourse (Raddon, 2002). It was only in Department B (Natural Science), where there was a female HOD, and half of the full time academics were female, that gender issues were raised in the interviews, particularly with reference to the tensions surrounding the changing gender profile within the department.

While I have chosen not to use discourse analysis as my method of research, my approach has included an awareness of discourses within which the social practice under investigation, as well as the research itself, was being constructed. However, the concept of Discourse models (Gee, 2005) has been used in my analysis of the interview data to extract “common sense” explanations for how academics learn in the workplace.

Discourse models are simplified, often unconscious and taken-for-granted, theories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives. We learn them from experiences we have had, but crucially, as these experiences are shaped and normed by the social and cultural groups to which we belong. (Gee, 2005, p. 71)

4.8 Ethical concerns

The ethical issues that needed attention in this study related to the potential influence of my role in staff development activities, obtaining informed consent and protecting confidentiality.

I have already explained how I attempted to background my role as academic staff development practitioner and to foreground my role as researcher in my engagements with the departments involved in the three case studies. When approaching a department to participate in the study, I first met with the HOD who assisted in informing academics in the department about my research and in emphasising that participation was voluntary. On one occasion I

was invited to speak at an academic staff meeting in the department after which those present informed the HOD individually whether or not they felt the research should proceed and whether or not they wished to be interviewed.

In ensuring informed consent, a letter of introduction was distributed to each academic in the department, explaining the aims of the research and methods to be used, making clear that participation was voluntary, and emphasising my commitment to anonymity and confidentiality. This letter was followed up with an introductory meeting or telephone call. Formal consent was obtained either via email or verbally during the course of these conversations. Across all three case studies, only two individuals indicated that they did not wish to participate in the study.

In the letter, and at the start of each interview, it was stressed that this study was about trying to understand how new academics learnt to assess students' performance in complex assessment tasks in that department. It was also emphasised that my role was not

- to evaluate their teaching or assessment practice or that of the department;
- to advise them on how to improve their practice, or
- to assist with their socialisation and induction into SAU.

Where agreement was reached to work in a particular department, confidentiality was maintained and the identity of those who participated in the study was not revealed, even to other participants in the same department. In all documents that have been produced, the names of individuals, departments and the institution have been changed and the discipline concealed. Only my supervisors were aware of the identity of the institution, the departments and the disciplines concerned. Given the significance of academic discipline within an academic community (Becher, 1994; Neumann, 2001) this may limit the scope of interpretation available to the reader; however ethical considerations necessitated this approach.

Interactions with a few of my key informants around my analysis of their interview data suggested ways in which I could strengthen anonymity and highlighted the feelings of vulnerability experienced by participants in research of this kind. Near the end of my study I approached the HODs of each of the three departments and offered to present a seminar in the

department on the findings of my research. While all three HOD's responded favourably to this offer, as yet none of the departments have set a date for such a seminar.

In this chapter key aspects of my research journey have been described. I have attempted to create a role for myself as an outsider in a field with which I am not only familiar, but for which I carry responsibility. I have done so not to try and achieve some "objective" view of the learning of academics, but rather to try and unsettle and disrupt that which I regard as "commonsense", to enable me to give due attention to interpretations that might otherwise be disregarded, or not even visible.

The next chapter introduces the three departments and provides an analysis of the context of this study, the academic workplace, within which new academics are required to judge student performance in complex assessment tasks.

University of Cape Town

Chapter 5: Understanding the academic workplace

5.1 Introduction

The academic workplace at a university in South Africa can be conceptualised as a social space situated within the multiple overlapping fields associated with academic disciplines and professions, and the educational, social and political aspects of life in South Africa. This chapter explores the analytical potential of the concepts of communities of practice, field and capital in explaining the academic workplace across three case studies and develops a contextual frame for analysing how new academics learn to judge student performance. While the case studies represented significantly different contexts, being part of SAU – a historically white, research intensive, higher educational institution in South Africa – meant that they shared an environment that prioritised research and engaged with transformation through, amongst other means, efforts to achieve employment equity.

Like many higher education institutions elsewhere in the world, SAU experienced multiple and ongoing pressures for change (Henkel, 2000). The dismantling of apartheid legislation governing education, the drive for transformation, the restructuring of departments and faculties and increasing student numbers were some of the significant change factors in recent years that had impacted on academic practice at SAU. Departments A (Social Science) and C (Design) had experienced the departure of relatively large numbers of senior staff, and their replacement with younger and newer staff. This change was supported by an SAU policy that posts vacated by senior academics be replaced by entry level posts to facilitate the entry of black or female academics into the system. The HODs in all three case study departments were relatively young and in Department B (Natural Science) there had been a dramatic change in the gender composition of staff. These changes tended to undermine long standing systems and practices. Significant evidence of division and tensions was found in all three departments. This chapter provides only a limited analysis of these dimensions of change and division in as much as they helped to understand the process of learning in the academic workplace at SAU.

5.2 Department A (Social Science)

5.2.1 Introduction

Department A was a large department within the Faculty of Social Science with over two dozen permanent academic staff and very large undergraduate classes, which offered a three-year undergraduate degree followed by a one-year Honours degree. Between 1989 and 2002 undergraduate enrolments increased by 80% to over three-thousand students and between 2000 and 2002 the numbers of postgraduate students grew by 25% to fifty-six Masters and eighteen PhD students. As a result the tea room had been converted into a work space for postgraduate students and there was no longer a space or regular time for members of the department to interact informally with each other.

The professional consulting work associated with the discipline in Department A (Social Science) was closely linked to the research work conducted by the senior academics, who often spent considerable periods of time away from the department. Their ability to do so was facilitated by contracting out their teaching to large numbers of part-time lecturers and postgraduate students.

The primary data in this case study consists of interviews with eight academics and two postgraduate tutors. Most of the academics interviewed had been students in the department, although only two had completed their PhDs and neither had done so in the department.

The two new academics interviewed were both appointed on short term contracts:

Cindy¹³ – a South African black female lecturer. Honours graduate of the department in her second year of teaching. Recently completed her Masters degree overseas.

Braam – a foreign white male lecturer. Honours graduate from another department at SAU in his second year of teaching. Completing his Masters Degree.

The three middle-level academics interviewed had each been teaching in the department for about five years:

Julius – a foreign black male lecturer. Masters graduate of the department.

¹³ Cindy left the department to study her PhD overseas soon after I had conducted the interview with her.

Henrietta – a South African white female senior lecturer. Qualified elsewhere in SA and obtained her PhD overseas.

Alan – a South African white male lecturer. Masters graduate of the department, currently registered for a PhD, with substantial research experience in the department prior to taking up an academic appointment five years ago.

The three senior academics interviewed had each been in the department for ten years or more:

Johan – a South African white male professor and previous HOD. PhD graduate from elsewhere, with twelve years teaching experience, ten of them in the department.

Bob – a South African white male associate professor and current HOD. Masters graduate of the department, currently registered for a PhD degree, with eighteen years teaching experience in the department.

Mark – a South African white male senior lecturer nearing retirement. Masters graduate of the department with twenty-two years of teaching experience, eighteen of them in the department.

The two postgraduate tutors interviewed were:

Peter – a white foreign male Masters student in his fifth year at SAU and second year of tutoring in the department.

Patrick – a South African white male Masters student in his seventh year at SAU and fourth year of tutoring in the department.

5.2.2 Change in the department

Interviews with the three senior academics provided insight into the changes in the department during the previous ten years. One of the most significant changes had been the increase in the research profile and output of the department. The substantial increase in the amount of work academics in the department were asked to do for the new government after 1994¹⁴ had changed the nature of research being conducted within the department.

¹⁴ In this year the first democratic elections were held in South Africa and the African National Congress was voted into power and began the formal dismantling of Apartheid.

SAU academics used to do academic research. 1994 changed all of that and as academics we were doing more and more government work, more and more private sector consulting work and the pressure to do it was going up. [Mark 48]

In trying to balance the pressure to increase research output with increasing student numbers, the department adopted a strategy that enabled research active academics to reduce their teaching load through the “extensive use of contract lecturers at first and second year level”, and postgraduate students for tutoring, and in some cases, lecturing. While this strategy helped in “freeing up the time of senior staff” (Departmental report,¹⁵ 2004, p. 7) it also contributed to a significant separation of junior and senior academics, with the former teaching primarily at the undergraduate level and the latter mainly doing research and teaching at the postgraduate level.

The traditional academic career path in the department began with tutoring as a post-graduate student, followed by part time or full time teaching on short term contract, often while still completing postgraduate studies. This provided many opportunities for teaching capital to accumulate prior to full time permanent appointment in the department. Contract lecturers were encouraged to apply for permanent positions as these became available, often before they had completed their postgraduate qualifications. As a result, several permanent academics in the department were still completing their postgraduate studies.

However, Bob, the HOD, who at the time of this study was himself still working on his PhD, explained that the appointments made during 2005 reflected a substantial change in the entry requirements for new academics in the department. Most of the applicants for the posts, even at lecturer level, had already completed their PhDs. As a result many of the lecturers on short-term contract in the department, despite their substantial experience in teaching, would not have been sufficiently qualified for appointment. He indicated that he would in future advise them to complete their PhDs before applying for a permanent post.

In the past . . . we made some appointments for permanent posts with or without a Masters That would never happen now, you'd have to be . . . well advanced with your PhD at the minimum and I think it won't be that long before you've got to have a PhD before you get in as a lecturer. [Bob 28]

¹⁵ This report cannot be referenced fully to maintain the anonymity of the department concerned.

At the same time Mark commented that the workload expected of new academics had increased significantly since he joined the department almost two decades previously.

It's chalk and cheese. . . . [A new academic today] is doing exactly the same teaching load as an established academic even though they've got to prepare their lectures from scratch and they're expected to publish at the same rate. [Mark 50]

While this increase in the emphasis on the research capital required of newcomers was partly a result of an increase in the number of PhD graduates nationally, it also reflected a response to the pressure from within SAU to increase research productivity. However this shift also suggested a devaluing of teaching capital amongst new academics. Both Johan and Bob commented on how the appointment of new academics with research qualifications and experience had changed the research profile within the department and increased its capacity to offer postgraduate courses.

When we started our coursework Masters programme we had very few people who could actually teach [at] Masters level. . . . Now we've got plenty. . . . The whole tempo of research, getting a PhD, has changed quite completely . . . partly pressure from the university . . . partly a more competitive environment for getting jobs. [Bob 17-19]

A second change during the previous ten years had been in the age profile of academics in the department. Johan commented on how he had been one of the youngest members of the department when he joined it in the early 90's, having completed a PhD and taught elsewhere. He described the department at the time as being dominated by older academics who spent most of their time doing consulting work.

A very old department . . . fairly ossified and everybody was quite well entrenched . . . people had been doing what they do for years and years and years, and they weren't that open to changing anything. [Johan 38]

However within a few years, many of the older academic left to take up appointments with the new government and Johan found himself one of the oldest members of the department. It was not surprising, given this changed age profile of lecturers and the high proportion of postgraduate students tutoring and lecturing in the department, that the environment, particularly with reference to undergraduate teaching, was often characterised as “young” by

those interviewed. Both postgraduate tutors noted this aspect of the academic staff in the department. Peter remarked how “young” and “approachable” the academics were. Patrick commented that most of the “people lecturing [with me] are people [who] did Masters with me or who were a year above me”. Henrietta said that she valued the enthusiasm, excitement and energy that these young academics and tutors brought to their work in the department despite their lack of experience.

Having previously been staffed almost exclusively by white male lecturers, the departure of senior academics had facilitated the appointment of several female and black academic staff such as Julius and Henrietta. Two of the nine female academics in the department were interviewed. In neither of these interviews, nor in any of the interviews with male academics, was there any reference to issues of gender within the department. However Cindy had established an informal relationship with Henrietta as her mentor and Henrietta in turn had established an informal relationship with a senior female academic in the department.

Two of the seven black academics in the department, Cindy and Julius, were interviewed. Julius, one of the first black academics appointed in the department, felt that significant progress had been made in changing the racial profile of academic staff in the department “from having no black lecturers to about four, five over a period of four, five years”. He acknowledged, however, that not everyone at SAU agreed with the pace of this progress.

He described his initial sense of isolation in the department and his dependence on his relationship with Johan, who had encouraged him to pursue a career as an academic. On two occasions during the interview, he emphasised that race had not been a factor in his experience as a new academic, although he saw it as an issue at an institutional level.

Cindy had recently joined the department and made no reference in her interview to her experience as a black academic either in the department or at SAU. She found the department very “friendly” and it could be argued that the presence of other black academics, including Julius, who had already been teaching in the department for several years, had created a climate which was more diverse and less alienating than Julius had experienced when he arrived.

5.2.3 The communities of practice

A significant feature of this department was the way in which the undergraduate teaching and research dimensions of academic life were separated from each other. This separation can be described in terms of the existence of two key communities of practice within the department.

The first community of practice centred on the management and delivery of educational programmes and courses for the large numbers of undergraduate students. This was a substantial activity in the department and constituted the “joint enterprise” which engaged all the new and some middle level academics together with a large number of postgraduate tutors. A recently established undergraduate education committee provided a level of co-ordination plus a place to discuss course changes, the organisation of assessment and course evaluations. This collection of academics, students and activities constituted the undergraduate teaching community of practice (CoP).

All new academics were assigned to teach undergraduate classes upon arrival and hence automatically formed part of the undergraduate teaching CoP. The common experience was one of being “thrown in the deep end” and reinforced the view amongst new academics that undergraduate teaching was not highly valued within the department. For a graduate from the department, entry into this community of practice was mediated by a *habitus* which incorporated the experience of the department as a postgraduate student. This experience often included working alongside lecturers as a tutor and is described in more detail in Chapter 6.

Bob, the HOD, acknowledged the existence of “tension” in the department between “junior staff who tend to teach at undergraduate versus more senior staff who tend to teach at postgraduate levels”. This separation was reinforced by the extensive use of short term contract staff employed specifically to do the undergraduate teaching. At the time of this study only one senior academic in the department was involved in undergraduate teaching. This separation also meant that the collective *habitus* within the undergraduate teaching CoP did not include significant experience of judging student performance in complex assessment tasks.

Julius felt it was unfair for junior academics to carry the responsibility for undergraduate teaching, especially given the relative importance of research at SAU. He argued that this practice made it difficult for junior academics to advance in their academic careers.

Teaching these massive classes of a thousand students . . . three times a day . . . From the point of view of a junior staff member that seems to be somewhat unfair. And where senior people, the professors . . . most of the time are [away] . . . they're not doing much teaching. . . . [T]he university rewards you through promotion by your research . . . but when you start off as a young person you're given a whole lot of teaching that makes it . . . very difficult to actually get some research off the ground and that's generating a lot of discontent amongst junior staff members, black and white. It's nothing to do with race now, it's about you being young and not being able to have time to actually do research which is what will get you promotion. [Julius 61]

Despite his view of how unfair the situation was, Julius regarded the process of starting in the undergraduate teaching CoP, and progressing into the research CoP, as a natural development in becoming an academic.

The old school have actually stopped teaching [undergraduates]. Teaching is now concentrated amongst the middle group but in particular the junior staff. . . . I mean that's standard practice. You start in the varsity, they throw you all the junior . . . teaching load. . . . As your research output grows . . . the less and less teaching you are required to do. . . . That's the kind of progression. [Julius 68]

The professors and the “senior people” Julius referred to above were engaged in a different enterprise, namely, that of producing research, and supervising and teaching postgraduate research students. This work formed the basis of the second key community of practice in the department, the research CoP, with a relatively small but growing postgraduate teaching CoP embedded within it (Figure 1). While the academics involved in the research CoP were themselves divided into several sub-disciplinary research units, they were nonetheless all engaged in the “joint enterprise” of producing knowledge through research.

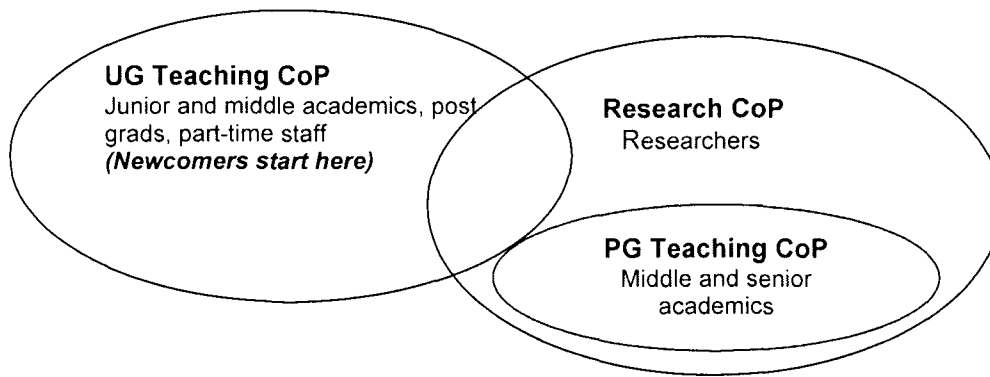


Figure 1: Communities of practice in Department A (Social Science)

This study argues that the particular configuration of communities of practice represented in Figure 1 is a significant feature of the field within which Department A (Social Science) was situated. It represents the possible positions and paths, in the form of identity trajectories, that academics, both those entering the field, and those already in the field, might take.

This separation of junior and senior academics had significant implications for the way in which the new academics related to the older academics and the forms of mentoring that took place. Julius described the department as consisting of “three different generations”. The “old school” of professors “who taught us when we were students”, the middle group “who have been involved in research for quite a while” and the “young group” who were the most racially “representative” of the broader society. While acknowledging an initial period of discomfort, he felt that after several years in the department he interacted well with these groups. He commented on the value of this range of experience for the research development of the younger academics in the department.

We have this unique interaction of views across the spectrum of age . . . as to what the real challenges are . . . and what practical solutions are available. . . . There’s no real agreement in the department . . . there’s different perspectives . . . not just the new cutting edge stuff, but also for us to learn from the past . . . and influence the way we think about how we progress into the future. [Julius 52-55]

While several interviewees referred to the role one or two senior staff played in “mentoring” junior academics, it was not always clear how “mentoring” was understood and it usually related to research rather than teaching. Bob equated it to the role played by a PhD supervisor, while Julius referred to the role senior colleagues played in giving him feedback

on a draft paper and helping him develop the confidence to send a paper to a journal. Writing and publishing a journal article formed a key element of the “shared repertoire” within the research CoP and provided a legitimate “boundary object” (Wenger, 1998, p. 105) for newcomers negotiating their way into the research CoP.

The significant role that Johan played in the informal mentoring of new academics was mentioned in several interviews. Julius described how Johan had encouraged him to apply for a post in the department.

My existence here . . . is owed to him. . . . He took it as his responsibility to . . . nurture and grow me . . . for which I am grateful. . . . I wasn't yet confident . . . to open up with any other people except with him. He knew my history and . . . was always there to . . . encourage and to listen if there was any issue. [Julius 411]

Henrietta felt that most of the senior academics, with the exception of Johan, made very little contribution to the mentoring of younger staff. She had rejected the person “assigned” to mentor her upon arrival in the department because she found him to be “unfair and inconsistent” and later established an informal mentoring relationship with a senior female academic working in a related research area.

While Julius and Henrietta had not been able to find help that easily when they arrived in the department, for the more recently appointed academics, they themselves formed part of what Henrietta termed a “buffer” of middle level academics available to support newcomers.

There are certainly instances where the new people are as badly off as I felt I was, but . . . there's a whole generation of us who've been around for five years. Now . . . at least there's a bit of a buffer, there is somebody next door that maybe has convened something before . . . who knows what the departmental line . . . is. [Henrietta 130]

This “buffer” was a significant help for Cindy, a black female academic, who had found an informal mentor in Henrietta, her colleague in the office next door who was “a huge help” with advice about everything from “admin” to “assessment”.

Everybody's just so helpful . . . Right, so marking comes up . . . you go to somebody that you feel [is] some kind of a mentor, and they kind of look out for you, but it's all very informal. [Cindy 75]

However Cindy voiced her concern that this informal system of support and mentoring into the undergraduate teaching CoP was not sustainable.

The reason why I think all of this works it's because the individuals here are just that committed and that passionate about what they do. . . . There isn't anything formalised that's holding [it together] [Cindy 171] . . . people will come and people will go. . . . If things are not institutionally formalised . . . it could become problematic. [Cindy 266]

Johan felt that the department did not have a good history of supporting newcomers. Despite the positive reports from other interviewees about his own role in mentoring newcomers, he reported that many of the junior members of the department had told him that he had not provided a supportive environment for them while he had been HOD.

Guys who came in under my watch . . . say . . . "We felt like we were left to sink or swim". [Johan 49]. . . Partly as a jest but not always. . . . Sometimes as a joke: "It's taken me a few years to say this but I actually have some anger about it because . . . I was coming in and I was trying to finish a thesis that I had promised to finish as part of my employment here and . . . I am floundering around and this is not how it should happen". [Johan 59]

He felt that academic staff from "disadvantaged backgrounds"¹⁶ found it particularly difficult to adjust to the "culture of the department" and cited the example of the problems that some black academics had in dealing with students.

It's [also the] culture in the classroom. People find our students incredibly pushy and abrasive and aggressive. . . . Some of the people from a disadvantaged background have really battled with that and at times they've said: "Well this is sort of racism, we're viewed as incompetent and required to . . . prove ourselves". [Johan 57-59]

Despite these difficulties, he had observed a shift in the balance of power from the older to the younger academics, including several from "disadvantaged backgrounds". After an initial period of being made to "sink or swim", and after completing their postgraduate qualifications or getting promotion, he noted that some of the younger staff began to assert themselves in ways that suggested they had started to "own" some of the place.

¹⁶ This phrase refers to the educational, political and economic disadvantage that black South Africans experienced under apartheid. The phrase "disadvantaged backgrounds" has become synonymous with "black" and in some quarters is regarded as politically more acceptable than the term "black".

As they've grown into the department . . . they've become more assertive. . . . That's exactly the development you want out of your junior guys. . . . Some of them . . . reflecting some anger about the way they had to . . . bed themselves into this place, but once they're bedded, it's a very good thing that they own enough of the place to say: "Well I think I can now say that I think that's a terrible way of doing something". [Johan 63]

An example of this assertiveness was provided by the display of agency by Henrietta and Julius in initiating a committee structure that enabled greater participation in the management of the undergraduate teaching programme.

In the past Duncan ran the department. . . . Then Duncan resigned creating this massive vacuum. . . . I was worried about the quality of the decisions. . . . So I said: "OK, why don't we set up a committee?" . . . and I put myself there so that I could at least know what the decisions were. [Henrietta 158-164]

Johan explained that in taking this initiative "these young people" were making it clear that they did not just "want to do what Duncan did" but that they wanted "to take [these programmes] in different directions". In his view this new assertiveness coincided with their ending their "apprenticeship" in the department.

It coincides with . . . an influential group of the younger guys in the department . . . getting their PhDs at very very good overseas universities. . . . Once they get them . . . it makes a huge difference to what they think about themselves . . . in a way I never would have expected. All of a sudden people are just so much more like: "Okay, we have delivered what we said we were going to do to this department and we now have the stuff" and they get promoted and . . . "We've done our apprenticeship, we're in and we want to be taken seriously around here". . . . While they were getting all their ducks in a row . . . they just didn't push their agendas . . . then all of a sudden the dam wall breaks and they're very assertive and . . . it's fantastic, because it's all driven by the fact that they're very serious about what they do. [Johan 68-71]

Despite his enthusiasm for this process, he acknowledged that some of his senior academic colleagues struggled to deal with the new levels of assertiveness of the younger academics.

The professors have now got to deal with stuff for the first time. . . . These guys just aren't signing off on everything we say is a good thing for this department. . . . It's a new milieu . . . where everything gets contested and debated. [Johan 74]

It could be argued that the separation of junior and senior academics provided the space for junior academics to take control of the decision making within the undergraduate teaching CoP. The process described provides an example of how the agency of newcomers can result in changes to the “collective *habitus*” of a community of practice within a department.

5.2.4 Identity and career trajectories

Wenger (1998) argues that when newcomers join a community of practice their identity construction settles into one of the trajectories related to membership of the community. As described in Chapter 3, the starting point and developmental paths of these trajectories are shaped by the interaction between the individual *habitus* and the field.

The starting point for the traditional academic career trajectory in Department A (Social Science) was working as a postgraduate tutor, followed by appointment on contract as a lecturer (Figure 2). While Bob acknowledged an element of exploitation in the extensive use of short term contract staff for the bulk of the undergraduate teaching, he argued that it provided a form of probation for people considering a permanent academic post. It gave them the chance to “do it and teach well and get into your research”. He felt this then put them “in contention for a permanent position”. The two new academics interviewed, Cindy and Braam, were both on short term contracts at the time of this study. Julius and Alan had each worked on contract for a while in the department and acknowledged that the experience had facilitated their move to a permanent position.

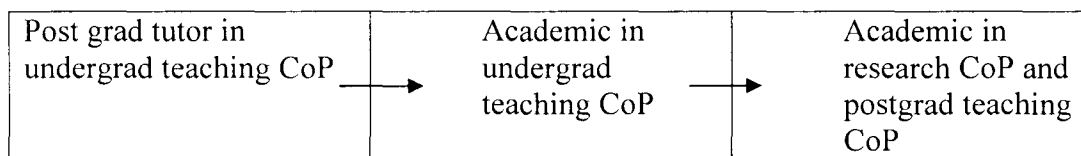


Figure 2: Career trajectory in the Department A (Social Science)

A key source of the tension between the two main communities of practice within Department A (Social Science) derived from the fact that, in an effort to increase research output, research active members of staff were helped to reduce their teaching load. Clearly these tensions impacted on the identity trajectories available to new academics. According to Wenger such tensions can result in the emergence of “paradigmatic trajectories” which “embody the history of the community through the very participation and identities of practitioners”. Wenger argues that through exposure to these trajectories, newcomers soon work out “what counts” (Wenger, 1998, p. 156).

The interviews with the three middle level academics, Julius, Henrietta and Alan, provided valuable insight into how different identity trajectories were constructed within Department A (Social Science). Julius had worked out “what counts”. As a result of the power relations that existed between the two communities of practice, the natural progression of an academic in Department A (Social Science) was to follow the “paradigmatic trajectory” out of the undergraduate teaching CoP into the research CoP, which is what Julius planned to do (Figure 3).

While he was satisfied with the recognition he had received to date, he was seeking formal recognition in the form of promotion to senior lecturer; his future in the department depended on him being successful in this application.

Should I apply for promotion this year and not get it, that's going to have an implication for my wanting to stay or not. [Julius 44]

This move was not only about reward for work done; it also formed an important part of Julius' attempt to gain access to the research CoP, given the fact that more senior academics in the department were assisted in reducing their teaching and increasing their research productivity. He was intent on following the “paradigmatic” outbound trajectory from the undergraduate teaching CoP into the research CoP.

However not all new academics in the department chose to follow this paradigmatic trajectory. The stories told by Julius and Henrietta highlight how the development of the academic *habitus* of individuals within the same context can be differently constructed. The different identity trajectories illustrated in Figure 3 are manifestations of this process.

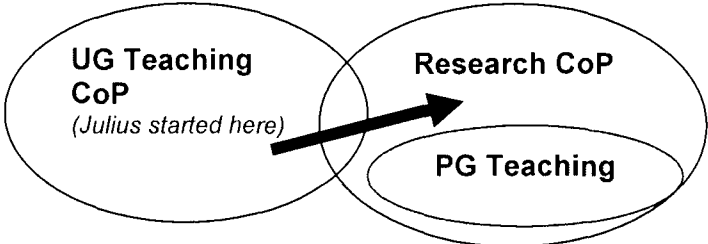
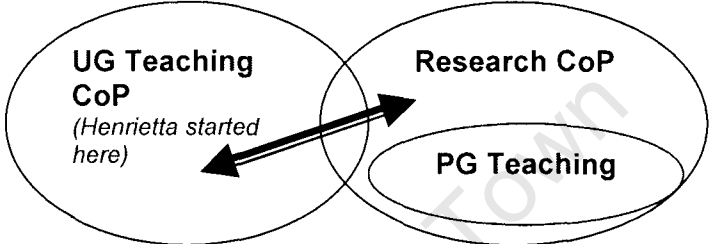
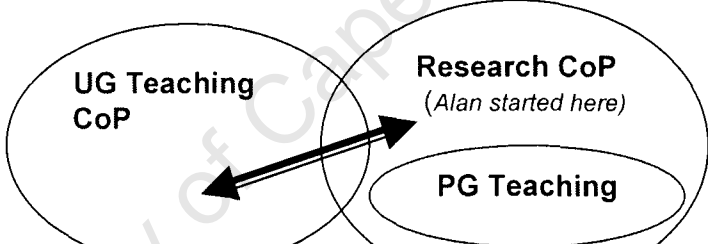
Identity trajectory	Relation with configuration of CoPs
<p>Outbound trajectory</p> <p>Paradigmatic trajectory from teaching to research CoP. (Example Julius)</p>	 <p>The diagram shows two overlapping ovals. The left oval is labeled 'UG Teaching CoP (Julius started here)'. The right oval is labeled 'Research CoP' and contains a smaller oval labeled 'PG Teaching'. A single-headed arrow points from the UG Teaching CoP towards the Research CoP.</p>
<p>Boundary trajectory 1</p> <p>From teaching to include research CoP. (Example Henrietta)</p>	 <p>The diagram shows two overlapping ovals. The left oval is labeled 'UG Teaching CoP (Henrietta started here)'. The right oval is labeled 'Research CoP' and contains a smaller oval labeled 'PG Teaching'. A double-headed arrow connects the two ovals, indicating interaction between them.</p>
<p>Boundary trajectory 2</p> <p>From research to include teaching CoP. (Example Alan)</p>	 <p>The diagram shows two overlapping ovals. The left oval is labeled 'UG Teaching CoP'. The right oval is labeled 'Research CoP (Alan started here)' and contains a smaller oval labeled 'PG Teaching'. A double-headed arrow connects the two ovals, indicating interaction between them.</p>

Figure 3: Identity trajectories in Department A (Social Science)

Both Julius and Henrietta initially focused their energies on becoming full members of the undergraduate teaching CoP. They developed reputations as innovative teachers, were active in attempting to improve the undergraduate teaching programme, and participated in a faculty wide education forum. Henrietta clearly articulated her commitment to teaching and her role as a change agent. She indicated that during the next five years she would “experiment” and act to transform “what we do at this place, because we’re not doing it right”. She was concerned by the fact that despite the considerable effort she put into her teaching, black students were not performing as well as white students.

[In course ABC], and that’s a course that works, the class separates out into three very distinct layers, white South Africans, black South Africans, white foreign students. . . . Even when I get it as right as I possibly can, the black kids are enormously discriminated against by what I do. [Henrietta 389]

While Henrietta appeared driven by her sense of fulfilment as a teacher, and pursued support for this orientation from outside the department, she also expressed a commitment to research, thereby indicating her intention to sustain membership of both communities of practice in the department. She described some of the practical difficulties involved in this strategy. Because her research and her teaching activities were “so far apart” she had negotiated that all her teaching happen in one semester.

The strongest bargaining chip was to do the job nobody else wants to do. So I . . . picked a course where I thought I could make a contribution and that nobody else wanted . . . that way I can walk in and demand whatever else I need. [Henrietta 198]

Deciding to teach the course that “nobody else wanted” empowered Henrietta to negotiate a way of dividing her time to sustain membership of both communities. Together with her rejection of the use of multiple choice questions (MCQ) and her commitment to “experimenting . . . and transforming what we do here”, Henrietta had taken on the role of change agent in the department and was actively engaged in “subversion strategies” aimed at challenging the field associated with her department. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73).

While for Julius becoming an academic meant moving out of the undergraduate teaching CoP into the research CoP, Henrietta’s participation in the undergraduate teaching CoP formed an integral part of her developing academic identity, her *habitus*. The interaction between her *habitus* and the departmental field had resulted in her constructing a boundary trajectory that sought to include full membership of both communities of practice (Figure 3). She also built links with communities of practice outside the department by, for example, actively participating in a faculty based education forum. This multi-membership (Wenger 1998) appeared to strengthen her ability to negotiate her participation in the individual communities of practice within Department A (Social Science).

Alan’s experience was unusual in that, after an initial period of teaching on contract, he had spent several years in the department as a researcher before being appointed as a senior lecturer five years previously. As a result, he displayed a strong sense of belonging to the research CoP, which he acknowledged as the “power base within the department”. In contrast to Julius and Henrietta, he sought to expand his identity to incorporate membership of the undergraduate teaching CoP. Like Henrietta, Alan’s *habitus* worked to incorporate membership of both communities of practice within his identity but from the opposite

direction (Figure 3). One would expect that his efforts to do so would be relatively uncomplicated, given the lack of barriers to membership of the undergraduate teaching CoP.

Henrietta, as a full member of the undergraduate teaching CoP, had to do substantial work to gain access to the research CoP. She was helped by the fact that she had accumulated research capital in the process of obtaining her PhD and was engaged in a significant research project. However, she was alone in her particular area of research and could not draw on the support of a broader group within the research CoP. In Alan's view, newcomers found support and encouragement when, like Julius, their research areas were closely aligned with existing research groups in the department. Where new academics were uncertain about their area of research, or where their area was marginal to existing research groups, they struggled to fit into the research CoP.

The relationship between the two communities of practice was reinforced by the relative values attached to the research and teaching enterprises within the university as a whole. The one community was defined in relation to the other with membership of one implying marginalization in the other. In this case, full membership of the undergraduate teaching CoP limited the opportunities for developing full membership of the research CoP. In the case of the many academics on short term contracts who had been brought in specifically to help with the teaching in the department, their participation in and membership of the undergraduate teaching CoP was reinforced by their explicit non-membership of the research CoP.

An internal departmental report acknowledged this dynamic and stated that this "could effectively trap junior staff members into high teaching loads (because their research record is poor) thereby ensuring that they never have the time to improve their research record" (Departmental Report, 2004, p. 43-4). This could potentially have serious consequences for junior staff as "promotion depends in large part on research" (Departmental Report, 2004, p. 40) and would limit their opportunities to accumulate research capital. Julius was very aware of the consequences of remaining a junior member of staff. Clearly this tension impacted on the identity trajectories that academics chose. It would appear that what was expected in Department A (Social Science) was for new academics to follow the "paradigmatic trajectory" out of the undergraduate teaching CoP into the research CoP. Julius had shaped his path strategically to achieve that goal, but it cannot be assumed that all newcomers would follow that route. Henrietta and Alan had incorporated membership of both communities of

practice within their identity, but from different directions, and chose to sustain identity trajectories with strong aspects of multi-membership.

Postgraduate students involved in teaching responsibilities played peripheral roles in both communities, as researchers and mentees in the research CoP and as tutors and lecturers in the undergraduate teaching CoP. For most postgraduate students the experience of peripherality was viewed as temporary and unproblematic. For them the peripheral trajectory served as an opportunity to gain valuable experience of the academic workplace and to clarify whether or not they wished to become academics. Only a few were likely to choose an academic career and would need to develop inbound trajectories aimed at becoming full members of one or both of the two key departmental CoPs.

5.2.5 Conclusion

In this first case study, the concept of communities of practice has provided a valuable tool for analysing relationships within the department. The particular configuration of communities of practice within the department, illustrated in Figure 1, is a key dimension of the field that new academics need to engage with as they develop their academic *habitus*. On the surface, the particular configuration of the research CoP and the undergraduate teaching CoP appeared to arise out of efforts to manage the large numbers of students in undergraduate classes, while maintaining a satisfactory research profile in the department. However this arrangement served to reinforce the privileged position of the more senior academics within the department, giving them time to pursue the research required for promotion, and resulted in a “paradigmatic” career trajectory that served to reproduce this arrangement Figure 2. This career trajectory had in the past valued teaching capital along with limited research capital at entry. There were signs, however, that this route into an academic career in the department was under pressure to change from an increased valuing of research capital reflected in the need to complete a PhD prior to entry. While there was evidence of a paradigmatic identity trajectory out of the undergraduate teaching CoP into the research CoP, not all academics chose to follow this trajectory. Some chose instead to construct identities that combined membership of both communities of practice.

In the next section of this chapter I present a similar analysis of the departmental context in the second case study.

5.3 Department B (Natural Science)

5.3.1 Introduction

Department B in the Faculty of Natural Science was formed out of the merger of Departments X and Y several years prior to this study. While most of the academics interviewed were associated with one or other of the original departments and disciplines, some were involved in two new research areas arising out of interdisciplinary collaboration. A three-year undergraduate degree was offered with four streams of specialization, two corresponding to the foundation disciplines X and Y, and two in the new research areas. This was followed by a one-year Honours degree which served to select students wishing to do a Masters offered by dissertation only. The department did not offer first year undergraduate courses so there were no large first-year classes.

The department consisted of sixteen full time academics and about an equal number of postdoctoral fellows (postdocs)¹⁷ who only conducted research. Appointment as a lecturer in the department required a PhD and several years of postdoctoral research experience. I conducted interviews with thirteen of the sixteen academics in the department (see Appendix 2) and drew on data from observations of a research group presentation, some of the Honours project presentations, and from occasional visits to the tea room.

Despite being considered overstaffed, the department had recently been allowed to appoint the following two new academics as equity appointees on short term contracts, both of whom were interviewed:

Joe – South African black male lecturer. PhD graduate of Department Y with postdoctoral research experience at a neighbouring institution.

Jane – South African white female lecturer. Masters graduate from elsewhere in SA with doctoral and postdoctoral research experience from overseas universities.

¹⁷ Postdoctoral fellowships were awarded for a period of not more than five years to doctoral graduates to enable them to work on a research project.

A group of middle-level permanent academics who were interviewed had each been in the department for several years:

Rob – South African white male lecturer. Graduate of Department Y, in his seventh year of teaching at SAU, previously in Department Y.

Carl – South African white male senior lecturer. Postgraduate of Department Y, in his fourteenth year of teaching at SAU, previously in Department Y.

Clara – South African black female senior lecturer. Postgraduate of Department X, in her eighth year of teaching at SAU, previously in Department X.

Claire – foreign white female senior lecturer. In her sixth year of teaching at SAU, previously in Department X, with postgraduate and postdoctoral research experience at overseas universities.

Mel – South African white female associate professor. Masters graduate from Department X, and Doctorate from overseas university. In her eleventh year of teaching at SAU, previously in Department X.

Dash – South African black male associate professor. Graduate from elsewhere in SA with Doctorate from overseas university. In his eighth year of teaching at SAU, previously in Department Y.

Marge – South African white female senior lecturer. Postgraduate and postdoctoral research experience at SAU in Department Y. In her ninth year of teaching at SAU.

A third group of senior academics, made up of three white females and one white male, were also interviewed. This group consisted of two professors, Tamara and Monica previously from Department Y, and two associate professors, Paula and Max previously from Department X.

5.3.2 Change in the Department

The merging of Departments X and Y to form Department B (Natural Science) had been a significant event for members of both departments. Department Y was described as having been strongly collegial with a strong culture of teaching. Several academic members of staff had been awarded institutional teaching awards. In contrast, Department X was described as having had a history of intense personality conflicts. Several ongoing disagreements in Department B (Natural Science) around issues such as the Honours programme or resource

allocation, seemed to be based on disciplinary differences between X and Y. Paula, the HOD, described her decision to compromise around the issue of space allocation.

[Department X had] waves of space but they're so entrenched and they're so fearful of moving . . . because they have just had a big change. . . . [T]hey're so fearful about . . . what they think they're gonna lose that they just don't co-operate on many levels . . . so I've had to reassure them that I won't take away their space. [Paula 45]

Several Interviewees referred to the lack of collegiality in Department B (Natural Science) arising out of the tensions and difference between members of the previously separate departments. Claire claimed that “very few people work together to a common goal”. She felt that there were still staff members who “wish we hadn't merged and can't get over the fact that it did”. While some of the older academics had reportedly experienced difficulties adjusting to the merger, many of the younger academics viewed it as a positive development. Claire felt it had provided opportunities to promote inter-disciplinarity and to reconceptualise research and teaching in the disciplines.

The fact is that . . . you don't have those disciplines anymore, most people's research, if you talk to them, crosses both. . . . It's an old way of looking at it to say: “I'm a Y” or “I'm an X”. [Claire 47]

For Dash the merger provided the opportunity for “new growth” and the development of “a new culture in the department,” while for Carl it had given “new life” to the old Department Y.

It brought a whole lot of people in with different disciplines and different ways of doing things. It's improved things a lot. It's also increased the politics but I don't have a problem with it. . . . The new people that have come in with the merger, I've got a lot in common with them so that's been a good thing too. [Carl 64-69]

A second substantial change was in the gender profile of academic staff in the department. Paula, the current HOD, regarded the high proportion of female academics as one of the strengths of the new department. While in Department Y there had previously been a female HOD, Tamara, and several female academics, in Department X, Mel had been the first female academic to be appointed not long before the merger, and reported experiencing great difficulties working with the six male academics who had been there a “long time”. When a

second post had opened in Department X, Clara applied despite knowing the difficulties Mel experienced. She had found it a very “tempestuous, combative environment” to work in.

It would often be male versus female because . . . the older males that had done their degrees . . . came here as PhD students and stayed. They've had a history of twenty years in how things were done. . . . Mel came in, when I joined here she'd just become head, and so she, as the only female, was always in conflict. [Carla 50-52]

A short while later Claire successfully applied for a third vacancy and the gender ratio in Department X shifted further to three women and four men. Clara described how as a young woman she was regarded by her male colleagues as “Mel’s lackey” resulting in “endless fights”.

Most of the fights ended up being old versus new, that we didn't know because we didn't have enough experience, and male versus female . . . and in a sense Claire and I were forced to take sides the day we walked in because we were female and we were young and we were new. [Clara 63]

In a striking indication of how immersion in such an environment of conflict had affected Clara’s own *habitus*, she acknowledged that she had found herself adopting a combative attitude towards new academics.

Now six years down the line I see newbies coming and . . . I realize I've adopted that kind of attitude myself. In a meeting, you don't sit there quietly, you attack someone if you think they are not right because that's what kind of Claire and I grew up with. We grew up with fighting for every piece of turf and asserting your academic kind of footing and right and confidence, it wasn't a gentle introduction. [Clara 80]

Mel, appointed as the first HOD in the new merged department, established an executive of four to manage the department, with only one male executive member. Clara recalled how Max, an older member of Department X, had said at a staff meeting that he had “felt sidelined as a man”.

Us girls were up ousting them and taking over. . . . The change was so rapid for someone like Max from twenty-five years of being a male department and then within three years it goes completely half-half and women run it. [Clara 263]

The shift in practice of gender-based exclusivity from male to female was starkly reflected in the following two accounts. Paula recalled how in her first appointment as the only female member of staff in a department at SAU she had been excluded from decision making by the male members of the department who had all graduated as students from the same class and held their staff meetings “in the pub on a Friday night”.

I don't drink so I never went to the staff meetings, so I often didn't learn about things until it was too late. [Paula 232]

The perception of gender-based decision making appeared to emerge in the new department in a new guise as evident from Clara's account of how the three women on the executive committee were perceived to interact.

Because the three women were friends and we used to go out and have dinner together it was considered we'd often pre-arrange issues over dinner and then come and put it as a fait accompli at the staff meetings as the girls. [Clara 265]

5.3.3 The communities of practice

The research enterprise dominated Department B (Natural Science), and as a result, despite sub-disciplinary divisions in the form of distinct research groups, all the academic staff, including all new academics, together with a large number of postgraduate students, full and part-time researchers and postdoctoral researchers, formed part of a single research CoP (Figure 4). In contrast to Department A (Social Science), all academics taught in the undergraduate programme, and almost all at both the second and third year levels. Except for occasional lectures by outside specialists, all teaching was done by the departmental academic staff and with a few exceptions there was no involvement of postdoctoral researchers or postgraduate students in teaching. A key incentive for all academic staff to teach at the undergraduate level appeared to be the need to attract students into one's sub-discipline to secure postgraduate students at Honours, Masters and PhD levels.

In Department B (Natural Science), professional work in industry, and academic research work were both laboratory-based and focussed on similar objects and outputs. Furthermore engagement with this form of research valued by both the academic and professional communities began whilst a student, intensified during the period of postdoctoral work and was one of the central focuses of establishing oneself as a new academic.

The main objective of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes was to produce graduates who were skilled scientific researchers to work either in private research laboratories or in university research departments. Research skills development formed the basis of most of the teaching at the third year undergraduate level and the Honours level. According to Paula, the HOD, investment in the teaching programme was given high priority, as the department was judged by the quality of its graduates in terms of their abilities to conduct research at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level. The relationship between teaching and research in the department was one of teaching serving research.

Appointment as an academic in the department required the accumulation of research capital through the completion of a PhD and several years of experience as a postdoctoral researcher. Membership of the research CoP therefore preceded participation in teaching. Given the strong link between teaching and research and the fact that all academics participated in teaching at all levels, the teaching CoP can be conceptualised as being embedded within the research CoP (Figure 4). To gain access to the teaching CoP one had to first become a member of the research CoP and given the relatively close relationship between teaching and research, the transition from researcher to teacher was thought to be unproblematic.

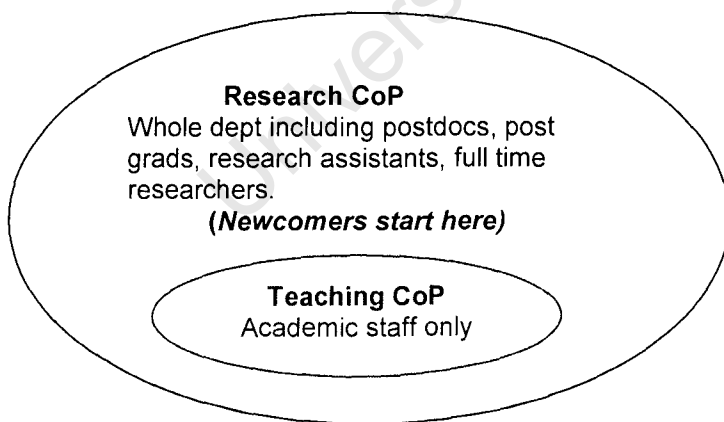


Figure 4: Communities of practice in Department B (Natural Science)

The configuration of communities of practice represented in Figure 4 differs significantly from that in Department A (Social Science). It reflects the overwhelming dominance of research capital within the field. While there was an explicit valuing of the teaching function, given the role it played in producing researchers and hence in supporting research, there

from Zimbabwe, she's brilliant, she's beautiful, she lives in the lab seven days a week . . . they say, "Here's a black woman who is clearly making it". [Tamara 149]

Joe also felt that the presence of black academics in certain labs encouraged the racial clustering of students evident in the department. He referred to his own experience as a student in the department.

When I was an Honours student and I went to Marge's lab . . . you find that eventually some other coloureds and blacks²⁰ also come. . . . I think it has always been from when Dash was here . . . many years ago . . . [when] the racial dynamic was more pronounced. . . . At that time a lot of the black students, coloured students, Indian students came to him . . . wanting him . . . and this was back when I was a PhD student. [Joe (3) 249-258]

As one of only two black academics in the department, Joe brought with him cultural capital that differed significantly from that of his white colleagues. His *habitus* incorporated the experience of being a black student in the department and he displayed an acute awareness of the complexities surrounding his transition from being a black student to being a black academic at SAU. He remarked on the "challenge" of working with his former lecturers.

Another learning curve is obviously my interaction with my former teachers . . . I have been told by my mentor actually to kind of get out of that frame of mind and see them as your fellow colleagues and people that you have to be firm with. . . . It's a bit more difficult than that . . . I've still got this mental image of them which I have to . . . deal with. [Joe (1) 77]

Joe felt that he had developed a good relationship with the students, but struggled to define his role as a black academic and understand what black students in particular expected of him. He also felt uncomfortable with the authority that his academic position gave him over students.

I talk to them . . . I don't like see them as I'm the supervisor, the academic. I actually hate that. I hate being in that position . . . of being in authority. [Joe (2) 210]

²⁰ In this extract Joe used the classification 'black' to refer specifically to African students. In his interview he shifted between this use of the term, and the more inclusive 'black' referring to African, coloured and Indian collectively.

He spoke at length about his interaction with the black students in his lab, expressing concern at their view that some of his white colleagues were racist, and that some of the black academics were “coconuts”²¹, based on what they perceived to be preferential treatment given to white students in marking and the allocation of scholarships. Given his own experience as a black student in the department, he acknowledged that he could identify with the perception that white academics discriminated against black students. He recalled how he and his fellow black students had felt it was “unfair” that after putting “a lot of effort into our Honours write up” they had been awarded “less marks than the white students”. However, twice he commented on how his perspective had changed since his appointment as an academic.

Looking back I realize . . . it may not have been a race questions it may just have been that our English was bad. . . . I have realized now in this position that . . . there are other pressures on academics which students are unaware of. [Joe (2) 222-226]

These statements reflected a break with his student past, an assertion of his emerging identity as an academic and the new perspectives that went with it. He also drew on the rational scientific perspective, associated with his professional training as a scientist, in posing an alternative to the student view and questioned whether the perception of racism was “valid or not”.

He admitted that he had only discussed the students’ concerns with Jane “because she’s new” like him and he was able to “trust her”. He felt the climate in the department did not encourage the discussion of such issues with his colleagues and expressed the need to discuss these concerns with other black academics at SAU.

I must actually ask other academics, black academics . . . whether they find that the black students kind of rely on them or . . . see them as a voice on their behalf and does that put pressure on them. Because . . . I didn’t ask for that role. [Joe (2) 276]

One strategy to try and unify the newly merged department had been to build a large departmental tea room, and to encourage the whole department, including academics, postdoctoral researchers, postgraduate students and scientific officers, to have tea together each morning. It is unclear how successful this was, as during the course of this study I joined the department for tea on several occasions and observed that less than half of the

²¹ A derogatory term used in the South African context to refer to black people who are seen to be serving the interests of white people i.e. ‘black’ on the outside and ‘white’ on the inside.

appeared to be an assumption that research and teaching drew on the same experience and skills, the same capital. A newcomer's *habitus* as researcher was thought to be able to deal with the challenges of teaching. As a result there were no obvious systems of support for developing one's teaching. The only reference to a teaching development activity was a two day teaching workshop that several members of the department had attended ten years previously which interviewees reported as having helped significantly in their development as teachers.

While almost everyone in the department contributed to the research enterprise and hence formed part of the research CoP, the interviews revealed substantial divisions within the department by sub-disciplines, teaching streams, lab groups, gender and race, and between the different sectors of the departmental community, such as academics (ordered by rank), postdoctoral researchers, scientific officers, technical assistants, postgraduate and undergraduate students. According to Rob the result of this level of fragmentation was that there was a feeling of "everyone for themselves" in the department. Monica also felt that within the "bigger department" people worked more as "separate entities" and supported each other less.

Research, and much of the teaching, took place in a network of laboratories (labs). While the labs provided a strong source of collegiality, they also seemed a focus of division. According to Dash the merger reinforced a tendency for individual academics to identify more strongly with their lab groups than with the larger department. Joe commented that "each lab saw themselves independently and not as a department" and it often appeared that they were in competition with each other.

The labs carved out sub-disciplines with the size of the lab, and the number of postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers, serving as a measure of the status of the sub-discipline and the academics associated with it. As a result issues of space and efforts to attract postgraduates and postdoctoral researchers took on additional significance. Some labs with access to large research funds employed researchers and research assistants rather than taking on postgraduate students. Marge felt that this resulted in further tension, as it appeared that these groups did not contribute their fair share to postgraduate student development and supervision.

At the level of personality conflicts, the ongoing tension between Mel and Graham¹⁸ was reported as having its origins in Department X. Jane described Graham as one of the “difficult” personalities in the department who many people “struggle to get on with”. She felt that she had found a way of working with him.

He often raises very good points in staff meetings . . . very valid objections and a lot of people override it just because he brought it up . . . There have been times when I've agreed with him and said so . . . I'm not sure if that has made him think that I am not just a yes man. But there have been other times when . . . I've disagreed with him and maybe because I have shown that I'm not afraid to say what I think. [Jane (1) 81]

There had been little success in changing the racial profile of the academic staff in the department with only two black academics, Joe and Clara. As HOD of the old Department Y, Tamara described how after investing a great deal of time in recruiting and mentoring three black academics, all three had left to take up positions in government. Dash, one of the three, and the most recent to leave, departed during the course of this study. In his interview he provided insight into some of the complexities and discomfort surrounding equity appointments at SAU in general but particularly in Department B (Natural Science).

I felt that many of my colleagues were looking at me as if I came through the back door rather than through the front door and that bothered me a lot because I felt that I needed to be looked at equally compared to the others. So . . . when . . . [another post in the department] was advertised . . . I applied for it and . . . out of 70 or 80 others who applied for it . . . on equal grounds and footing I got that post. [Dash 12]

The racial profile of postgraduate students was uneven across the labs. At the time of this study Tamara's lab had only black postgraduate students and, together with Joe, constituted a significant black presence within the department. Tamara speculated that the presence of black academics, such as Dash and Joe, in the lab had contributed to this concentration of black students.

Dash was . . . always having undergraduate students in his office and I'm sure Joe does too . . . being black. [141] . . . Word gets around that this is an international¹⁹ lab and it's particularly strong in Africa. . . . They come into the lab and there's Dani

¹⁸ A senior academic in the department who declined an invitation to participate in this study.

¹⁹ This refers to the fact that many of the black postgraduate students came from countries in Africa outside of South Africa.

academics made use of this facility. I also became aware that some research groups, including Tamara's and Joe's, maintained a tradition of making and drinking tea within their own lab, and did not seem to make use of the departmental tea room. Joe felt that drinking tea in his lab facilitated conversations between himself and black students that were unlikely to take place "upstairs in the big tea room".

As in Department A (Social Science), relationships between older and younger academics were often spoken about with reference to mentoring. Tamara, the past HOD of the old Department Y, felt that she had invested a great deal of time in mentoring new academics, in particular Dash, who she described as having "mentored seriously". Despite the evidence of tensions and divisions, Dash commented that the environment in the old Department Y had been very "nurturing" and "hands on mentoring used to take place quite extensively". Marge had often "come around" to check if he needed help and to ask about his teaching. He found Tamara to be a "very caring and affectionate person". It was easy for him to sit with her and ask advice about things that were worrying him. He felt there was a very good mentoring environment for the two newcomers, and that Joe would probably benefit most from Tamara as mentor, while either Mel or Claire were in a position to "provide good mentorship" for Jane.

Tamara felt that Joe had fitted in very well in her lab.

We are in and out of each other's office all day, every day. We co-supervise, we write project proposals together, but I'm not his only mentor because the two people he did his PhD with, Marge and Monica, also look after him . . . so he seems to be fine.
[Tamara 48]

Upon arrival in the department Joe had chosen Marge as his mentor, as she had been his Honours supervisor. He described her as a "very good mentor", "patient" and "motherly". Despite having graduated from Department Y and "interacted" with his colleagues as an undergraduate and postgraduate student, he felt that he had needed Marge's help to negotiate the transition from student to academic, and to help him to "know the politics".

She's been a great help. She really has assisted me . . . especially in terms of the little things in the department that you are unaware of. [Joe (1) 61]

Marge had lacked a mentor herself as a new academic in Department X many years ago. She described her role as Joe's mentor for matters related to research and, at times, teaching. She recalled assisting him with setting exam questions "to pitch the standard of the exam at a particular level", but did not express confidence in providing mentoring with respect to teaching.

The information he is going to get is only as good as I am. I'm certainly not trained in any way to help with that sort of thing but I can give him a sense of where to pitch his questions. [Marge 343]

She felt that the department needed a more formal system of mentoring to help new academics settle in, as it was "unreasonable to expect any new person . . . to come into a department and know the system intuitively".

Jane was "not entirely sure" what role Mel, who had been assigned as her mentor, was supposed to play and felt she was probably "not using her as much as I should". While she had approached Mel for advice in setting exam questions, she understood that a mentor was primarily appointed to help her deal with personal rather than professional problems.

I'm just supposed to go to her with any problems. . . . When I first started I had a lot of problems with [the personnel department] and the [research office] . . . and I went to her with that. And then recently I've had some problems with family deaths and things and I've gone to her to deal with – so personal . . . rather than a professional thing. [Jane (1) 135]

It is not clear whether the time Tamara devoted to mentoring was specifically directed at new black academics, as Carl reported that he had had very little mentoring when he had joined Department Y. At the time he had just returned from a period of postdoctoral research in the USA where he had had the opportunity to supervise at Masters and PhD level. He had "transferred" his research projects to SAU and grown his own research group by starting off with Honours students who eventually went all the way through to a PhD degree. When he arrived he was given the same number of lectures as everyone else without any support. Rob had also not been assigned a mentor and had established his research group "from scratch".

Both Carl and Rob felt that Joe and Jane were being well mentored because they were equity appointments and were therefore "looked after much better than new lecturers were before".

According to Carl they “were having it a lot easier” and were not being overloaded with lectures.

5.3.4 Identity and career trajectories

In contrast to Department A (Social Science), the basic requirement for a new academic in Department B (Natural Science), even those appointed on short term contracts, was a PhD degree and postdoctoral experience in research. The development of research capital over an extended period of time preceded entry into the Department as an academic, and in most cases preceded the experience of teaching. In this context there was not a set of identity trajectories that could be compared with those evident in Department A (Social Science). The “paradigmatic” career trajectory in this case appeared to be the only identity trajectory for academics in Department B (Natural Science) (Figure 5).

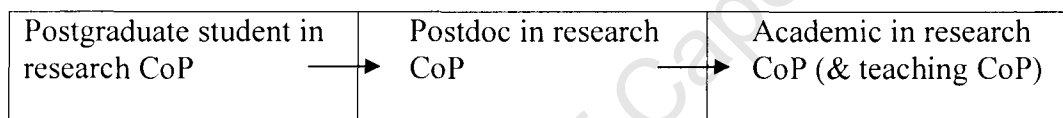


Figure 5: Career trajectory in the Department B (Natural Science)

However, two stages that emerged as significant in the process of becoming an academic were the experience of being a postdoctoral researcher, and the process of developing one’s own lab, both of which assisted in the development of the academic *habitus* with respect to research, and formed part of the journey to full membership of the research CoP.

The postdoctoral research experience

The postdoctoral research experience was regarded as an apprenticeship in research that facilitated the transition from postgraduate student to scientist. Claire explained that PhD students were dependent on a project that formed part of their supervisor’s research. However, as postdoctoral researchers they had more “independence” and were encouraged to develop their own research project.

It’s a vital part of the career process. . . . You’ve got the confidence that you’ve got your PhD and you just really grow as a scientist. [Claire 246-247]

The postdoctoral research experience was not generally regarded as an opportunity for the development of teaching expertise. Before appointment in the department, Joe had recently

spent three years as a postdoctoral researcher at a neighbouring university, during which time he had had the opportunity to publish, supervise two students and manage a lab. He was also fortunate to get the chance to present a week of lectures, which he described as having been a “very difficult” experience in which he had been “thrown in the deep end”.

Some postdoctoral researchers, particularly those interested in following an academic career, would offer to do a few lectures or help supervise students to gain some experience of teaching. Marge, Dash and Mel all reported having done a small amount of teaching during their time as postdoctoral researchers. Mel had volunteered to teach a two week module on an Honours course and felt this had helped her when she had applied for an academic post in the department.

I had some teaching experience, I had some course assessments, and I actually had managed to recruit as a consequence of that . . . three Masters students . . . so that definitely helped I think in applying for the post. [Mel 23]

Carl had supervised Masters and PhD students during his period of postdoctoral research in the USA, while Jane had done some teaching as maternity cover for another academic and marked her first Honours project while doing postdoctoral research in the UK. Claire had recently arranged for two of her postdoctoral researchers to teach her lectures as she was about to take maternity leave. However, opportunities for postdoctoral researchers to teach were the exception rather than the rule in the department.

There was evidence that postdoctoral researchers were unhappy with their position at SAU, as they were officially classified as students and their length of tenure was limited to five years. Joe was disturbed by what he described as the neglect of postdoctoral researchers, as he regarded them as future academics.

Lecturers don't come from a vacuum; they come through a postdoc experience, so how you nurture your postdocs is very important because if you invest in your postdocs you are investing in future lecturers. [Joe 88]

Furthermore, the competition for posts was severe. In 2005 the department had fifteen postdoctoral researchers and, with only one retirement anticipated in the next few years, there was little chance of any of the them getting a permanent academic position in the department in the near future.

Developing one's own lab

The link between the lab and the academic identity was evident in both the physical and social aspects of the department. Each academic had an office within or alongside a lab. Academics and their students formed “lab communities” in many ways similar to the master-apprentice communities of the trades, with postgraduates being assigned benches where they worked for the duration of their studies. Each academic was strongly associated with his or her lab group; in the discourse of the department the labs took on a personified form. According to Jane, one lab might develop a “bad name” associated with the “personality of [the principal investigator]” while another lab might be viewed as “extremely collegial”. Both Carl and Rob’s labs had developed reputations for being very sociable and were highly visible through their participation every day in the morning teatime.

Mel compared running a lab with managing a communal house. She argued that one needed to be careful of the “personalities” one took into the lab. While they might be “fantastic scientists” they could “destroy something” if they were “unpleasant to have around”. She acknowledged, however, that she could be “fussy” because she was not trying “to build up my lab”, and that it was “tough” for newcomers as there was “big pressure” to get their lab up and running.

Both Jane and Joe were initially allocated relatively light teaching loads, to give them time to prepare their teaching and establish their research labs. As newcomers, they each faced different challenges in establishing their labs. Jane’s area of research was new in the department, so upon arrival she had been given a lab of her own with minimal infrastructural support. In the relatively short time of a year her lab had shown substantial growth. She had two PhD students, a Masters student, and an Honours student who was considering doing a Masters with her the following year. As a newcomer, she valued the expertise she found amongst the postdoctoral researchers and drew on the “local knowledge” of those who had graduated in the department. Those who had undertaken postdoctoral research elsewhere brought “outside experience”, which included new technical knowledge, and provided her with what she described as “new ways of thinking about things and solving problems”. Jane’s lab was near the tea room. She and her students regularly went to tea together; I observed her using teatime to build up her “lab community” in a way similar to that used by Carl.

In contrast, upon his arrival in the department, Joe had been placed in an established lab led by Tamara, a senior academic with an extremely successful research profile. Tamara had ensured that he had the equipment, funding and opportunities to co-supervise and build up a cohort of students. Within six months he was supervising one PhD student, a Masters student and an Honours student who was planning to do a Masters with him the following year. While he appreciated the support provided by Tamara, Joe described how he was attempting to develop his own identity, to be as “independent as possible”.

I believe that I need to carve my name out by myself and her support is invaluable but . . . I really want to do things on my own. [Joe 235]

The two aspects of identity development described above both relate mainly to the development of the academic *habitus* related to research, and involve the journey to full membership of the research CoP.

5.3.5 Conclusion

The context of this second case study was found to differ substantially from that of Department A (Social Science). The overwhelming dominance of research and the strong alignment of teaching with research were central to the particular configuration of communities of practice, with the teaching CoP embedded within the research CoP. All academics entered the department as members of the research CoP after accumulating research capital over an extended period of time. There was little sign of alternative identity trajectories.

The undergraduate curriculum had as its aim the production of researchers. Through this curriculum students were inducted into their roles as researchers. All academics were centrally involved in teaching at undergraduate level, reflecting a strong alignment of teaching with research interests.

5.4 Department C (Design)

5.4.1 Introduction

Department C in the Faculty of Design was a relatively small department with ten full time academics, the majority of whom had been in the department for five years or less. The department was heavily dependent on about thirty part-time teaching staff, mainly professional practitioners, who assisted with the design studio and some of the other teaching. There was a three-year undergraduate programme followed by a postgraduate programme with a substantial body of coursework. The curriculum for each year of study was structured around a design studio, with smaller support courses taught alongside the studio.

I interviewed nine of the full time academics in the department and a retired professor who still taught part time. Three of those interviewed were relatively new academics:

Majdi – South African black male senior lecturer. Graduate of the department, in his second year of full time teaching.

Zaid – South African black male lecturer. Graduate of the department in his second year of full time teaching. Registered for a PhD.

Neville – South African white male lecturer. PhD graduate from elsewhere, in his third year of full time teaching.

Four of the interviewees had been teaching for between five and twelve years:

Pat – South African black female lecturer. Graduate of the department in her fifth year of full time teaching. Working on a Masters degree.

Frank – South African white male senior lecturer. Graduate of the department in his ninth year of full time teaching, five of them elsewhere, with twelve years experience in practice.

Hanlie – South African white female senior lecturer. Graduate from elsewhere in her twelfth year of full time teaching, nine of them elsewhere. Working on a PhD.

James – South African white male associate professor. Graduate from elsewhere in his tenth year of full time teaching, five of them elsewhere.

Three senior academics were interviewed:

Roger – South African black male associate professor. HOD at time of study and graduate of the department with twenty-seven years of full time teaching at SAU.

Stuart – South African white male professor. Previous HOD, joined the department five years ago after having taught for fifteen years elsewhere.

Malcolm – a recently retired, South African white male professor. Graduate of the department with thirty years of full time teaching at SAU, still working part time in the department.

5.4.2 Change in the department

Interviews with three senior academics, Roger, Stuart and Malcolm, provided insight into the changes that had taken place in the department over the past few decades. These included changes in departmental leadership, in the relationship between teaching and professional work and in the racial composition of the staff. At the ideological level within the discipline, post modernist perspectives challenged the dominant modernist perspectives of the past, with Stuart expressing the view that the department was too strongly aligned with the modernist view of the profession.

In the old days . . . there was a . . . way of dealing with [it]. It's got to work . . . it's utilitarian, it's problem solving. . . . It's not that [anymore] . . . it's about critical thinking, it's about cultural positioning and stuff like that. [Stuart 102-104]

At the level of departmental leadership they reported three distinct phases during the previous thirty years. In the first phase leadership was centred on the personality of Etienne, the HOD at the time. Malcolm felt that Etienne had provided “very good leadership” and had been a “very receptive leader, who was big and tough and could get ideas going”. He had been “well organized” and “created a very clear structure” within the department. Stuart, on the other hand, criticised the conservative ideology underlying that particular style of leadership.

It's a particular ideology of [the] Master . . . striding across the world as a colossus, with a timeless view of [the discipline], teaching people the right way of dealing with the world. And it grew out of a kind of homogenous white culture of South Africa. It doesn't fit comfortably with this expression of difference and diversity that now is part and parcel of our everyday lives. [Stuart 29 -31]

After Etienne's departure to work full time in professional practice, the position of HOD was rotated amongst the senior members of the department for two years at a time. Malcolm described this as a very difficult period, as two years had been too little time for an HOD to achieve anything. The third phase began in 2000 with Stuart being appointed as HOD for a five year term of office, followed by Roger in 2005.

The history of the department revealed significant shifts in the relationship between teaching and professional work. This relationship appeared to be the source of much tension in the department. Several interviewees criticised the senior academics for spending too much time on their private professional work and not spending enough time providing leadership and managing the department's affairs. Pat described the antagonism between "people that practice and people that teach and who does enough of what". Hanlie said it was unacceptable that many of the full time senior academics were "just not present". She felt that they didn't "get involved in the culture of the [department]" and that the management and administration of the educational programmes was "left to the few people that's around in the afternoon".

This tension had not always existed in the department. Malcolm described how in the mid 1970's, the academic staff focussed their efforts on building the educational programme with very limited involvement in professional practice.

We worked our butts off 24 hours a day. We were committed to making a good [department]. We didn't do any research . . . very few of us did any practice at all . . . We worked a full time job getting the [department]going . . . [It] became the strongest . . . in the country and . . . when we were evaluated by [the international accreditation body] . . . I remember them saying: "You're as strong as the top three in the UK".
[Malcolm 42-45]

However, by the mid 1980's, some senior academics in the department began spending more time developing their professional practice, and in a few cases research, and less and less time within the department.

[Etienne] went off and did his practice. Trevor and Lillian got their research careers going . . . but they did their work at home . . . I think that was a problem. Roger got a bit of [professional] work and he pulled out . . . so . . . from this very coherent group all working together with this fantastic focus . . . it sort of split out. [Malcolm 51]

At the time of this study the majority of academics in the department were young and relatively new, and displayed a strong sense of commitment to building up the educational programmes. Several members of this group clearly favoured a return to a focus on teaching and a move away from professional practice. Frank, Neville and several of the other junior academics took responsibility for restructuring the undergraduate programme in the department and decided to limit their professional involvement. Frank made use of a formal academic staff development opportunity by registering for and completing a Masters course on teaching. Hanlie described herself as a “full time academic”.

My interest in practice . . . doesn't compare to the joy that I get from teaching, I'm a happy academic. I love teaching. [Hanlie 102]

It was only the two most senior academics, Stuart and Roger, who maintained an involvement in practice that the others felt was inappropriate. This was acknowledged by Stuart:

There is a tension certainly in the [department] . . . between those who are full time working here all the time doing research and teaching, and those of us who are teaching and doing administration but also practising. [Stuart 47]

Roger, the HOD, supported the younger staff taking the initiative and being given the freedom to shape the future of the department.

The . . . young dynamic people who've come into the [department] now who need to be given some kind of reigns to free things up a bit because we've also inherited a particular tradition . . . from the people who've directed the [department] in the past. [Roger 68]

The recent appointment of Zaid and Majdi had raised the proportion of full time black academics in the department to 40%, a relatively high proportion for a department at SAU. Roger, himself a black academic, acknowledged the difficulties of attracting young black professionals into an academic career, as they could earn “twice what they get paid here” in the private sector. However he also remarked on the particularly rare combination of skills and abilities needed by new academics in the discipline.

We are looking for someone who's got an intellectual interest in the discipline but who's also got a hands-on bent as well. Someone who can talk to a [worker] on site and still talk Foucault. [Roger 27- 39]

During the 1990s as part of an equity development initiative at SAU, the department had offered short term contracts to facilitate the development of skills and experience amongst black and female academics, to enable them to compete on “equal terms” when permanent posts became available. Malcolm described how a young white female lecturer, Leanne, had been appointed to such a three year contract post. During that time she had obtained a distinction for her Masters thesis and gained substantial experience plus a good reputation for her commitment to teaching.

When the post came up, she didn't get it . . . Nobody realized that Marvin²² would apply . . . nobody in the country would have been able to compete with Marvin. . . . Leanne . . . felt she was being badly treated, but she didn't know how good Marvin was . . . academically, professionally, managerially. . . . He came in for a year and he couldn't cope with Stuart. I think that was the main thing. It was also that he felt that he had to work hellavu hard for not a lot of return . . . so . . . he pulled out . . . [Leanne] went, then Neville came in, irony of ironies, a white male. [Malcolm 128]

Stuart, the HOD at the time, recalled that Leanne had been informally told that she would get the job and when she didn't, he was blamed. In retrospect, he felt it would have been better to have appointed Leanne rather than Marvin, as she had been committed to an academic career.

Marvin's reasons for leaving were much more selfish and narrow minded . . . he just felt he wasn't making enough money here. . . . He thought he could combine practice and teaching, and he found his teaching was taking up too much time. [Stuart 87].

Leanne represented the potential offered by new academics in the discipline, committed to teaching, bringing in new perspectives and, as a woman, increasing diversity amongst the academic team. Marvin's cultural capital represented proven success and reputation in professional work, yet he appeared unable to deal with the challenge of balancing academic and professional life. This episode in the life of the department highlights one of the challenges that face institutions trying to transform. In this case the symbolic capital in the form of reputation in the discipline represented by Marvin was valued more by the academic community than the opportunity to support transformation through the appointment of Leanne.

²² A white male academic with an excellent reputation in the profession.

5.4.3 Communities of Practice

A separation of sites of participation of junior and senior academics, as seen in Department A (Social Science), was also evident in this case study. Junior and middle level academics were responsible for the undergraduate teaching, while senior level academics only taught at the postgraduate level. Stuart, a former HOD, explained how this division of labour had evolved.

The [undergraduate] programme is much more structured than the [postgraduate] programme . . . students are really taken by the hand through a series of . . . quite pedantic exercises. . . . That's much easier work to assess. The [postgraduate] programme is different and there you get much more senior people who've been teaching for years and I think are better able to assess that work. . . . What has tended to happen . . . almost inadvertently caused by me when I was HOD, was that the younger staff went to the [undergraduate] programme . . . and the more senior staff went to the [postgraduate] programme. [Stuart 110]

The major enterprise of teaching in the undergraduate programme was managed and monitored by a very active undergraduate programme committee that formed the hub of an undergraduate teaching CoP. The undergraduate programme committee meetings provided a structural framework for, and helped to consolidate shared understandings within, the undergraduate teaching CoP. The main objective of the teaching programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level was to produce graduates who were able to work as professionals; teaching and assessment practice was strongly aligned with this objective.

As mentioned above, engagement with professional practice, to varying degrees, formed a part of the identity of an academic in Department C (Design). As such many academics also participated in a broader community of practice in the profession. While this professional CoP did not have the same coherence as the undergraduate teaching CoP, its presence in the department was sustained by the large numbers of professional practitioners who taught part time or examined within the educational programmes, and by the professional involvement of key academic members of staff. Senior academics aligned themselves significantly with the professional CoP. Their responsibility for postgraduate teaching resulted in the latter CoP being substantially embedded within the professional CoP (Figure 6).

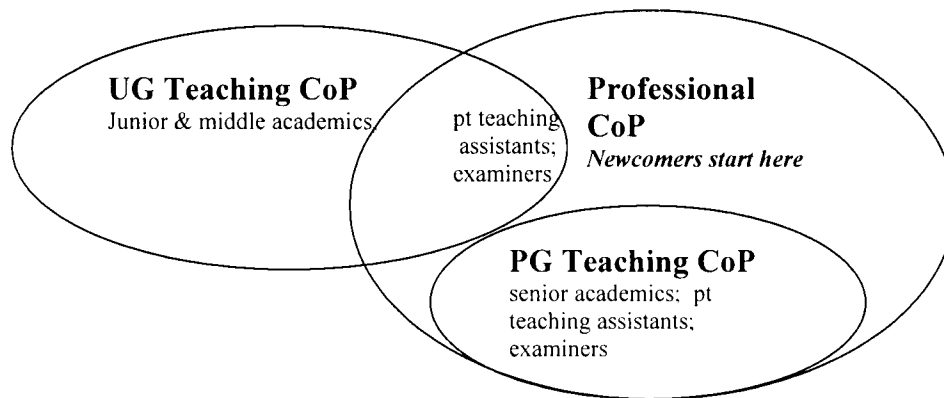


Figure 6: Communities of practice in Department C (Design)

Traditionally graduates who aspired to becoming academics began their careers by first working in practice, establishing themselves as members of the broader professional CoP. During this time they usually served as external examiners, part time lecturers or studio assistants in higher educational institutions. As such they would be accumulating substantial capital associated with teaching and the profession prior to embarking on a full time career as academics.

The configuration of CoPs in Department C (Design) represented in Figure 6 bears some resemblance to that of Department A (Social Science), especially in the separation of the junior academics into the undergraduate teaching CoP and senior academics into the other main CoP. The absence of a research CoP in Department C (Design) can best be understood by the fact that the outputs of professional practice most valued in the professional CoP were not regarded as evidence of academic research. There were very few peer-reviewed journals that were recognised by the broader academic community. Formal research papers in Design usually focussed on relatively limited theoretical aspects of the discipline.

While the field associated with the discipline favoured the accumulation of professional capital, the field of higher education valued the development of research capital. This produced a dilemma for academics in the discipline, well articulated by Stuart:

We have the university telling us that we've got to become much more professional as academics, we've got to produce knowledge . . . and we have now a generation of young people . . . committed now to a dedicated academic career. But you have other people in the [department] like myself, Roger and a few others, who are more used to

the world where we could bridge these two worlds comfortably . . . we haven't yet found . . . a very very clear way [to] bring that practice work back into the [department] so that it both constitutes research and it constitutes teaching material.
[Stuart 47]

As a result there was very little sign of a research CoP within the department and therefore no vehicle through which research capital could assert itself. However, individuals, such as Neville, who had recently completed his PhD, and Zaid and Hanlie, who were completing their PhD studies, might at a future stage constitute the nucleus of a research CoP. They are likely to be supported in this development by the dominance of research capital within the broader institution and field of higher education.

5.4.4 Identity and career trajectories

Frank highlighted the distinction between the identities of the professional practitioner and the academic within the department. He argued that the senior academics in the department had strong professional practitioner identities and were unable to serve as role models for new academics in the development of their academic identities.

It's a department which is academically driven by . . . people who have a practitioners' identity rather than a purely academic one . . . and has been for a long time. . . . It affects the way teaching happens which is sort of from a practice base rather than from a theoretical base, and . . . there's a kind of lack of research culture historically. And it affects the induction of staff, because the role models are people who are practitioners and who succeed as practitioners rather than as academics.
[Frank 51]

Frank, as someone who had spent several years in practice before embarking on an academic career, acknowledged the value of the knowledge of professional practice that he and his colleagues brought into the programmes and the department.

It's a professional degree. It's about teaching students to be able to succeed in practice. Students respect that sort of body of work. [It] brings prestige to the Department, award winning work and that kind of thing. [Frank 54]

Stuart explained how Design programmes internationally were under pressure to fall in line with “traditional academic practice”. As a result “two very distinct fields” had emerged, ; namely, a “field of practice” and a “field of theory of teaching”. He described how in the USA academics are “utterly committed to an academic career with no engagement in practice and under pressure to produce new knowledge and research” [Stuart 45].

Success as academics in Frank’s terms implies success in research that is recognised by the field of higher education, something that the senior academics in the department had not achieved because of their focus on professional practice. This emphasis on professional practice is evident in the career trajectory that academics in the discipline have traditionally followed (Figure 7). This trajectory began with an induction to the profession as a student, followed by a period of time in professional practice. During this time, participation in part time teaching enabled professional practitioners to accumulate teaching capital and to establish a relationship with the undergraduate teaching CoP.

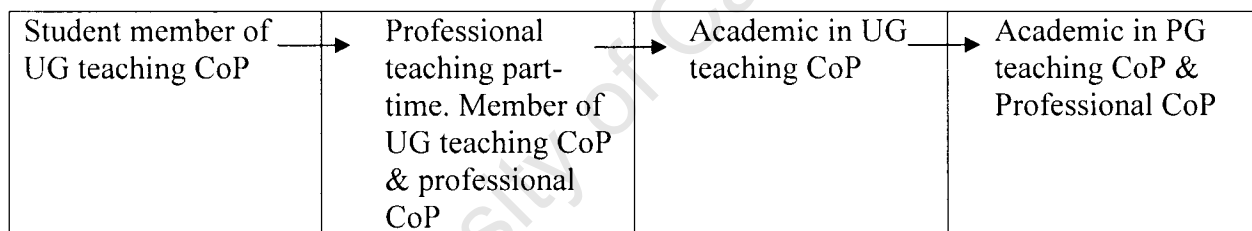


Figure 7: Career trajectory in the Department C (Design)

This study therefore revealed two groups of academics; namely, those who saw themselves primarily as academics, committed to teaching, and in some cases research, and those who saw themselves primarily as professionals. As a result several identity trajectories could be identified (Figure 8). While some senior academics, such as Stuart and Roger, had embarked on an outbound identity trajectory from the undergraduate teaching CoP into the professional CoP, the challenge for most academics in the department was to sustain a boundary trajectory between the professional and undergraduate teaching CoPs. However Frank appeared to be willing to disengage himself from professional practice and devote his attention to teaching. Evidence of this was his recent completion of a Masters course in teaching and his involvement in managing and reviewing the undergraduate education programme. As such Frank’s identity trajectory appeared to be inbound from the professional CoP into the undergraduate CoP.

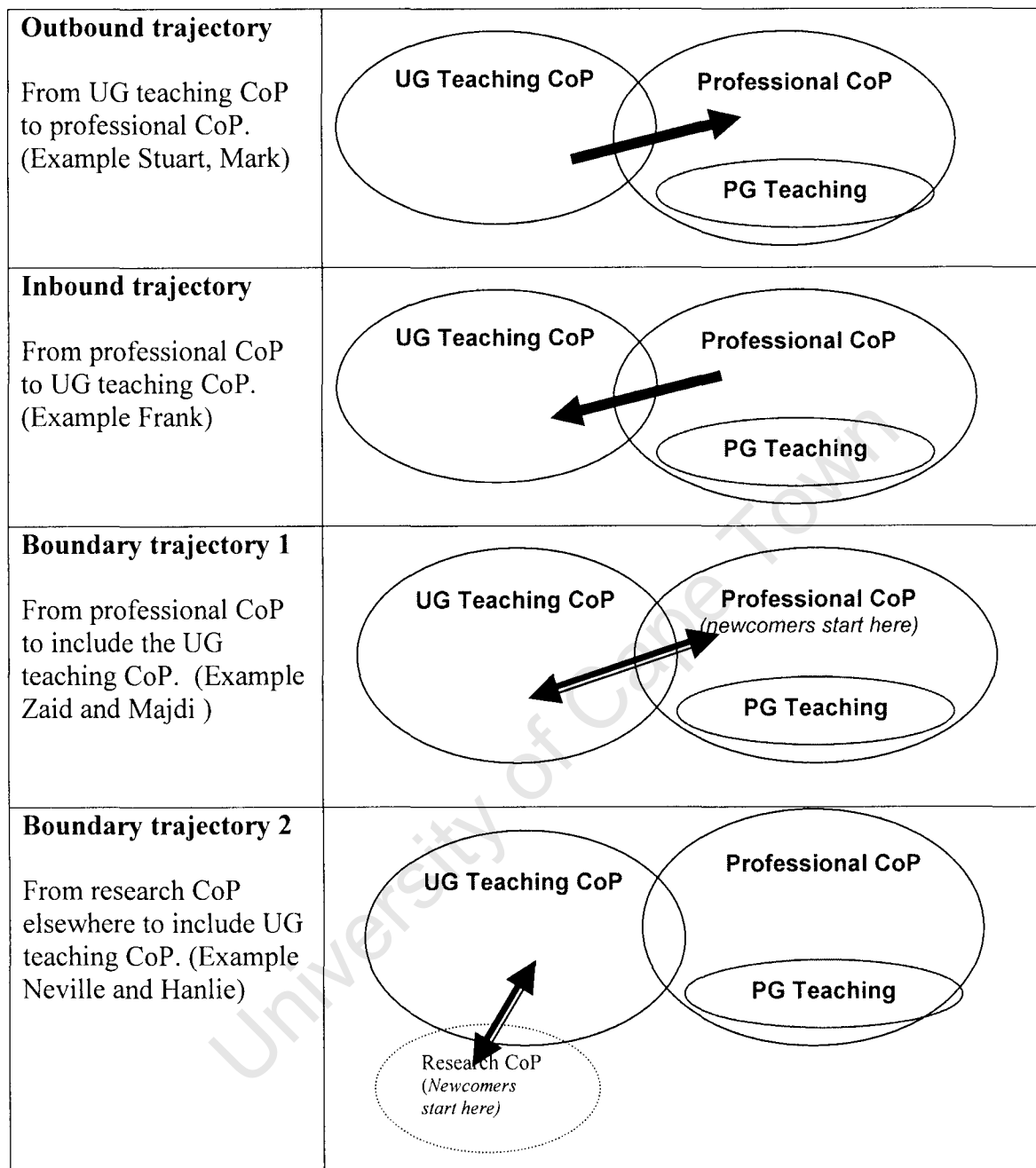


Figure 8: Identity trajectories in Department C (Design)

An alternative, nascent, identity trajectory was revealed by the experience of Neville and Hanlie. Neville, a white male academic, followed an alternative career trajectory by first obtaining his PhD in the USA, after discussions with a visiting professor from the USA about how best to secure an academic post. While in the USA he developed expertise in computer-based design, an area of work new to the discipline. This expertise, together with having completed a PhD, facilitated his appointment in Department C (Design), despite being a white male, after the collapse of the equity development initiative involving Leanne described

earlier. He entered the department with no experience of professional practice. Hanlie began her academic career at another South African university, also with no experience of professional practice.

Hanlie and Neville are examples of individuals whose *habitus* does not include previous experience of professional practice. Their identity trajectories are directed from an earlier experience of a research community of practice elsewhere, into the undergraduate teaching CoP, and represent an alternative career trajectory into the discipline. While the transition from the profession CoP to the undergraduate teaching CoP was regarded as relatively unproblematic, given the exposure to part time teaching and examining that most newcomers had experienced, one can only speculate about the difficulties new academics following the alternative academic career trajectory might encounter if they wished to join the professional CoP. The dominant collective *habitus* within the department was that of members of the professional CoP, and it remains to be seen how this collective *habitus* will adjust in the engagement with an individual *habitus* of the kind represented by Neville and Hanlie.

Whereas previously new academics would have been drawn from the pool of skilled practitioners, particularly amongst those who had experience of teaching part time, increasingly applicants will be required to have completed, or be working on, a PhD. The two new black academics in the department, Zaid and Majdi, were both planning to do a PhD, a route not followed by their senior white colleagues. This would require devoted time to developing a career trajectory that included research development and less time spent building up their professional practice.

5.4.5 Conclusion

The configuration of communities of practice within Department C (Design) displayed significant similarities to that found in Department A (Social Science) but had very little in common with Department B (Natural Science). The separation of sites of engagement of junior and senior academics was found in both Departments A and C. However the dominant role of the professional CoP and the lack of any significant research CoP are the central features of the field within which Department C is situated.

In Department C (Design) there appeared to be a substantial distance between the professional world of practice and academic research. In contrast, the link between professional work and teaching was exceptionally strong, reinforced by the presence of many part time practitioners as design teaching assistants, and the authentic forms of assessment and teaching modelled on practice. As a result it was the development of professional capital that was most valued within the discipline, as evidenced by senior academics spending a great deal of time sustaining their professional practice. As in Department A (Social Science), they depended on the use of large numbers of short-term contract and part time staff in the teaching programme to enable them to do so.

While the majority of full times academics in the department had followed the career trajectory represented by Figure 7, at least two academics had joined the department without any experience of professional practice but significant research expertise. As such their career paths represented a possible emerging alternative career trajectory.

5.5 Fields and communities of practice at the departmental level

In formulating the research design of this study I chose departments as case studies where there were fundamentally different relationships between teaching, research and the profession, in order to explore the experience of learning in the academic workplace across significantly different contexts at SAU. The characterisations presented in this study are not intended to establish a model or reinforce stereotypes of particular disciplinary contexts. The levels of change and division evident in each of the case studies indicate that the contexts are dynamic and susceptible to pressure for change from a range of sources, including the broader social context, the institution, and new academics themselves.

In each of the cases studies there was evidence of significant change: increased student numbers (Department A); changing entry requirements for new academics (Department A and C); changing age profile of the academic staff (Department A); changing race and gender profiles (Departments B and C); merger of departments and emergence of new sub-disciplines (Department B) and change in models of departmental leadership (Department C). Furthermore in each of the cases the HODs were relatively young and had been in office for

less than five years. It could be argued that the academic practices in each of these departments had evolved and continued to evolve within a context of ongoing change.

Rather than constituting harmonious “communities”, several lines of division and tension were evident within each of the departments. Some were at the ideological level, such as that between the modernist and postmodernist perspectives in Department C (Design). Other divisions related to competition for resources between different sub-disciplinary formations and lab groups, as in Departments B (Natural Science). At the interpersonal level there were tensions arising from personality conflicts, issues of gender and race. In the context of this study, however, the most significant division was created by the separate sites of participation for junior and senior academics in different communities of practice (Departments A and C).

The three case studies reflect disciplines associated with fields that value very different forms of capital within the *habitus* of newcomers, as summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Forms of capital valued in a new academic

Dept	Experience required of newcomers	Capital valued
A (Social Science)	Experience of teaching, through tutoring as postgraduates or teaching on part time contracts, and some research at a Masters level.	Teaching and research
B (Natural Science)	Strong research qualifications and experience reflected in a PhD and several years of postdoctoral research experience.	Only research
C (Design)	Experience of professional practice and some experience of part time teaching or examining.	Professional and teaching

The valuing of research capital, reflected in the attainment of a PhD and the successful completion of a period of postdoctoral research, was most evident in the entrance requirements for academics in Department B (Natural Science). These requirements appeared to be relatively stable and showed no signs of being dislodged by the pressure to transform in terms of achieving employment equity.

However, it is clear that in the case of Departments A (Social Science) and C (Design), there was evidence of pressure to reduce the value of the capital associated with experience of teaching and professional practice at entry level, and to increase the value of the capital

associated with research, as evidenced by postgraduate educational qualifications, particularly the PhD.

In Department A (Social Science) this pressure was also reinforced by the growing number of qualified PhD graduates in the discipline nationally and internationally. In the case of Department C (Design) however, there was little sign that research capital would replace the dominance of capital associated with professional practice. However, there were signs that the nature of academic work in the discipline was in the process of transforming from being professionally oriented to being academically oriented, both in terms of teaching and research, with the latter direction incorporating the attainment of PhD qualifications in the early stages of an academic career.

It could be argued that Department B (Natural Science) represents the paradigmatic case within higher education (Flyvbjerg 2001), reflecting the view that all academics at university should have a PhD when they start their careers. In reality however, many departments at SAU did not formally require a PhD for appointment at lecturer level. Despite the pressures to formally raise the entry requirements, employment equity demands could result in the continued appointment of black academics who have not yet achieved their PhD. However those new academics who come into disciplines associated with Departments A (Social Science) and C (Design), without postgraduate qualifications, would be faced with the pressure of having to “catch up” by completing research qualifications up to the PhD level, while at the same time performing their job of teaching and developing and sustaining a research profile.

The career trajectories of new academics across the three disciplinary contexts were not only influenced by the forms of capital that they brought with them as part of their individual *habitus*, but were also strongly shaped by their experiences of the relationships between the communities of practice that they encountered when they arrived. This experience involved an engagement between the *habitus* of the individual academic and the collective *habitus* of the communities of practice within the departments. In each department the study found a different configuration of communities of practice reflecting substantially different contexts within which learning in the academic workplace occurred (Figure 9).

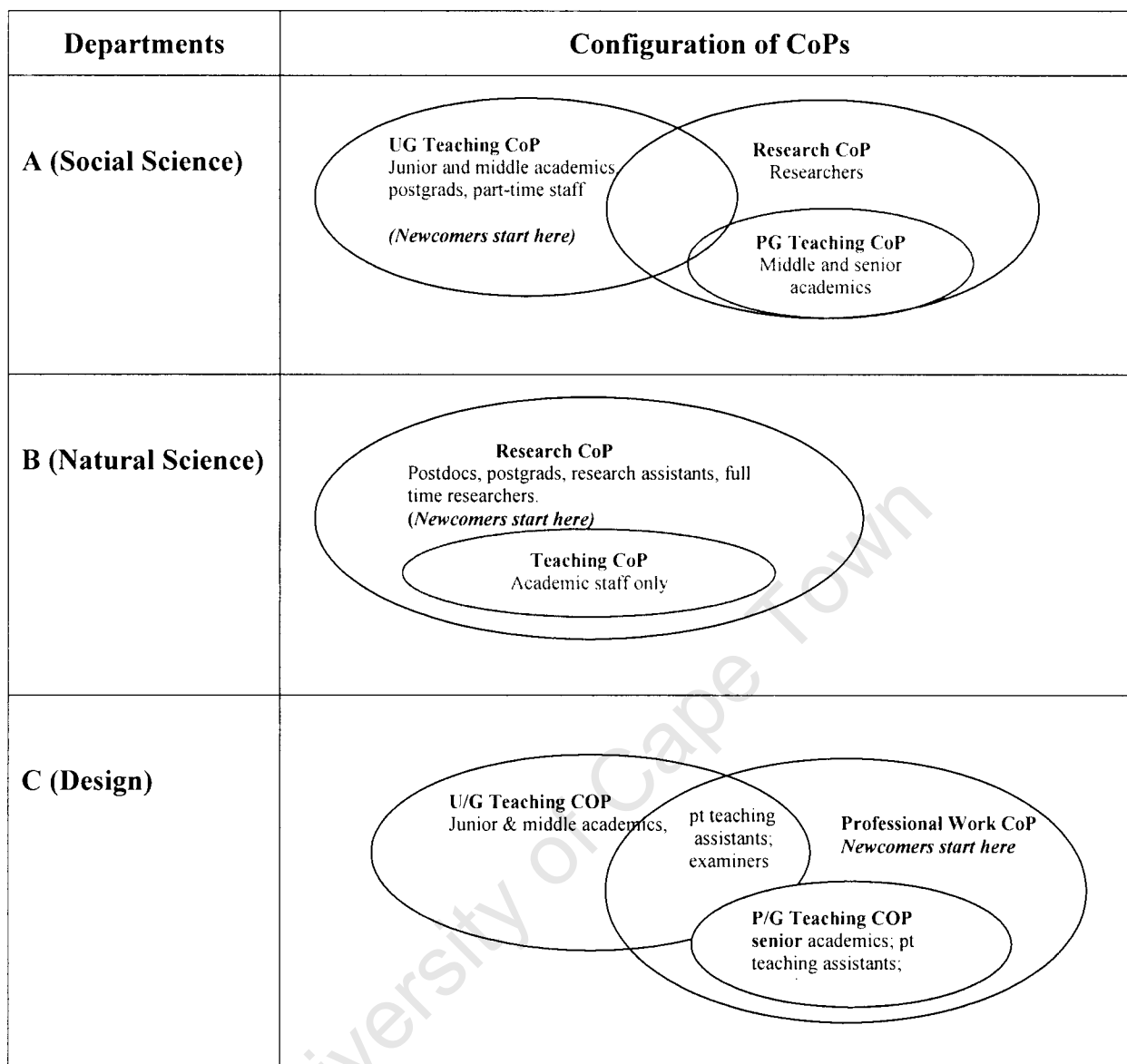


Figure 9: The configurations of communities of practice in the three departments

In Department A (Social Science) the experience of new academics was fundamentally shaped by their interaction with two largely separate communities of practice within the department, the undergraduate teaching CoP and the research CoP. The separation of the older, more experienced academic staff from the teaching at undergraduate level had significant implications for the way in which new academics were inducted into the practice of teaching and assessment in the department. It also provided a range of possible identity trajectories arising out of the engagement between the individual *habitus* and the field.

In Department B (Natural Science) the close alignment of teaching with research is reflected in the embedded nature of the teaching CoP within the research CoP. Entry into the teaching

CoP was automatic upon achievement of full membership as an academic of the research CoP. The latter process is preceded by an extended period of induction into the research CoP as postgraduate student and postdoctoral researcher. A single identity trajectory into research appeared to dominate the field and to give individual academics little choice.

The configuration of communities of practice in Department C (Design) appeared similar to that of Department A (Social Science) in that the separation of the junior and senior academics, in the undergraduate and postgraduate communities of practice respectively, meant that there was limited interaction between newcomers and senior staff. The evidence of two substantially different career trajectories in this department suggests a possible future shift in the roles of research and the profession in shaping teaching.

An analysis of the three case studies has revealed evidence of some of the key drivers of change in the department. It has also provided an understanding of the configuration of communities of practice within the field associated with each department, helped to map the typical career trajectory for an academic and, in some cases, provided evidence of alternative trajectories. The interaction between the individual *habitus* and the collective *habitus* of these communities of practice manifest themselves in some cases as a range of identity trajectories within each configuration of communities of practice. Having laid out a representation of the field within each case study, the next chapter examines how newcomers learn to judge student performance as part of the process of engaging with the field and becoming members of communities of practice.

Chapter 6: Learning to Judge

A learning curriculum is a field of learning resources in everyday practice viewed from the perspective of learners. . . . A learning curriculum is essentially situated. It is not something that can be considered in isolation . . . or analyzed apart from the social relations that shape legitimate peripheral participation.

(Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 97)

6.1 Introduction

My argument in Chapter 5 was that the three case studies represent qualitatively different contexts in terms of their configurations of communities of practice, the capital that is valued and the career and identity trajectories available to newcomers. In this chapter examples of practice are presented that help explain how learning occurs. These examples are analysed using the concepts of *habitus* and legitimate peripheral participation in relation to the specific configurations of communities of practice and fields identified in Chapter 5. No claims are made that these examples constitute the full range of ways in which learning occurred in the cases being examined; however they help to deepen our understanding of learning in the academic workplace. This chapter also explores the relationships that enabled or inhibited aspects of peripheral and legitimate participation within the academic workplace, and analyses the development of the academic *habitus* along particular identity trajectories.

6.2 The simple answer – Discourse models

In all three case studies interviewees struggled to find the language with which to describe how they learned to judge student performance. This was best reflected by Cindy, a new academic in Department A (Social Science), who could only respond to the question of how she arrived at a particular mark as follows:

*I don't know [uses face and arms and whole body], I don't know, I really don't know.
. . . I don't know what's the general standard, what's the right standard. [Cindy 308]*

The explanation offered to Joseph Starr in the introductory vignette was the same one provided by many of the interviewees across all three case studies; namely, that the knowledge required to judge complex student performance was simply acquired through experience, through “learning by doing”.

I think it was learning by doing. At the end of the day . . . I see most of the processes at SAU are learning by doing. [Julius 200 – Dept A]

You sort of learn by doing it and as you do it, you get exposed to other things and you can sort of gradually piece it together. [Frank 222 – Dept C]

The “learning by doing” explanation can be understood as an example of a Discourse model that provides a way of explaining “how the world works” (Gee, 2005) and was offered by both junior and senior academics.

Johan, a senior academic in Department A (Social Science), described the development of his own confidence in assessing student performance as having happened through “learning by doing”. However the notion of “learning by doing” was not very helpful for new academics. Henrietta, in the same department, described how she was “thrown into jobs” for which she was unprepared. Left alone to “learn by doing”, she had made “every single mistake in the book” and found herself “running into trouble . . . having parents yell at Deans, which is quite an unpleasant way of doing it”.

The “learning by doing” Discourse model was also evident in Department B (Natural Science) where academics worked on their own for most of the time. Carl remembered learning “by trial and error”. Claire described her learning as a process of reflecting on practice as she built her “own internal standard” through looking at how she had “marked previously”. Joe also commented that “learning by doing” involved a conscious reflective process in that the act of marking “in itself” is what “teaches you by sitting down, marking, constructing the question, looking at the response that the students give”.

The “learning by doing” Discourse model provided a way for academics to explain how they learned to judge student performance. At the same time it appeared to support models of experiential learning and explanations of how the accumulation of case experience occurs as a

necessary precursor to the movement to higher levels of learning in the transition from novice to expert (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986).

However, within the context of the development of academic staff in higher education, it also appeared to serve a different function, namely that of explaining how learning occurred without any explicit learning opportunities being provided for new academics. It reinforced the view that learning in the workplace was unproblematic, individual, and not the responsibility of the institution. This is an example of what Bourdieu calls “collective misrecognition” and forms part of what it means to belong to a field (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 68). Cunningham (1993) argues that *habitus* is responsible for the “systematic ‘misrecognition’ by agents of the nature of the ‘fields’ or institutions within which they work” (Cunningham, 1993). This “collective misrecognition” serves to hide the real logic of the field, in this instance disguising the distributed nature of the knowledge, and justifying the lack of institutional investment in supporting the learning of newcomers.

A second Discourse model evident in the data was the notion that “help is available – you just have to ask”, articulated by both senior academics and newcomers. Stuart, a senior academic in Department C (Design), argued that you just have to “ask the questions, someone will help you”, while Cindy, a new academic in Department A (Social Science), explained that if one felt that one was “drowning” one could “ask for help and it’s there . . . you just have to ask for it”.

This model served to “misrecognise” the nature of the power relations at work within the field and the complexities surrounding “asking for help”. It implied openness to helping within the community of practice, and an equality of access and opportunity to ask for such help. As in the case of the “learning by doing” Discourse model, this model contained the implication, sometimes quite explicitly stated, that the responsibility for learning lay with the individual new academic.

No one is going to go out of their way to help you, but if you ask for someone’s help, they will give you help. [Stuart 83 – senior academic Dept C]

There is no programme on teaching and big mentoring and discussion. It depends on you to ask how do you do it. [Max 128 – senior academic Dept B]

Evidence from all three case studies suggests that newcomers' efforts to look for help were not unproblematic, and took place in the context of conflict and divisions within the departments. In both Departments A (Social Science) and C (Design) the separate sites of participation of new and junior academics from senior academics meant that newcomers had to move out of the undergraduate teaching CoP to gain access to the more senior academics, many of whom were often absent from the department because of professional or research commitments.

Mark, a senior lecturer in Department A (Social Science), described how a regular departmental tea had played an important role in facilitating the interaction between newcomers and older members of staff in the past by providing a "place . . . and a time to ask".

At 10.30 people would . . . go upstairs and have a cup of tea. . . . They would talk about the work that they were doing and the teaching. . . . This provided a foundation for young staff then that was absolutely fantastic. . . . If you've got a problem . . . talk about it over tea. [Mark 32]

With the tea room no longer there, and a limited number of staff meetings, there were very few formal opportunities for newcomers to be part of conversations about teaching in Department A (Social Science); instead they had to rely on informal interaction with other staff. Mark acknowledged that power dynamics might inhibit some new academics from approaching more senior staff for help. In particular he felt that academics on contract might not want to ask for help for fear of giving the impression they were incapable of doing the job thus decreasing their chances of a permanent appointment. He also suggested that those newcomers who had been students in the department found it easier to ask for help.

However Julius, a graduate of the department, did not experience the environment as being very welcoming. He admitted that he had not been willing to talk about the problems he was facing with anyone except his informal mentor, Johan, who he described as "probably the only friend I really had at the time". When he approached Johan for advice about marking however, he had not found his responses very helpful and was often just told: "It's fine, you're doing well". Despite his knowledge of the department and having had Johan as his informal mentor, he concluded that one should not become too dependent on asking for help.

You have to develop a sense of confidence early on to really manage . . . you can't keep asking people all the time . . . And on the day you're really pissing them off by keep on asking every little thing . . . you just have to make a decision and stick to it [Julius 309]

In contrast, in developing a support structure for himself, Braam took the initiative and made a point of asking for help from several colleagues. However, asking for help did not in itself guarantee help being provided.

I wanted to know what the department actually wants to see . . . I spoke to Sue, I spoke to Clive, I spoke to Johan, I spoke to Jonathan . . . and Andrea. I wanted to see what are they looking for. . . . The general answer I got every time I asked one of them, was: "That's difficult to say". [laughter] Which didn't help me much. [Braam 30]

Johan, who was known to spend a great deal of time helping newcomers, acknowledged that he was "hopeless" when it came to answering questions on how to judge student performance, confirming the tacit nature of this knowledge.

At another level Braam was constrained from asking for help from certain academics because of the existence of two competing perspectives on knowledge in the discipline. The one emphasised the social dimensions of the discipline and acknowledged a level of subjectivity, while the other emphasised the more technical dimensions and the need for objectivity. According to Henrietta, most academics in the department followed the technical approach. The alignment of an individual academic *habitus* with one or other of these perspectives depended on their experience of the discipline as a postgraduate student and early researcher. Julius described how students were "caught in between" when a supervisor and a marker held opposing perspectives; their results often depended on who was assigned to mark their work. Braam acknowledged that he aligned himself with the social dimension of the discipline and avoided talking about assessment with those academics he regarded as being "technically orientated".

I didn't speak to them . . . if I see that the student doesn't develop a conceptual understanding properly, if the argument is not developed properly, I don't consider it to be a very good paper, no matter how technical the paper is. [Braam (2) 49]

In Department B (Natural Science), despite all academics belonging to the same research CoP in which the teaching CoP was embedded, they appeared to work on their own within their separate laboratory groups. From my observations the regular departmental tea did not appear to provide opportunities for newcomers to discuss matters of teaching with senior colleagues.

As in Department A (Social Science), senior academics in Department B (Natural Science) were unable to provide guidance when approached by newcomers for advice on how to mark third year and Honours projects. Carl, the Honours convenor, told Joe to “use your discretion” when he approached him for advice on how to mark Honours projects. He also told Jane that “it’s up to you” and suggested that she consult the “Honours manual”. When Jane approached Claire for help, she gained the impression that, given the departmental policy on using your own independent judgement, one was not supposed to approach colleagues with questions about assessment.

I don't know whether it's this, we shouldn't talk about it . . . but it was a very closed door. She was kind of: "No, you just do what you feel." . . . She didn't go into any of the criteria that she used. [Jane (2) 116]

Both Carl and Claire acknowledged that when they were new academics, they had felt uncomfortable about approaching people for help.

I don't even remember asking people anything. . . . It wasn't something that people did. You didn't feel like you could go and ask. [Carl 52]

Unless somebody sort of takes you under their wing you have nobody to ask all those sort of questions that you feel silly asking. [Claire 76] . . . You are new. You don't know who to talk to. [Claire 85]

In the Department C (Design), Zaid, Majdi and Frank each described the physical and social environment as isolating and lonely with everyone working in their own offices and seldom interacting.

This room is horrible. We hardly see anybody. It's only when you have meetings . . . that we actually interact. . . . Everybody tends to operate in a very isolated way and that is very disconcerting for somebody coming in fresh. [Majdi 47]

I've been here three years and I . . . still feel that I'm a newcomer. . . . For me the one feeling was very much one of isolation. I found it quite lonely. [Frank 71]

Frank contrasted the isolation he experienced within his academic work with his experience in professional practice where people worked together all the time. He explained that while “the opportunity definitely was there for support . . . you had to go and initiate it”.

Pat felt that as a newcomer to Department C (Design) she had not been “very good” at approaching “other academic staff on a sort of conversational . . . level”. She also struggled to work out the power dynamics behind much of what happened within the department.

The way people operate in the system and the ease with which they operate . . . is dependent [on] . . . how secure they feel of their level of power or what they perceive alliances to be. . . . It's different for everyone. [Pat 230-243] . . . The funny thing about [this discipline], is it's very political 'cause it's a very small pie. . . . People make allegiances and alliances with each other so that they can access projects. . . . I'm never quite sure who backs who. . . . People shift also depending on who is in charge. . . . I suppose that's what you have to do. They kind of play a game. [Pat 267-268]

While the above two Discourse models provided interviewees with a way of explaining their experience of learning in the academic workplace, in reality the situation was much more complex than the models suggested. Furthermore, both models aided in the “misrecognition” of the roles of the individual and institution in facilitating learning by reinforcing the view that the responsibility for learning lay solely with the individual.

The widespread use of these two Discourse models across all three cases suggests that they form part of the collective *habitus* of communities of practice within the field of higher education, and as such are associated with the *habitus* of being an academic.

In the remainder of this chapter an analysis is presented of the process of learning to judge student performance within each case study.

6.3 Learning to judge in Department A (Social Science)

6.3.1 Introduction

As described in the previous chapter, a key feature of Department A (Social Science) was the separation of the younger, less experienced academics from the older, more experienced academics into the undergraduate teaching CoP and the research CoP respectively (Figure 10). This configuration of communities of practice constituted a dominant relationship in the field in which this department was situated. Except for Alan, all new academics had begun working in the department teaching undergraduate classes as part of the undergraduate teaching CoP.

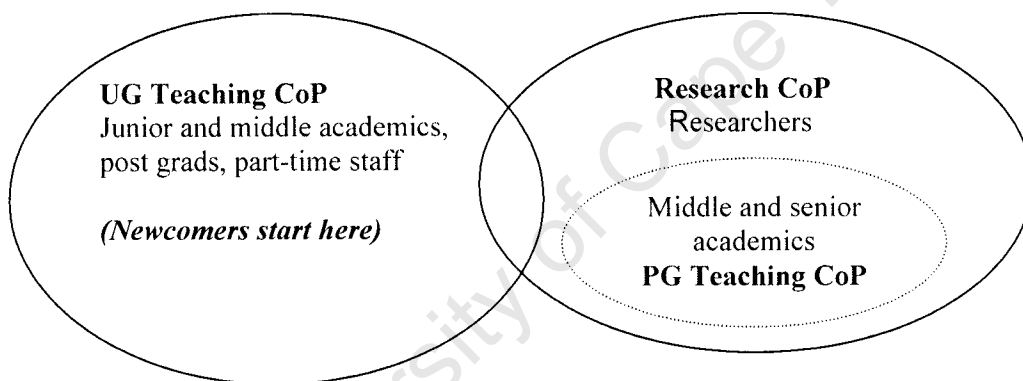


Figure 10: Relationship between CoPs in Department A (Social Science)

This study focussed on two key complex assessment activities in this department; the assessment of essays at second and third year level in which only members of the undergraduate teaching CoP participated, and the marking of the Honours research paper, in which all academics were involved (Table 6). These two sets of assessment tasks were key “learning resources” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) for new academics.

The analysis of learning to judge in this department draws primarily on interviews with two new academics, Cindy and Braam; two postgraduate tutors, Peter and Patrick; and three middle-level academics, Julius, Henrietta and Alan. All had experience of marking undergraduate essays. The academics, with the exception of Cindy, had also experienced the marking of Honours research papers.

Table 6: Key complex assessment tasks in Department A (Social Science)

Level	Assessment task	Who marks?	Managing difference in marking
2 nd and 3 rd year	Essays	Members of the undergraduate teaching CoP including postgraduate tutors. Several mark each class. External examiner moderates	Regular discussion between course convenor and postgraduate tutors or colleagues marking on same course.
Honours	Research paper	All academics – each marks alone. Double marking – supervisor plus one other marks each script. External examiner moderates.	Negotiate between two markers – if unresolved, third marker. If still unresolved, external examiner.

The marking of postgraduate essays and Masters theses was not included amongst the activities analysed, as these were solely located within the research CoP. Most of the interviewees did not discuss marking at this level, except for Alan, who, because of his previous position as a researcher in the department, had joined the academic staff having already achieved membership of the research CoP. He indicated that there appeared to be very little discussion in the department about assessment at this level where one was often the only specialist around in the subject area being taught.

Because of the large numbers of students in Department A (Social Science), the marking of undergraduate essays was divided amongst junior academics and postgraduate students. There was an extensive system of support within the department for the postgraduates who were assigned to mark essays (see below). Henrietta raised concerns that the assignment of markers was done by a departmental secretary who did not know whether a particular academic or postgraduate was “adequately equipped”. However she preferred having postgraduates marking her students than other academics, reflecting some of the power relations that existed within the department.

[Postgraduates] will say: “. . . What did you have in mind? How would you like me to mark it?” and then get on with the marking process. While . . . I hand a box of marking to a professor and I can say what I had in mind and what the marking schedule looks like. Whether they actually look at it or not is outside of my control.

[Henrietta 247]

Wenger argues that in the process of identity construction, meanings that newcomers hold need to compete with the meanings present in the local “economy of meaning” within the community of practice (Wenger 1998). There were clear signs of a clash between Henrietta’s individual *habitus* and the department’s collective *habitus* in this regard. Henrietta was intent on asserting her own “meaning” with respect to assessment in rejection of the established “meaning” in the department.

I've rejected what the department is doing in terms of assessment. . . . I've walked away from MCQs . . . [and] structured questions. . . . I don't do it because students don't learn if that's the assessment system. And if they don't learn, I don't teach, and if I don't teach I have an identity crisis. . . . I'm definitely outside of the box, and many of my colleagues don't know what the hell I'm on about which is why I don't network in the department. I network out of the department with people who think in the same way as I do. [Henrietta 386-389]

For Braam, at the end of his first year of lecturing, the pressure to complete his Masters had been so great that he had paid postgraduate tutors to mark his share of examination scripts. The fact that a very junior academic had outsourced marking in this way suggests this was a common practice within Department A (Social Science). He said he had developed a “model answer” and chosen tutors who had worked for him so they knew “exactly what I teach, how I teach it and what I am looking for”. When I interviewed him again, a few months later, he said he had been satisfied with the way his tutors had marked. He admitted, however, that he had not been able to complete his research because of ongoing committee work and a new private teaching commitment that he had taken on.

Alan felt there were often problems of interpretation when someone else marked one’s examination. He admitted that as a lecturer he drew on more than just the examination question and script. He mentioned an occasion when a marker had returned his scripts with very low marks. On reflection he realized he had set a “bad question” and it was not obvious what he was “looking for”. When he remarked the borderline cases, he found his marking “was very different to the person who marked it . . . because I knew what they had been taught so I knew where their answers were coming from” [Alan 142-147].

Both Bob and Mark, senior academics in the department, acknowledged a contradiction between what they regarded as the general view held in the department of marking “as an objective act” and their personal experiences of it as “extremely subjective”.

Marking is a difficult thing, especially marking research papers. It's really difficult in terms of being objective. It's a subjective process really. [Bob 142]

Alan felt however that there was a general sense of confidence in the marking in the department mainly due to the role played by the external examiners, who he felt were able to “assess the level of the exam and the quality of marking”.

6.3.2 Learning to judge as a tutor

As has been described in the previous chapter, most new academics in Department A (Social Science) had begun their career trajectories in the department as postgraduate tutors within the undergraduate teaching CoP. The marking of essays in the large undergraduate second and third year courses by junior academics and postgraduate tutors was a central feature of the “joint enterprise”, which formed the basis of the undergraduate teaching CoP. At the time of this study there were about sixty postgraduate students tutoring and marking in the department; a system of support for these tutors in their marking was managed by the junior and middle academics who served as course convenors. In this context extensive discussions around how to judge student performance took place both at the level of postgraduate tutors being supported, and at the level of junior and middle academics managing the marking process and providing tutors with support.

Although providing support for tutors in marking was regarded as standard practice in the department, it was not formal policy and was left to the discretion of the course convenor. According to Mark, a senior academic nearing retirement, this practice had a long history in the department. He recalled being helped with his marking as a tutor over twenty years previously. Braam described a similar experience of being supported in the development of his marking as a postgraduate tutor in another department at SAU.

For tutors, the marking was legitimate as it formed part of the official assessment system within the department. At the same time however, their participation was peripheral as they were not required to take full responsibility for their marking and were answerable to an

academic. This experience of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) served as an introduction to the field and facilitated the development of an academic *habitus*, a “feel for the game” of academic work, particularly in relation to assessment practice. For those who chose to continue as lecturers in the department, this experience formed a crucial aspect of the *habitus* with which they began their new role as academics.

The support Julius had been given while a postgraduate tutor in the department had contributed significantly to the development of his confidence in his ability to judge student performance. One lecturer had required that he always submit the first few scripts he marked to him to check that he was not being “too harsh or too lenient” and that he was being “consistent in . . . applying the assessment criteria”. Cindy felt that she “got a lot more learning how to mark” while working as a tutor than since her appointment as a full time lecturer.

The lecturer . . . spent a significant amount of time with us going through essays . . . as to what's a good essay, what's a bad essay. [Cindy 108-110]

Having become aware of the importance of these tutor-related activities in learning to judge student performance, I decided to interview two postgraduate tutors in the department, Peter and Patrick, who described an extensive system of support for tutor marking involving having discussions with lecturers about marking criteria, being given marking memoranda and having their scripts moderated as they marked. They drew on support from a community of people they regarded as “contemporaries”, other postgraduate tutors and new academics, reflecting the “young” nature of the undergraduate teaching CoP. These interviews provided a rich source of data on the first experience of marking complex student performance, as well as evidence of the role played by Cindy and Braam, the two newest academics in the department, in supporting tutors in their marking.

Despite his confidence in his knowledge of the course material, Patrick’s account reflected some of the anxieties associated with judging student performance for the first time in two particular areas; concern about one’s mark relative to other markers, and dealing with pressure from students.

He had recently shared the marking of an essay question in a test written by over a thousand students. Despite being given “clear instructions” by the lecturer of what “he was looking

for” and what constituted a first class pass, he had struggled to distinguish between “what’s a good first and what’s a bad first?” He regularly marked alongside other markers and was worried that he was too lenient, as he had found that his marks were often “slightly” higher than other markers. He described himself as a “generous” marker who tended to “push up the borderline people” and “a bit of a softie” when it came to student appeals, referring to a recent occasion where he raised a student’s mark higher than he felt was justified.

He also expressed concern that the “vast majority” of his marks fell in a narrow range “between 15 and 19 out of 30” but could not explain how this restriction on his marking range had come about. He felt that much of the pressure from the high achieving students resulted from an unstated upper limit in the department on marks for essays, and questioned the validity of such a “ceiling”.

If you're gonna only mark from nought to 80 percent, then just scale the marks, 80 becomes a hundred. [Patrick 239]

He admitted to feeling uncomfortable with the power marking gave him over students, but rationalised away his concerns by emphasising the relatively low contribution of his marks to the students’ final marks.

This is one out of three questions in a test which is only worth twenty percent of the final mark. So my mark that I give them is only worth six or seven percent, and if I'm wrong by five percent it only translates into two or three tenths of a percent, so what am I worried about? [Patrick 356]

He recalled the lack of explicit criteria and feedback on assessment during his own recent experience as a student and sought to correct these omissions in his role as tutor by explaining to students how their essays would be marked. In so doing he concealed his own uncertainties about the process by telling students:

“This is how you will score marks in the essays. This is what you must do. And I can tell you this because I mark essays and I know what I look for”. [Patrick 209]

The experience of Peter, the second postgraduate interviewed, highlighted the central role played by academics, such as Cindy and Braam, in supporting tutors. He explained that he was advised to read a few papers before assigning any marks. Before he marked he made sure that he knew “what I was going to give for what kind of points” and understood the criteria.

Before marking an essay for Cindy, he would discuss with her how he was going to mark, and “what exactly was going to be a first”. Despite this display of confidence he acknowledged consulting Cindy regularly for reassurance that his marking “was right”.

On another course, where he was the only tutor and the questions were more “mathematical” and “easy to mark”, he still relied on checking with the lecturer to “make sure” that he was marking correctly. Later in the same course he had marked a longer essay of six to ten pages and had met with all the lecturers on the course, including Cindy, where they had discussed how to allocate marks. Despite this discussion and feeling very confident about the subject area, he had struggled to make a judgement on each essay as “there was no real right or wrong specific answers . . . it was up to the marker basically to judge the essay”. In this case he had repeatedly asked Cindy to check that he was on the right track.

Recently Peter had shared the marking of one question in a set of six hundred scripts with another tutor. Despite them both having a “lengthy meeting” about the criteria with Braam, the course convenor, they had struggled to mark “the same”.

There was a lot of room for . . . leeway. . . . After reading some of hers and after reading some of mine, we actually went back and marked a whole lot of scripts again . . . we didn't feel that it was exactly the same. [Peter 233-237]

However after checking with each other a few times, they began to feel more confident about their marking and stopped feeling the need to check with each other. The issue of consistency between markers, or “marking the same”, arose frequently in the interviews with reference to tutor marking. The main reason behind the desire to “mark the same” appeared to be the prospect of students challenging their marking.

Cause there's nothing worse than when a student comes to you and says, like “I wrote exactly the same as my friend . . . I got 19 and he got 25, why?” [Peter 249]

Peter recalled marking on a course in which the test had been “really hard” and there had been “much room for discrepancy between markers”.

The students really didn't do well. . . . That put a lot of pressure on the markers afterwards, because a lot of students wanted to have their scripts revised. . . . In our talks with Braam he said like you must be able to justify . . . every mark that you give.

Which is right . . . you should be able to do that for anytime you mark. [Peter 308-312]

Peter showed signs of growing confidence in his marking. He felt that as a tutor he had learnt to make judgements about things “that weren’t so mathematical” and had developed the ability to form an “impression” of the students’ level of performance “straight away”. Regular interaction with academics, such as Cindy, had been central in this development.

I’ve learnt a lot from lecturers especially like from Cindy. [Peter 276] . . . I’d give people the benefit of the doubt . . . because if I look at lecturers like Cindy that’s how they mark as well. [Peter 302]

Despite signs of anxiety, the safety inherent in being “peripheral” and not having full responsibility was evident in the accounts of both tutors. Nowhere in their interviews did they refer to having to worry about their reputation. As a tutor, seeking help was expected, if not required, and there was always a lecturer who took ultimate responsibility. Marking as a tutor provided an ideal opportunity for learning to judge student performance through legitimate peripheral participation. In the process the *habitus* of individual tutors was shaped by its increased familiarity with the academic “game” of marking.

6.3.3 Learning to judge as a manager of tutors

The monitoring and moderating role needed to ensure consistency across multiple markers also provided valuable opportunities for new academics to talk to and learn from their colleagues. The fact that several tutors and academics were often marking the same essay or exam, meant that there were regular opportunities to discuss assessment criteria and the levels at which marks were to be awarded. This space for newcomers to talk through the process of judging student performance and the need to clarify assessment criteria was unique across the three case studies and seemed central in helping to build the confidence of the new academics in Department A (Social Science). It provided a significant opportunity for learning, particularly as it involved the need to verbalise the judgement making process and make criteria explicit in discussions with other lecturers and tutors on the course.

However in moving from the role of tutor to that of lecturer, new academics experienced a substantial shift in identity from being the receiver of support to being the dispenser of

support. Both Cindy and Braam had become facilitators of the LPP of others, modelling their practice on what they themselves had experienced. As new academics developing their own confidence in making judgements about student performance, they were required to provide support for the tutors assigned to them and were expected to provide answers to questions that they themselves could not always answer.

Given this level of responsibility for new academics, it was surprising that this role was generally regarded as unproblematic. However, Henrietta, who had not graduated in the department, questioned the principle of assigning inexperienced lecturers to take on this responsibility in order to free up the senior academics to do research. She argued that this practice reflected the low status of teaching in the department and placed the most vulnerable academics in the position of having to deal with student dissatisfaction with the system of marking.

There's just nobody else prepared to take the job. . . . Teaching is seen as a very low priority activity in the department so who do you put there? People you care least about. . . . People who can't say no. . . . Being blonde and young and inexperienced, they're the staff members most at risk of being lobbied by students. [Henrietta 126-128]

Despite Henrietta's concerns, marking within the undergraduate teaching CoP played a crucial role in inducting new academics into the departmental assessment practice. It was a relatively safe space within which a newcomer's *habitus* was given time to settle into the field. Cindy had no problems turning to colleagues for help and found it easy to talk to other colleagues in the undergraduate teaching CoP about her marking of essays. These discussions had helped her formulate her approach to marking.

The best advice a colleague gave me was read twenty scripts, don't mark them, just read them and, to get a feel of the level, and then you can start to put it in your own mind where you put things. [Cindy 54].

However, Alan described an awareness of the possible consequences of his marking on his reputation as an academic. The first time that he failed a student's essay he was worried not only about the serious consequences for the student but also about drawing attention to himself that might reveal him as "an appalling marker". He had approached the course convenor for advice and had been reassured that his decision to fail the student was correct.

On another occasion an academic at SAU had come to his office to challenge him on his marking of his son's essay. This experience highlighted for him the consequences of giving low marks and the need to be able to justify one's marks.

I hadn't given his son a first or something, and . . . he thought this was a really good essay, he had read it himself. . . . I was rather annoyed. . . . I didn't change my mark, but what it did . . . highlight from me, is . . . if you . . . give a bad mark, . . . write some comments so that the student knows why they've got it. . . . Giving low marks is the toughest when a new staff member because you probably will have to defend it. [Alan 107]

In Alan's view the insecurity of being new resulted in one adopting a "generous" approach to marking to avoid attracting attention, a strategy that he referred to as "detection avoidance".

You don't want to highlight your incompetence by failing everyone, that being reviewed, and finding out what an appalling marker you end up being. So it's this kind of detection avoidance scheme. . . . In the beginning . . . you err on the side of generosity . . . because that way it's less controversial . . . less chance of being hauled up to substantiate your decisions. [Alan 102]

The support provided by LPP in marking while a tutor, together with the feedback and discussions from colleagues within the undergraduate teaching CoP, contributed significantly to the process of building experience and developing the confidence to mark undergraduate student essays. Furthermore, the use of "detection avoidance" strategies, such as the one described above of "being generous," was evident across several interviews in this study and could be regarded as one of the mechanisms that assists in the process of harmonizing the individual *habitus* with the collective *habitus*.

6.3.4 Marking the Honours research paper

All academics in the department, no matter how inexperienced, were required to supervise and mark Honours research papers, an experience that differed substantially from that of marking essays within the undergraduate teaching CoP. This was one occasion where members of both the undergraduate teaching CoP and the research CoP interacted around assessment and provided insight into the interface between the two communities of practice.

It constituted what Wenger (1998) calls a “boundary encounter”, one in which there appeared to be a great deal at stake in terms of the reputation of, in particular, the new academics.

For the Honours research paper, each Honours student was required to produce a journal article as the outcome of a research project under supervision of an academic. Johan explained that requiring students to produce a journal paper motivated them to read journal articles. It also provided a framework for markers to assess these papers using the criteria for judging journal articles. He acknowledged, however, that this was not that helpful for new academics “because they don’t do a lot of refereeing for journals” and therefore they don’t know how to judge whether an article is “potentially publishable” or not.

Each Honours research paper was “double marked” by the student’s supervisor and one other academic in the department. If the two marks differed by less than 10%, then the average was taken as the final mark. If the marks differed by more than 10%, the course convenor attempted to negotiate a compromise between the two markers. If that failed the paper was passed on to a third marker. Braam felt that the 10% margin could result in a mark being awarded as a result of substantially different interpretations of the student’s work.

Ten percent is a massive margin in my view. If I give someone 60% and the other person gives them 69, they will not re-mark it. They will simply give the average, but I was saying the person might almost be considered a fail, while the other person might say look . . . it is almost a 70. [Braam (2) 61]

There was no formal system of feedback to any of the markers.

Sometimes a colleague will say: “I marked your student’s thesis, I gave it a bad mark; I gave it a good mark cause of this or that.” . . . It’s more . . . bumping into in the corridor, or chatting over lunch. It’s not formal at all. [Alan 196-198]

Johan commented that several new academics had complained to him that this system did not help them understand the “parameters” used in marking, as two markers might award the same or similar marks for completely different reasons.

You are new. You don’t know how to pitch it. . . . You come up with a mark based on your wrong sort of anchoring and it happens to be the same as some sort of tough old buzzard around the place, and so it goes through, no discussion. [Johan 153-157]

Each marker was supposed to write a report explaining their mark. Johan felt that this was a useful requirement as it forced one “to sit down and think about the stuff”. He was not sure whether everybody in fact wrote these reports, and noted that the poor quality of some of the reports meant that they were often of very little help in resolving differences in marks. He noted that many of the new academics struggled with writing reports on their own students. Several had come to him and ask whether they must try and be neutral and adopt a “veil of ignorance”.

I keep saying: “No, well that’s ridiculous in my opinion”. I write my thing unambiguously saying okay this is what I have got to say about the process as a supervisor . . . and partly that’s an argument for my mark. I am not going to pretend I didn’t supervise the student. . . . That’s . . . certainly going to influence my mark and I am going to say that. At least if I put it in my report, it’s there. If people disagree with it they can say . . . whatever they like. [Johan 179-181]

Henrietta referred to an occasion when, to the department’s embarrassment, the variation between the two marks awarded for an Honours research paper had been very large and the external examiner had commented that there was a “fundamental” flaw in the paper. As a result the academics in the department had decided to try and reach agreement between markers before sending the marks off to an external examiner. In her view this required that the course convenor “horse trade in the passage” and “bring one of the marks up or the other one down” as most academics were “willing to negotiate 15 percentage points in either direction”.

She recalled how the first time she marked an Honours research paper she had given it 85%, as she felt that she would not herself have been able to produce work of that quality as an Honours student. The second marker had awarded a mark 15% lower than hers and as a result the course convenor had approached each marker to try and “settle the difference”. It was at that point that she had been confronted with the issue of power and authority in relation to assessment in the department.

That’s a very scary system, because we . . . look for a consensus mark that has nothing to do with anything. “OK I give 80% you give 70% – shall we settle for 75%?” . . . We could have just as easily settled for 70. It’s all a power relationship. Are we going to back you or are we going to back me. It’s who shouts the loudest. [Henrietta 321]

Reflecting back on that experience, Henrietta felt that newcomers should “shut up until they get a feeling for what’s going on”, but acknowledged that she had “picked a couple of fights” which she had later regretted.

Having recently been required to mark his first Honours research paper, Braam had asked several academics for help in finding out what the department was “looking for”, but found them unable to explain what was required (see Section 6.2). He had been aware that the markers of an Honours research paper often differed by more than 10% and feared having to defend his mark against a more experienced academic in the department.

Because I'm new, I didn't want to have such a big difference. It's more difficult to justify my position if the other person was a more senior lecturer . . . so I took it very very serious, and taking it serious and not really knowing what to look for, is not easy.
[Braam (2) 66]

However, in the process of asking for help he had discovered several important benchmarks, namely, that a first class pass, of 75% or above, was awarded if an Honours research paper was publishable in a South African journal; that 65% was the minimum mark for students who wanted to go on to do a Masters, and that between 50% and 60% meant that the student had “failed” and should not think of continuing in the department.

One of the difficulties he experienced was that as a second marker of an Honours paper he felt he was marking “the student as well as the supervisor”. On one occasion he had approached the supervisor of a student he was marking to discuss what he felt was the very poor structure of the paper. To his surprise, he discovered that the structure of the paper had in fact been recommended by the supervisor.

The supervisor thought it's fine to do it that way, I disagreed with that. And that's difficult because again there we don't have proper guidelines. [Braam (2) 118]

He had written relatively long reports for each of the Honours paper he marked because he felt he needed to explain clearly “where the problems were” and what he regarded as being “very good”. He doubted however whether anyone bothered to look at the reports if the marks did not differ by more than 10%.

The relationship between one's confidence in marking and one's reputation as an academic was highlighted in Julius' account of his first few experiences of marking Honours research papers where he had supervised the students concerned. He had felt that the "issue was a sensitive one" as his "reputation" was at stake. He had been worried that the students' marks would reflect badly on him. He acknowledged that his concern for what others might think of his level of objectivity had resulted in him awarding, in one instance, a mark lower than he felt the student had deserved.

I wasn't now sure whether I could be objective enough . . . and as a result I was very strict . . . I thought: "No, if I give this guy 75 it will look bad". So I gave him 65. [Julius 277]

The course convenor had then approached him to find out if he would be willing to adjust his mark.

I didn't know then that 80 was the other mark, so I thought . . . I'd probably give it another 3 marks . . . 68 or something like that. That's . . . how it ended up. [Julius 284]

When he had subsequently discovered that the second marker had awarded a higher mark and it had "turned out the paper was good", he had felt guilty at being responsible for the student missing a first class pass because he hadn't been "sure how do you measure goodness".

Although I thought this is a first class paper . . . I gave it a 65. Which I regret up to this day. . . . By marrying the two they got something like 71 . . . and he missed the first class which he would have got if I had just gone with my instinct. [Julius 277]

On another occasion he had been worried that the poor performance of one of his students would reflect on his ability to supervise. As a result he had awarded the student 50% despite feeling she should have failed.

The other examiner failed her. . . . I wasn't willing to go any further down, and he wasn't willing to go any up, so it had to go to the external . . . and the external thought, as I had predicted, that the student should not pass . . . so she ended up failing and getting 48 percent for it. [Julius 292]

In both of these incidents Julius acknowledged that his primary concern at the time had been to make a good impression on his colleagues and in both cases he felt he had made the wrong

decision. Possibly as a result of these experiences he said that he'd "rather be overly generous than to be mean and then regret it", displaying a similar "detection avoidance" strategy to the one suggested by Alan.

These incidents had occurred several years previously, and at the time of this study Julius felt he had "learnt the ropes" and would not have problems consulting other academics about assessing Honours research papers. He described a method that he had developed for marking the Honours research papers which involved "getting a feel" for the paper during a first read, and then re-reading the paper to interrogate particular aspects of the work. If he was very familiar with the material, he felt confident enough to "look at a paper very quickly" and "place it in a range of marks". Then by picking out "the major points that are there" he was "able to allocate a mark accordingly".

Julius explained how the positive feedback about his marking, such as when the HOD had congratulated him on the fact that the external examiner had thought his marking "was fair and consistent", had helped to build up his confidence. Increased experience of teaching and a thorough knowledge of the subject material had also contributed toward his increased confidence in his assessment. In response to a question as to whether his being black had impacted on the development of his confidence in the department, he replied that he felt his youth and lack of experience had been responsible for his early sense of insecurity rather than his race.

I never really felt that any of my lack of confidence was related to my being black. I only thought . . . I was young and I have a lot to learn. . . . To me race never played any . . . constraining factor in all the learning . . . and the problems and challenges that one faced within the department. . . . I'm a small fish in a river with big fish in it, and it's a matter of just growing and learning, in swimming in with the big fish. . . . I think my confidence was mainly shattered by my age amongst my colleagues. . . . With time and with more interaction with people, I got to understand the processes and the structures much better. [Julius 358]

Both Alan and Henrietta highlighted the strong link between experience of publishing in the research field, associated with membership of the research CoP, and the development of confidence in assessing the Honours research papers.

So how does a young person . . . learn how to do it? By seeing enough Honours research papers on the one hand, and by submitting enough journal articles on the other. . . . I said to you a moment ago, that I gave the paper 85 . . . because it was better than what I could have produced. . . . Now I have a slightly better sense of what is Honours work and what is a publishable journal article. [Henrietta 340]

Mark, a senior academic nearing retirement in the department, commented on the value of feedback from good external examiners' reports as a source of learning, but acknowledged that one needed to "hang around long enough" to be able to see enough of them. Alan, who had had the advantage of starting his career trajectory from within the research CoP, felt he learnt a lot from the comments written by people who examined his Masters and honours students. After five years of teaching he displayed a great deal of confidence in his ability to judge student work.

I can defend my marking. . . . But more than just defend, I have developed a basis for doing that assessment. [Alan 112]

The experiences reflected in the data in this case study highlight the sensitivities around the act of judging student performance in complex assessment tasks, with respect to the relationship between marking and academic reputation, and the vulnerabilities of new academics to the power relations within the department. It would appear that the mechanism of "double marking" supported the process of harmonization of the individual *habitus* to the collective *habitus*. It discouraged risk-taking behaviour or innovation, given the possibility that as a newcomer one might be required to "substantiate one's decision".

6.3.5 Discussion

The key structuring features of the field in this case study relate to the valuing of research capital above teaching and the relationships between senior academics, primarily involved in research, and the middle and junior academics and postgraduate tutors, primarily involved in teaching.

All new academics joined the undergraduate teaching CoP and participated in the two key complex assessment tasks in the department within their first year of appointment and then annually. While the process of learning to mark undergraduate essays often involved a

significant LPP experience, the same cannot be said for learning to mark Honours research papers. This occurred at the boundary between the two communities of practice and there was strong evidence of the lack of peripherality in this activity. Newcomers were acutely aware of the possible consequences of their decisions on the lives of the students and on their reputations as academics. Julius' honest acknowledgement of the priority he had placed on protecting his reputation to the detriment of the students concerned illustrates the power relations at play across these two CoP's. The fear of having to defend one's mark against a senior colleague generated different behaviours in Braam and Alan. Braam set out to ask for help from a range of colleagues and wrote extensive reports justifying his marks, while Alan chose to be "generous" in marking to avoid exposing himself to possible "unwanted attention" as a result of challenges from students.

It is possible to identify three key elements in the process of learning to judge student performance in Department A (Social Science):

- a. Firstly, there was evidence of significant legitimate peripheral participation of tutors while marking undergraduate essays within the undergraduate teaching CoP.
- b. Secondly, participation in a series of increasingly complex assessment activities, when mapped onto the typical career trajectory, revealed what I call a "learning to judge trajectory" extending over several years represented by the bold dashed line in Figure 11. This relatively structured trajectory can be thought of as being formed by the field within which the department is situated and in some respects could be said to resemble a "learning curriculum" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Billett, 1996).

Career Trajectory		
Post grad tutor – on periphery of undergraduate teaching CoP	Academic – in undergraduate teaching CoP	Academic – in research CoP and postgraduate teaching CoP
a) Mark undergraduate essays under supervision. (LPP experience).	b) Mark undergraduate essays	f) Mark postgraduate essays
	c) Manage tutors marking essays	
	d) Mark Honours paper	
		e) Mark Masters thesis

Figure 11: The learning to judge trajectory in Department A (Social Science)

Most academics in Department A (Social Science) began the learning to judge trajectory as postgraduate tutors. During this phase their *habitus* development with respect to judging student performance was shaped primarily by their experience of LPP while marking undergraduate essays as part of the undergraduate teaching CoP. Over a period of several years they developed the confidence to judge student performance through participation in assessment activities at increasing levels of complexity, reflecting their transition from peripheral to full membership of the undergraduate teaching CoP then on to membership, part or full, of the research CoP.

- c. Thirdly, the data revealed a series of mechanisms that served to “harmonize” the development of the newcomers’ academic *habitus* with that of the field. These included the following:
- i. A system of monitoring and moderation of the marking of essays through regular discussions between tutors and course convenors as part of LPP in the undergraduate teaching CoP.
 - ii. A system of “double marking” of the Honours research paper which placed new academics in the potentially difficult situation of having to defend their marks against more senior lecturers when substantial differences occurred.
 - iii. The adoption of “detection avoidance” strategies by academics in their assessment practices to protect their reputations as academics.
 - iv. The requirement that written reports be submitted justifying one’s mark for an Honours project.
 - v. The system of external examining and associated feedback.

These mechanisms collectively helped to ensure that new academics in Department A (Social Science) developed a “feel for the game” and that each one’s *habitus* was harmonized with the collective *habitus* in such a way as to produce judgements that supported the departmental system of assessment and did not put them at risk of being embarrassed or excluded from the game.

The mechanisms were however by no means able to dictate how all new academics behaved. Henrietta’s decision to do things differently revealed that there was still the opportunity for agency within the field. Support for these acts of agency was obtained from networking and from engaging in staff development initiatives outside of the department.

The learning to judge trajectory, along with the mechanisms above, contribute to the development of an academic *habitus* that enables the process of learning to judge and forms the basis of what is perceived to be the process of “learning by doing”.

University of Cape Town

6.4 Learning to judge in Department B (Natural Science)

6.4.1 Introduction

As indicated in Chapter 5, a key feature of the field within which Department B (Natural Science) was situated was the dominant role of research capital, evident in the fact that all academics in the department were required to have completed a PhD and several years of postdoctoral research experience before appointment, joining the department as members of the research CoP. The teaching CoP was embedded within the research CoP, with all academics participating in teaching at the undergraduate level. There was no official postgraduate student or postdoctoral researcher involvement in teaching (Figure 12).

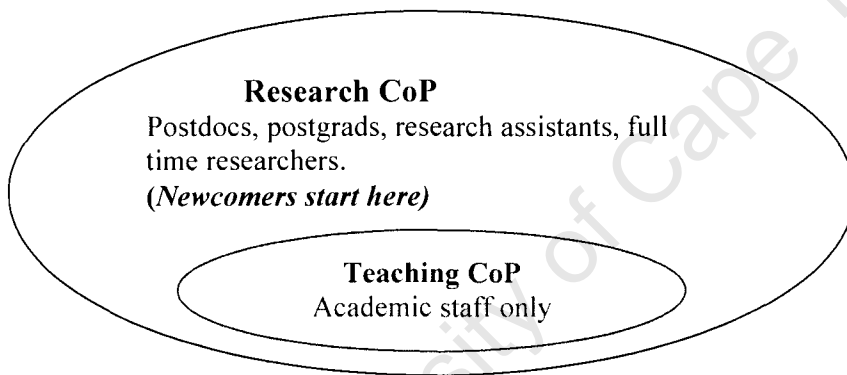


Figure 12: Relationship between CoPs in Department B (Natural Science)

The curriculum revealed a strong alignment between teaching and research. At the undergraduate level there was very little use of essays compared to Department A (Social Science). Several essay assignments used in the past had been changed into other forms of assessment. A second year essay had become a poster project and a third year essay had been converted into a journal club exercise, an indication of the way in which assessment practice was increasingly aligned with the processes valued by research. The output required of the third year project was an article suitable for submission to an academic journal.

All academics participated in the key complex assessment tasks that formed part of the Honours course and the marking of the third year project. At the Honours level the assessment tasks were spread throughout the year and appeared to have been designed to provide students with an induction into the different genres of communication within the

research community: the specialist essay, the research proposal, the presentation, the literature review and the final report in the form of a journal article. Since all new academics arrived having already obtained their PhD's, they were also required to mark Masters theses. Listed in Table 7 are the key complex assessment tasks in this department, along with information about who marked each task and how differences between markers were resolved.

Table 7: Key complex assessment tasks in Department B (Natural Science)

Level	Assessment tasks	Who marks?	Managing difference in marking
3 rd year	Project (Nov)	Supervisor plus one other	Take average or third marker and take average. Review panel moderates
Honours	Specialist essay (March)	Supervisor plus one other	Take average
Honours	Literature review (May)	Supervisor plus one other	Take average or third marker and take average
Honours	Proposal presentation (June)	A team of markers	Take average
Honours	Research paper (Nov)	Supervisor plus one other	Take average or third marker and take average. External moderates
Honours	Presentation (Nov)	A team of markers	Take average. External moderates
Masters	Thesis	One internal marker and two externals	HOD and supervisor recommend to Faculty Postgraduate examination committee

There seemed to be evidence of a ceiling mark of 85% for complex assessment tasks in the department. Monica explained that the ceiling mark was something “you absorb” as it is not stated explicitly anywhere. She justified it by saying that: “you can’t get 100%. You can never write the perfect essay . . . not like maths”. Several interviewees acknowledged that the ceiling of 85% placed their students at a disadvantage when they competed for external bursaries and awards.

Normally I'm fairly mean with marks but we know that it's unfair because . . . if you compete nationally for bursaries then . . . you get students from other universities and they say; "He's got 80% and he knows nothing". So you tend to get, as you get older, more lenient. [Max 114]

Monica recalled that at one meeting the academics in the department decided to raise the ceiling and mark “a bit higher”. This attempt to change practice had met with resistance from

the external examiner who “hammered us and said the marks are far too high”. In this case, the external examiner acted as a “conserving force” resisting changes to the field (Bourdieu, 1998).

While each marker in Department B (Natural Science) was required to write a report explaining the mark they had awarded, there were differences in understanding as to who the reports were intended for. While Monica claimed that reports were written for the external examiner, both Clara and Claire believed that the reports were written simply to justify the mark and help the Honours convenor resolve differences in marks. Rob felt that the course convenor only used the reports when there was significant variation in marks and did not know whether the reports were shown to the students. Carl, as course convenor, indicated that the students were given the written feedback so they could see the “justification for the mark they have been given. It’s not a thumb suck without any justification”.

When he had first marked an Honours literature review, Joe had not been aware that he was required to write a report justifying his mark.

Later . . . I saw that some did write a comment, some just wrote an email and they emailed it off to Carl and he printed it with the literature review and then I basically just came and printed out my ones which I did already . . . [and] I gave it to the students. [Joe 152-153]

6.4.2 Conversations about assessment

Within the department the key challenge for assessment practice appeared to be achieving “objectivity” in judging students’ work. Assessment was seen to be a private affair, requiring academics to reach independent judgements without influencing each other through discussion. Departmental policy discouraged markers who were marking the same scripts from talking to each other about the script or the student they were marking.

You are meant to be marking it personally and unbiased. You mustn’t know the student had a breakdown during the thesis. [Clara 121]

This policy appeared to be an attempt to align assessment practice with the “scientific method” and views on the need for “objectivity” that dominate disciplines in Science (Handal et al., 1990). Jane was comfortable with the departmental policy. She felt that it provided a

way of ensuring a degree of fairness and wanted it to be implemented consistently across the department. She recalled how on one occasion, Paula, the HOD, who had been marking the Honours literature review of one of her students, had phoned her to talk about the script.

I was saying: "Paula, we are not allowed to talk to each other". . . . She was like: "Oh yes, sorry I didn't mean to get you into trouble". [Jane (2) 58-60]

"Getting into trouble" meant answering to Carl, who as convenor of the Honours programme was an ardent supporter of the policy.

He's quite strict and he gets quite annoyed if people break the rules because his view, which I agree with, is that it's unfair on the student. . . . If there is collaboration between markers then it's to the advantage of some students and the disadvantage of others and it's not fair. You should really have a level playing field. [Jane (2)78]

Joe was ambivalent about the departmental policy of not communicating with the second marker, as he felt it denied him access to information that might help him in his judgements.

I think that you can have a discussion about the student, not necessarily his mark, because somebody may bring up something that you overlooked. [Joe (3)127]

He suspected that some of his colleagues discussed the students whose scripts they were marking, as he had also been on the receiving end of mixed signals from Paula. He struggled with the notion of being "objective". He commented on how "very tough" and "very subjective" the marking of third year projects was and repeatedly spoke of the "subjective" nature, of assessment especially when it involved marking one's own students.

When it comes to marking your own student you're always subjective, you subconsciously . . . try to be objective. Right? But . . . you become subjective by the nature of knowing the person. [Joe (3) 82]

After initially indicating that he did not discuss the students he was marking with his colleagues, he remembered an occasion when, after marking all his scripts, he had consulted Monica about one of her students. He had needed reassurance that he had not marked this student too high as he was going to use his mark as a benchmark against which to compare the marks he had awarded the other students.

I said: “. . . this is your student. . . . I gave him a mark and I’m going to use this mark to basically adjust all my marks. . . . Was my assessment fair?” and she said: “Yes.” . . . Then we discussed him a bit . . . and I said: “Okay fine, then I’m happy with the mark I’m giving him”. [Joe (3) 151]

Monica had not made him feel he was doing something wrong by approaching her. He justified his decision to approach her by emphasising the importance of him being sure about his “anchor mark”.

I felt what I did was okay ethically because I’d marked everyone already, I didn’t pre-judge the mark. . . . I didn’t discuss other marks with her, only his mark. Right? And the reason I discussed his mark was because his was the anchor mark . . . and if you make a mistake with that mark you basically are going to negatively judge the other students because it could be that you’re giving a too high or too low mark. [Joe (3)159-170]

In a direct reference to the high stakes nature of assessment practice in terms of academics’ reputations, Clara felt that the existence of the departmental policy discouraging discussion amongst markers of the same students suggested that academics themselves were being judged through their marking. It reinforced the perception that assessment also served as a “system of classification” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) amongst academics.

One gets a sense you’re not meant to be discussing marks beforehand. It’s almost your exam of how well you mark. [Clara 170]

Despite the department appearing to maintain the notion of objectivity in assessment, several of the senior academics referred to making judgements based on a “gut feel”.

It’s similar to somebody listening . . . to good music or bad music. . . . I don’t know how to describe it. [Carl 243-250]

The few times I joined the department for tea, I observed no discussion about teaching or assessment. While there appeared to be little discussion around assessment within the academic community in general, clusters of two or three individuals, like Jane and Joe, consulted each other regularly. Jane described how Joe had come to her with a set of assessment criteria he had found on the internet.

It was the first time we'd been involved in the Honours marking thing and so we talked . . . about . . . how you mark an essay and a literature review and so we decided that we were gonna follow the criteria set out in the Honours manual and Joe had been on the internet and he'd found various articles about how to mark. . . . We discussed how we would approach it and then we went independently and we didn't speak again. [Jane (2) 101-103]

Jane appeared defensive in her remark that they had marked “independently” and “didn't speak again”, as if she needed to justify their discussion in case it might be viewed as having undermined the “independence” of their judgements or violated the policy in the department. However she appeared more confident than Joe about approaching colleagues to discuss marking third year project and some other courses. She also reported having had discussions with Rob, convenor of the third year project, and with Mel, her appointed mentor.

We've spoken a lot about how we are going to deal with students who've failed on those courses and those kind of marking issues. And then on third year projects we co-supervised some of them so we talked a lot about the marks that we were giving to those students and why . . . not as a role as a mentor but in just normal working relationship . . . we've discussed marks quite a lot. [Jane (3) 179]

Clara described having regularly discussed marking with Abe, a former colleague with whom she used to teach. They would mark separately using their “own personal scheme” and would sit and discuss afterwards “what he considered a first and what I considered a first”. She had noticed that despite using different criteria, and marking “different things”, they had often ended up awarding the same grade.

I know Abe often weighs different things than I do . . . and still [we] are more or less within the same grade most of the time. . . . Sometimes I give somebody a first because I think they gave a brilliant presentation . . . he liked the content and they could answer all the questions but we both agree on the first. So we don't argue about . . . where did you give the marks. [Clara 150]

Shortly before the start of this study a new opportunity to talk about assessment had opened up with the appointment of a review panel to moderate the marks awarded for third year projects. Jane had been part of the first panel and said that the experience gave her the opportunity to “see what other people value” and “affirmed” what she was “valuing”.

However with the relatively small classes, lecturers often got to know the students quite well and Jane described her discomfort at how some members of the panel had used their knowledge of the students in ways that she felt were inappropriate.

Two of the panel members had experience of who the students were. They made assumptions. . . . They'd say: "Well this student . . . wouldn't have put up with, you know, the demonstrator doing it for them and this definitely is their work". . . . I don't know whether it's ethical to bring them in. [Jane(3) 30]

There was some mention of external opportunities to develop one's assessment practice. Claire, Carl, Clara and Rob each mentioned the attendance of several members of the department at a three day teaching workshop about ten years previously. Clara referred specifically to the influence of that workshop on her assessment practice. Both Jane and Joe had attended workshops on assessment as part of the Academic Staff Induction programme (ASI) to support new academics at SAU. Joe referred several times to the value of these workshops. He reported countering a colleague's negative comments that staff development workshops were a "waste of time" by describing to that colleague the "brilliant session on assessment" that he attended on the ASI programme. He felt that, as a new academic, these workshops gave him a language and a set of conceptual "tools" with which to reflect on his assessment practice.

[It]gave me some tools that I could use. . . . As a new academic I was totally lost and it kind of gave me some base which I could work from. [Joe (3) 11]

Jane and Joe's participation in the ASI assessment workshops might explain the relatively high level of engagement with the notion of assessment criteria in their interviews, in contrast to almost no reference to the concept by the rest of the interviewees. Jane admitted that when she had approached Claire to ask her how she marked the Honours literature reviews she had been frustrated by the fact that Claire had been unable to discuss assessment criteria with her.

I don't think they're really very accessible so I think because Joe and I feel a bit lost, I think it's natural to gravitate together. [Jane (2) 108]

6.4.3 Resolving difference

Despite the attempts to achieve objectivity in assessment, it was widely acknowledged within the department that some individual academics had reputations for being "strict" while others

were regarded as “lenient” in their marking. Tamara commented that she had recently noticed the newer academics appeared to be stricter than some of the older academics. At the same time she implied that “tougher” marking was “better”. Her comments seem to support a remark made by Max that as you get older “you tend to get . . . more lenient”.

A system of rules and procedures had developed to deal with the conflict around, amongst other things, issues of assessment.

We've got a lot of rules in place to allow for this difficult kind of assessment, particularly at Honours level because we've had a lot of fights in the past. [Claire 83]

Mel, as HOD, and Carl, as Honours course co-ordinator, had been responsible for introducing a more rule-based examinations system.

When I first started we just had exam papers that went out the last minute. . . . We now have exam papers with model answers. Those get reviewed extensively within the stream before they go to the external. . . . So we have a proper system. [Mel 179]

Mel felt that this new examination process was a “hundred percent better” and was not only useful in managing conflict, but also provided new academics in the department with a clearer system to follow.

The use of double marking was the key mechanism for enhancing reliability in the assessment of complex assessment tasks, based on the assumption that two competent markers should “find the right mark”, that in effect, they should agree. Where they did not agree, a set of rules defined how the difference was resolved and was applied to both the marking of the Honours research papers and third year projects. When the difference in marks between the supervisor and the second marker was less than 10%, the average was calculated and taken as the final mark. When it was greater than 10%, the script was sent to a third marker and again an average taken across the larger “sample” of three.

The view that averaging marks across markers of the same assessment task was an acceptable means of arriving at an appropriate result for a student’s work was widely held within the department. It formed part of the collective *habitus*. None of the interviewees raised concerns about the validity or appropriateness of such a strategy in an educational context. In fact, Marge, a member of the department who was regarded as very knowledgeable about the

education process, felt that taking the average was a more “robust” way of “reflecting what the student is actually doing”. Carl argued that taking the average not only helped to counter “subjectivity” but was also more respectful of different markers’ opinions than the strategy of discarding outliers. He felt that by taking the average across three markers one was “probably getting into the right zone in terms of where the student is”. He also used the arithmetic average in marking Honours presentations.

I get as many academics as possible to attend all the talks and then we all mark separately. . . . You just take the whole lot and average the mark and that tends to sort of negate the outlier markers and I think it’s the fairest way. [Carl 231]

The perceived validity of taking the average had been strengthened by the results of an “experiment” conducted one year to help resolve a debate over whether or not to drop the outliers in this marking process.

We had nine markers . . . and we basically took the average of all nine . . . with and without the outliers. . . . There was no difference if you had enough markers and so we decided we have to have a least five to seven markers and then it averages and you all have to be there. [Claire 132]

This arithmetic solution to variation in assessment judgements served to further align the assessment process with experimental procedures in the Sciences and enhanced the impression of objectivity. It provides an example of what Handel et al (1990) describes as the teaching practice being “influenced by the dominating rationality of the discipline”.

However while this mechanism of dealing with difference avoided the need for discussion and negotiation, it made it difficult for new academics to understand the issues underlying the difference in marks. Joe’s experience described below highlights the missed opportunities to obtain feedback and to understand the basis of assessment in the department that resulted from this practice.

Joe’s story – dealing with difference

A critical incident involving Joe’s first experience of assessing the Honours literature review occurred just prior to my first interview with him. He had marked four scripts and passed them all, including that of a black student he was supervising. He had felt confident about his assessment when marking as he had used a set of assessment criteria developed in discussion

with Jane. He was very disturbed to discover that his student had been failed by two of his white colleagues, Paula and Claire.

The way in which this incident upset him needs to be understood in terms of the practice in the department of handling differences in marks administratively and not providing markers with feedback on their marking. Academics usually did not know if their marks differed substantially from the second marker and their scripts were handed to a third marker. Unlike the negotiations that took place in Department A (Social Science), the final mark was calculated by taking the average, without discussion with the supervisor or second marker. Carl, the Honours course convenor, argued that supervisors could deduce the outcome by comparing their students' final marks with the marks they themselves had awarded. The marks that Joe had available to him with which to make such a comparison are reflected in Table 8.

Table 8: Final results for students Joe had marked

Honours Student	Mark awarded by Joe	Final Mark awarded to student
A	75%	77%
B	67%	66%
C	70%	74%
D (Joe's student)	62%	49%

He remembered that upon receiving these results he had first noted that the final results of the students he had not supervised, students A to C, were “very similar” to the marks he had awarded. He had then been shocked to see that his own student, student D, had failed and had immediately gone to the office to find out what marks the other markers had given.

The second marker gave him 40%, I gave him 62% and the third marker gave him . . . 46% or something. [Joe (1) 134]

In trying to understand what had happened, Joe returned to the results available to him, reflected in Table 8, and noted how in most cases, his mark was close to the final mark awarded to the student. He concluded from this that, except in the case of his own student, he had marked “quite well”.

My second marker was very close, I gave one 72%²³, a guy got 74%, the other one got 60 something, I mean all were consistent, it's only my student that wasn't. [Joe (1) 150]

However from the interview it was clear that Joe had not seen the full set of results awarded by all the markers, and was not aware that his mark for student C also differed substantially from that awarded by the second marker (Table 9). Looking at the final mark alone, as suggested by Carl, he deduced that only his own student, student D, had needed a third marker and he regarded this as a personal criticism of the way he had marked the student he had supervised.

Table 9: Full set of results for students Joe had marked.

Student	Mark awarded by Joe	Mark awarded by second ²⁴ marker	Mark awarded by third marker	Final mark awarded to student (Ave)
A	75%	78%		77%
B	67%	65%		66%
C	70%	90%	63%	74%
D (Joe's student)	62%	40%	46%	49%

This experience had shaken his confidence in his ability to judge student performance and he struggled to understand what had happened. In his view he had marked using a clear set of assessment criteria. He wished to get feedback on how to improve his assessment practice, but felt unable to approach the other two markers, Paula or Claire, to discuss whether this set of criteria had been inappropriate in any way.

My question is not the mark itself. . . . My question is . . . "These are the criteria and why you think it was the case?" but not in a confrontation, more in terms of let me try and get some feedback, because it's kind of made me unsure of my marking. [Joe (1) 148] . . . I worry about my assessment. Did I really assess him so badly that . . . a person gave a 40% and I gave him a 60%. I mean a 20% difference but yet my other assessments were okay? [Joe (2) 297]

²³ The slight discrepancies between Joe's figures and those in Table 8 and Table 9 result from the fact that he was recalling the marks from memory during the interview and did not have them in front of him.

²⁴ Technically Joe was the second marker in the case of students A, B and C, as he only supervised student D. The column is labeled in this way for simplicity.

He wished to know what assessment criteria the other markers had used and commented that all markers should be required to make their criteria known. Before marking he had distributed the criteria he had found on the internet to several colleagues in the hope that he might get feedback on whether or not they were appropriate to use.

I actually emailed this also to some of the other academics that this is how I mark. If they have a problem with it they should let me know. [Joe (1) 164]

At the second interview, held a week later, Joe again mentioned wanting to approach Claire to ask her to look at the criteria he had used and explain why his marking had, in her view, been wrong. However he feared her reaction to such an approach.

If I go and say: "Lookat here, these are my assessment criteria, if you have a problem . . . let me know so that I can look at it again". . . . I really think this was a good mark that I gave. . . . How would she perceive me coming to her . . . as a new academic? . . . Would she take it to mean: "You know you're actually criticizing my assessment and you're criticizing, you know, me"? [Joe (2) 306]

He also indicated that he was thinking of approaching his mentor to discuss how to deal with these concerns. However several months later, when I again interviewed him, he had not followed up on the issue. He justified his decision not to intervene on behalf of his student by arguing that "[he] will appreciate if he is judged according to his talents and not because his supervisor has spoken out for him". However, his failure to follow up this incident in support of his student could place him at risk of being seen to be siding with the white academics and could result in him being labelled a "coconut" by black students in the department.

6.4.4 No peripherality

As described above, the collective *habitus* placed strong emphasis on achieving objectivity through independent and "unbiased" judgement. Each academic was expected to reach his or her judgement alone and with very little discussion. As evident in Joe's story, this aspect of the field within which the department was situated caused particular difficulties for new academics who arrived in the department as members of the research CoP. As such they were expected to be able to perform at the required level in the teaching CoP. There was no

evidence of opportunities to learn about assessment through legitimate peripheral participation.

The lack of peripherality was aggravated by the high level of division amongst members of the department that in some cases had its origins in the old Departments X and Y. Clara described how, as a newcomer in Department X marking Honours research papers for the first time, she had been confronted by conflicts erupting during attempts to reach agreement on student marks. At that time there had only been six Honours students and five academics, so everyone had marked all the scripts and then met to decide on the final marks. The “we” below refers to the female members of staff, Mel, Claire and Clara, who were all relatively new in Department X at the time.

For the first time I saw how fraught this process was. . . . Graham failed Henry's student, where everybody else passed her . . . just because he doesn't like Henry. . . . We were told we don't know anything, it's our first year doing Honours, what do we know? [Clara 69]. . . Suddenly we see outliers were thrown out so . . . then we said: "No, we're to average" and then suddenly some people's marks mattered less than others. . . . It was a fight that lasted . . . an hour and a half or two hours. [Clara 73]

Clara described how her sense of confidence in her marking had been undermined when one of her “very good” students had been awarded “quite a low mark” by another member of staff, as had happened in Joe’s case. Rob also highlighted the relationship between judging student performance and one’s reputation. In a clear description of “detection avoidance” behaviour, he commented that one needed to be careful of “attracting the wrong kind of attention” by not marking too high and that it was safer to mark in the “middle zone”. These remarks by Clara and Rob emphasised the high stakes nature of assessment practice for new academics in the department.

Paula’s account of her first experiences of marking on arrival at SAU, initially into a department other than Departments X or Y, emphasised how much the process of judging student performance was associated with issues of identity and the development of self-confidence. She admitted that she had initially “watched how other academics did” their assessment and “fitted into their mould”. As a newcomer she was “a bit of a people-pleaser and didn’t want to stick out”. She recalled how when she had first marked a student seminar along with everyone else in the department, she had found that her marks were “way out” of

the range of the other markers “simply because . . . I didn’t know how they marked”. She had also had to deal with the initial fear of being judged by the performance of her students.

If my students did badly I took it as a personal reflection on me . . . which was really wrong. . . . You don’t want to use your student as a shotgun because of your own pride and ego but that’s kind of what I did at the Honours level. . . . When I became more confident in who I was and what I could offer the department and in my own ability to assess students . . . then I was able to realize that in fact I didn’t have to dance to their tune as strongly as I did, but I did in the beginning. [Paula 221]

With reference to her recent experience in the department Jane, admitted to feeling “very nervous” when marking a student she had supervised. She felt that she had been “more strict” with her own student because she “didn’t want to appear to be favouring him” more than the other two students she was marking.

Her experience of marking the Honours project was mixed. On one occasion she had marked one of Joe’s students and when she discovered that their results had differed by more than 10% she had had no problem discussing this with him.

I spoke to Joe. . . . I said I was the second marker of his student and I told him what I gave and he said that was fair enough and he told me why he had given more. [Jane (3) 56-60]

She confessed that on a different occasion she had felt anxious marking an Honours project because she knew that she marked “differently to certain people”.

I knew someone else’s project that I got and I knew that I would be giving their student a lower mark than they would be giving them so I knew that there would be a problem. [Jane (3) 69]

On this occasion, because she suspected that there would be a “problem”, she had approached Carl for advice.

I said: “I know that I mark differently to this person” and he said: “You just have to mark how you mark. You can’t change your style”. [Jane (3) 73]

The emotions and concerns previously described by academics in Department B (Natural Science) echo those expressed by Julius with reference to his experience in Department A

(Social Science), and highlight how new academics' concerns for how they might be viewed by their colleagues influence their judgement of a student's performance.

As all academics in the department arrived having completed a PhD qualification, newcomers were also called upon to mark Masters theses. In her first year in the department Jane had served as internal examiner for two Masters theses. She described it as being "scary to know that you were deciding someone's degree basically based on that thesis". After approaching Claire and some colleagues outside of SAU for advice on how to do this marking, she had passed both theses, one with minor corrections and the other with instructions to revise a few chapters.

At the time of this study, Joe had not yet marked a Masters thesis within the department but had served as an external examiner for a neighbouring institution where they had provided him with written guidelines on how to mark that he had found very useful. He was aware that there were often large differences between markers at the Masters level where "one external will give a distinction, right, the other external totally opposite".

Claire commented that she had probably been "very harsh" the first time she marked a Masters thesis because all she had was "the memory of your supervisor going through your thesis correcting every single word". She felt that the lack of guidelines for marking Masters theses was a problem and described a recent example where there had been major differences between the marks awarded by the two external and one internal examiner.

One external said: "Outstanding". One external said: "Great, it should be published". And then the internal said: "Absolutely terrible". . . . The internal person was new and so . . . I think the decision was made that the internal was actually being too harsh. . . . Her comments were factually inaccurate and so the student addressed those in a sort of report so in the end she got a distinction because the externals had said it was great. [Claire 208-210]

Experiences like this had made her "quite cynical about the whole marking thing". She felt that if this degree of disagreement was possible at the level of Masters thesis, there was little chance of getting "people to agree on a standard" when marking student work in general. She had also experienced the power relations between newer and more senior academics marking at the Masters thesis level. In one of her first experiences of marking as an external examiner

of a thesis from a local institution, she had recommended that revisions needed to be made and that she approve them as external examiner. The supervisor, a senior academic, had phoned her and complained about the lengthy process involved in following her recommendations.

[He] basically put pressure on me to say that he would look at the revisions. . . . It was the first year I was here. . . . Now I would never give in but then I just gave in. [Claire 231]

For Clara the process of marking Masters theses, as with all her marking, was guided by the “golden standard” of the research journal article.

The first time you get a thesis from another university to mark . . . you think: “Oh my God, I’ve got to mark someone’s masters. What do I do?”. . . My guide is . . . papers in the journals . . . is an appropriate standard . . . for a Masters to have achieved. [Clara 198]

The lack of opportunities for LPP was a central feature of this case study. There appeared to be an expectation that new academics, as full members of the research CoP, would be able to make judgements on student performance in complex assessment tasks. The situation was similar to that described by Viskovic (2005):

People had had to move very quickly into full participation in work – little time was spent on the periphery, as their inbound trajectories quickly immersed them in the full demands of practice. (Viskovic, 2005, p. 401)

It left new academics feeling “vulnerable” to the power relations evident within the field, such as between a young academic and a more senior academic. As in the previous case study, there were several references to concerns about how one’s assessment decisions were used to judge one’s ability to mark. As a result, new academics adopted similar kinds of “detection avoidance” strategies referred to in the first case study.

6.4.5 Developing confidence

Despite the lack of opportunities for LPP and the limited opportunities to talk, a system of judging student performance had evolved within the department, in which the majority of academics and external examiners appeared to have confidence. At an individual level an

analysis of the interviews revealed that the development of confidence in one's ability to assess complex student tasks could be described in terms of stages.

Jane was fortunate to have gained her first experience of marking at third year project level as a second marker while doing her postdoctoral research at an overseas university. She had found the process "scary" as she had no idea what the required standard was. After marking for three years while a postdoctoral researcher, she had begun to feel that she "was on the right track" and was looking "for the right kinds of things".

Within the first few months of starting work in Department B (Natural Science) she had been required to assess a third year project and an Honours paper. She spoke of the importance of using criteria to ensure "transparency" and said she had used the criteria in the "Honours manual". Upon investigation I found that the "Honours manual" was in fact the Honours course handout for students. The only reference to criteria in this document was a statement that the Honours literature review would be "marked on various criteria including accuracy, understanding, logical development and presentation" (Honours Course Handout, 2005). When I asked Jane about this, she admitted that she had initially been surprised to hear other academics refer to the course handout as the "Honours manual", but after a while had also begun to adopt the practice. In her interview Jane clearly described the assessment criteria that she used in marking.

Did they address the question? Were they accessible to the lay person? Were they correctly referenced? . . . The writing style . . . So I marked on those criteria and . . . a personal feel of how did it feel to me. [Jane (2) 18]

She felt that these criteria had provided her with clear justification for the one occasion when she had failed a student.

The references . . . were not cited correctly, he hadn't addressed the topic and it was so poorly written that I couldn't actually say whether it was accessible to a non-expert or not. . . . It was horrible. [Jane (2) 18]

She mentioned two occasions when her confidence in her marking had been boosted as a result of discussions with colleagues. On one occasion she had approached Mel, the second marker on a third year project, to discuss why their marks had differed by 5%. She had explained why she had given the extra 5% and Mel had agreed with her. On a second

occasion she had discussed her marking with Carl, who felt that she was “being very generous” with her marks on a course that they shared. After she had explained how she marked, he acknowledged he had been “looking for a different answer”.

However she remained uncertain about the standard in the department that she was supposed to work towards in her marking.

Because you're applying your standards to the project . . . you may be looking for very different qualities. . . . That's always my worry is that I have very different standards . . . to what is being looked for. [Jane (1) 221]

When interviewed again six months later, the additional experience of having supervised and marked more third year projects, and having her own Honours student, had strengthened her confidence in her marking.

Having exposure to more students, and to more projects, helped me gauge better how the projects were looking in the whole class and . . . having my own Honours student and interacting with the Honours students right from the beginning helped me in my assessment. [Jane (3) 5]

However, although she felt comfortable with her marking, she was still unsure whether she was doing what the department expected of her.

There are some things that I judge based on whether they are scientifically valid and I don't know whether all people do. Some people seem to be perhaps swayed by the merits of the project but you can't judge the student on the merit of the project that would be the supervisor's [project]. . . . I'm marking true to myself but I don't know whether I'm marking true to how the department marks. [Jane (3) 38]

Despite this, she found that her marks usually ended up being “very similar” to that of the second marker, leading her to comment that even though one may be looking for different things “it all evens out in the end”. This notion of the inevitable convergence of marks, despite the possible use of very different assessment criteria, emerged in several places in this study. It seemed to reinforce a sense of confidence in the system and formed part of the collective *habitus*.

Joe reflected on how “tough” marking had been during his first year as an academic, and described the development of his individual assessment “style” as a “work in progress”.

Initially, when I started here . . . you have this impression that everybody marks the same . . . everybody gives 60%. But I then realized actually that even amongst the senior academics there's big differences in marks and I only realized it later in the year. . . . Becoming comfortable with your own marking assessment is also something that I did realize would take time . . . I've been strict in some cases where I shouldn't have been so strict in my marking and I think I'm trying to find my own individual style which I'm happy with. [Joe (3) 26]

Joe felt strongly that “you can't get away with not having a set of criteria”, as it not only provided a framework for marking but was also important in helping students to do the task and to understand the feedback they got.

You have to have a set of criteria . . . to judge the essay, allowing the student to use that criteria to formulate the essay . . . then whatever mark they get they know why they're getting that mark. [Joe (2) 188]

He also stressed the importance of feedback from assessment needing to be based on explicit criteria to help students understand the “standard” required in scientific work.

You're saying that: “. . . this is the standard we have in science, that there has to be a logic behind your work, there has to be coherence of ideas, there has to be good structure . . . irrespective of your background, irrespective of what you know and what you don't know”. [Joe (2) 188]

He expressed frustration at the fact that he did not know what assessment criteria the external examiner applied.

Is he using the criteria of [his institution]? . . . Is he making his criteria plain to us? . . . I would like to know how externals judge. . . . He obviously marked the projects according to his . . . criteria. [Joe (3) 202]

As a newcomer, Joe was looking for the security of a transparent system that could clarify how to judge student performance. Such a system did not exist within Department B (Natural Science) and so, in preparing to mark his first Honours literature review, he searched the internet and found a set of marking criteria produced by a similar department at an overseas

institution. In seeking a structured system of support, both Jane and Joe were expressing the needs of novices described in the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) model presented earlier.

Claire recalled how in her first experience of marking Honours papers she had only been able to draw on her own experience of writing a thesis and the feedback from her supervisor. After several years in the department she felt that she still struggled to decide on an “appropriate mark” because she didn’t know what the “standard” was and found that she simply relied on the experience of what she had “marked previously”.

Both Claire and Jane referred to the development of an “internal standard” and confidence in their own judgement despite not being clear what “external standard” was required. This reflects a context in which they were expected to work on their own with very little access to opportunities to discuss assessment practice within the department. The data in this case strongly suggests that the individual *habitus* was required to develop in the context of a collective *habitus* that did not see the need for making assessment criteria explicit or for reaching agreement on how to judge student performance in complex assessment tasks.

While the path appeared to differ for each academic, the development of the individual *habitus* appeared to proceed from a dependence on “structure” to a confidence to do it alone. Monica, Paula, Carl and Clara each described a process whereby their initial use of “categories” in marking had given way to the use of “gut feel”. Monica explained how at first she had tried “setting categories” but found she often got “skew results”.

So what I go with is a gut feel . . . and then I break it down into those different categories and I must admit, probably tweak the marks to coincide with what my gut feel was. [Monica 86-92]

Paula described a similar system of moving between “structure” and “gut feel”. With her initial reading of an essay she would rely on her “gut feel” to determine broadly the grade of the work. Having established her impression of the level of the work, she would then return to the categories and allocate marks to each section. Upon comparing the two results she often found that her “gut feel” gave her the better result. She was unable to explain how she “learned” to assess in this way.

Carl described how he had shifted away from a system of assigning a “mark for a point” based on a “model answer” to judging students’ work holistically. While he also struggled to describe this approach, “gut feel” played an important part in it.

When I'm marking student exam questions I have a gut feel. . . . You can't take my ticks and add them up and that's the mark. . . . It's similar to somebody listening . . . to good music or bad music. . . . I don't know how to describe it. . . . It's not a method. [Carl 243- 250]

The strong relationship between confidence in judging the Honours research paper and experience of research emerged in Clara’s explanation of the standards she set when marking.

My guide is . . . the papers in the journals I read. I look for theses and papers to be in that style. That's kind of my gold standard. I know it's a very high standard for a third year student but it is an appropriate standard for an Honours [student] to strive towards and for a Masters [student] to have achieved. [Clara 198]

Paula made a similar link between the development of her confidence in marking and her growth and success as a researcher.

The confidence came from . . . despite having come out . . . from under a PhD where I felt I was guided by mentors into a system where I was absolutely on my own . . . and to realize that I was publishing, . . . my single author publications were being accepted, I could do this on my own. [Paula 229-230]

The evidence from these interviews suggests that the experience of making judgements on student performance starts with an initial dependence on a structure, such as “a model answer” or “a set of criteria”, then moves through a stage of “learning by doing” leading to the accumulation of experience where both criteria and “gut feel” are used together, to the point where one has confidence to use one’s gut feel alone. These phases bear a close resemblance to the stages in the Dreyfus model. The process involves the development of an academic *habitus*. Once again there is evidence of an underlying confidence in the inevitable convergence of results despite individual academics marking separately and using different criteria. The notion of “gut feel” encapsulates the confidence that one knows what counts and that “things will all even out” either serendipitously, or with the help of an arithmetic consensus-reaching mechanism such as taking the average.

6.4.6 Discussion

In trying to understand how academics learn to judge student performance in Department B (Natural Science), it became clear that the main experience of legitimate peripheral participation was in respect of learning to do scientific research while a postgraduate student and during the postdoctoral research phase. Given the absence of any support for the development of teaching, it could be argued that one of the assumptions in this department was that the development of excellence in scientific research would translate into excellence in teaching and, by implication, assessment practice. An analysis of the data in this case study revealed several key features related to the process of learning to judge student performance in Department B (Natural Science).

- a. There was no evidence of legitimate peripheral participation in teaching or assessment practice within the department. The process of assessment for new academics involved having to make judgements of student performance in situations that involved potential disagreement and could reflect poorly on themselves as academics.
- b. The mapping of the experience of complex assessment tasks onto the typical career trajectory revealed a very different representation of the learning to judge trajectory to that produced in Department A (Social Science). In the first year as an academic, newcomers were faced with having to assess multiple complex tasks in quick succession (Figure 13) resulting in what Joe described as a “very big learning curve”. The cycle of assessment tasks was repeated each year providing the opportunity to learn by reflecting on the previous years’ experiences along the lines of Kolb’s experiential learning model (Kolb, 1984). However, given the lack of feedback or discussion within the department, each individual academic was left to draw on their own resources in this reflective process.
- c. There was much less evidence in this case than in Department A (Social Science) of mechanisms that facilitated the “harmonization” of the *habitus* of individual academics with the collective *habitus*. The development of the academic *habitus* in respect of assessment practice appeared to proceed with little interaction with other members of the community of practice. Double marking took place in an environment of very little discussion and feedback, and appeared to serve primarily as the basis for

an arithmetic approach to determining a “reliable” mark. Joe’s experience illustrated how such an approach did not assist academics in understanding how to judge student performance. If anything, it encouraged “detection avoidance” strategies such as marking within a “safe” zone and adhering to a marking “ceiling”. It could be argued that this represented a crude form of learning, having much in common with theories of behaviour modification, and as such it appeared to bring the individual *habitus* in line with a collective *habitus* that held that it was possible to arrive at an “objective” judgement on one’s own without discussion.

Career Trajectory			
Postgraduate student on periphery of research CoP	Postdoc in research CoP	Academic – in research & teaching CoP	
		1 st Semester	2 nd semester
		Mark Honours specialist essay	
		Mark Honours proposal presentation	
		Mark Honours literature review	
			Mark 3 rd yr project
			Mark Honours paper
			Mark Honours presentation
			Mark Masters Thesis

Figure 13: The learning to judge trajectory in Department B (Natural Science)

One possible answer to the research question in this case is that learning to judge in this context involved adopting an individualistic approach within certain limits, knowing that there were mechanisms for arriving at a final mark irrespective of what mark you gave. For newcomers this process felt extremely uncomfortable, but given the environment of conflict and division, they soon became immune to disagreements with their colleagues over marks, and left the course convenor to use the administrative process of rules, arithmetic consensus management and external examiners to arrive at the final marks.

A possible explanation is that newcomers learned to stop searching for rules and criteria for marking, because they realized that no one applied them consistently, and they did not provide the basis for discussion with colleagues, except possibly other newcomers. The basis for judgement shifted to individual “gut feel”, not as a sign of reaching the higher stages in the development of expertise reflected in the Dreyfus and Dreyfus model, but rather as an acceptance of the fact that there was no need for common agreement on criteria.

The written report justifying one’s judgement, while initially offering an opportunity for helping one formulate an argument for one’s mark, over the years, was either not taken seriously, or was used to simply describe one’s individual approach and to provide feedback to students, rather than as the basis for reaching agreement. The development of confidence could be said to have been based on a realization that there was no need to reach agreement, as structures were in place to ensure a mark would be awarded anyway, a *habitus* coming to terms with the uncoordinated harmonization of practices (Bourdieu, 1990).

This individualist approach appeared to be inherently conservative, and while Mel and Carl had initiated significant sets of rules and procedures to manage the teaching and assessment practices of the larger department, there was little sign of the kind of agency articulated by Henrietta in Department A (Social Science). There was also little sign of expectations that any transformation of the current system would arise as a result of the agency of individuals or groups within the department.

6.5 Learning to judge in Department C (Design)

6.5.1 Introduction

In Department C (Design), as in Department A (Social Science), a separation in sites of participation was found, with junior and middle level academics responsible for the undergraduate teaching and senior academics only teaching at the postgraduate level and working in their professional practice. A large unstructured professional CoP, consisting of mainly senior academics who sustained a professional practice, plus the large number of professional practitioners who taught part time or examined at both postgraduate and undergraduate levels, had a significant influence on the departmental practice (Figure 14).

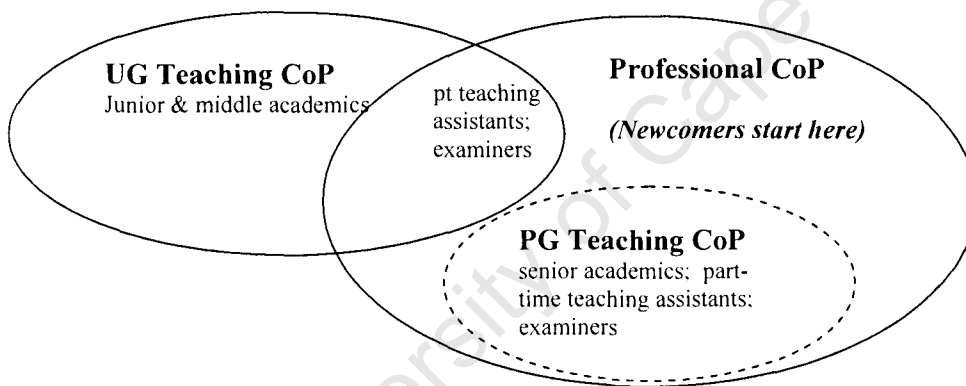


Figure 14: Relationship between CoPs in Department C (Design)

The dominance of professional capital within the field was evident in the authentic nature of the assessment practice in the department. The role of professional practitioners in the department was central in sustaining this authenticity of the assessment practice and the strong relationship between teaching and professional practice. They served as part time lecturers and as external examiners in the annual panel reviews of individual design work at all levels of the curriculum. Given the aim of the educational programme in preparing professionals, the design tasks throughout the curriculum played an important role in inducting students into the profession. Frank explained how the judgement of student performance in design was strongly aligned with the process of project evaluation in professional practice. At one level, the academic *habitus* appeared to be well aligned with the professional *habitus*.

In the world of work . . . there's a similar kind of process where you are having to explain ideas and locate them and defend them . . . both with clients and with your colleagues. . . . So you're always assessing what you do in relation to other people and the whole . . . design tradition is about establishing your own inner ability to do this. . . . It's a sort of a self-assessment sort of thing all the time. So in teaching one's just using that sort of process. [Frank 108]

He acknowledged, however, that there were at times signs of tensions between the academic internal examiners and the professional external examiners. These tensions reflected a difference in the capital valued by the fields of higher education and the profession.

At exit level . . . the external examiner is there to sort of defend the needs of the organised profession to ensure that graduates are competent to enter the industry. . . . An internal examiner, who's sort of defending the intellectual integrity of the piece of work, might have very little interest in those things. [Frank 157]

The key features of assessment practice in Department C (Design) were; a dominant view that assessment was a subjective process involving knowledge that was tacit, a high level of collaborative marking, the generally public nature of the process and its authentic nature in terms of its alignment with professional practice.

As regards the tacit, embodied, nature of the knowledge used in the design process, both Zaid, as a newcomer, and Stuart, as a senior academic, referred to the different forms of cultural capital that academics drew on in their judgement of student work.

We don't have a particular measure for saying: "Well that's a beautiful [object]". . . . What's beautiful for you as somebody coming from your context, and what's beautiful for me coming from my context, is very different. [Zaid 9]

How do you judge someone's taste if they come from an entirely different class background to yours? . . . How do you assess that stuff? [Stuart 104]

Stuart argued that the public nature of the discipline and the fact the students often chose "very individual ways of giving expression to themselves and their work" presented particular challenges for assessment within the discipline. Despite this, he felt that there were

acknowledged sets of criteria for assessing student work, such as evidence of “critical thought, development of intention, the final product, the formal resolution”.

Pat, who had worked closely with Stuart, also described assessment within the discipline as needing to acknowledge that “there are no real absolutes”. She described the process of recognising quality in student work as a “kind of literacy” similar to recognising good music.

It's a bit like: “How do you know it's a good piece of music?” About how it makes you feel and then you understand it makes you feel like that because it's put together in a specific way . . . [that] can only work because certain instruments can only do certain things. [Pat 149]

For James, what was important was that “the work speaks for itself” and although he acknowledged this might not be experienced in the same way by everyone, he felt it was possible to judge the work against what the student set out to achieve.

A good piece of work will speak whether you like it or not. . . . The student has to prove beyond reasonable doubt that they achieved what they set out to do and the evidence on the wall are the daggers and the blood and all that, and then you say: “Yes, you've done it, I don't like it, but I agree with you”. [James 189-191]

As in Department A (Natural Science), there appeared to be a ceiling mark of 85%. Several interviewees mentioned the negative impact this might have when students apply for scholarships or competitions outside of the department.

Maybe it's a quantitative thing rather than a qualitative thing. . . . We tend to say aren't we marking too low and shouldn't we . . . also give [our students] the benefit of good work easily getting into the nineties? [Hanlie 168]

A recent suggestion by Stuart that the ceiling mark be raised to 100% had provoked uncertainty in Zaid who felt that, as a newcomer, he would not know how to maintain the standards set in previous years.

But it's not easy because . . . it also needs to be moderated against kind of theses in previous years which you are dependent on the experienced staff to have sort of knowledge about. [Zaid 239]

There was no reference in the interviews to the use of written reports. The justification for a mark was given orally either directly to the student in the course of an examination on an individual design, or within a panel of examiners in the process of negotiating a mark. This oral feedback was felt to be crucial in assisting student learning. Frank argued that assessing design required competence in two skills; namely, the awarding of a mark and the presentation of oral feedback. He felt that providing a student with appropriate oral feedback was a very difficult skill to learn.

The verbal [feedback] is often the assessment that can be devastating to students. . . . It might be completely obvious what's wrong with this, but the skill is to try and pitch that at the level that the student can understand in terms of where they are and the sort of progression of understanding. And I think that's the skill of assessment which is not taught or not explained. It's assumed you can assess a project at the end of second year in the same way as you would at the end of fifth year. Although the issues might be the same, how you would deal with them might be very different to get a student to learn through the assessment. [Frank 162-164]

The public nature of the assessment practice, its acknowledged subjectivity and the process of collaboration and negotiation in marking, contrasted starkly with the private efforts to reach “unbiased” objective judgments of student performance in Department B (Natural Science). These differences can best be understood in terms of the practices that had emerged within the specific configuration of communities of practice in each department.

While the central complex assessment task in Department C (Design) was the individual student design, and most of the interviews focussed on this form of assessment, reference was also made to essays used to assess some of the theoretical aspects of the curriculum (Table 10).

Table 10: Key complex assessment tasks in Department C (Design)

Key task	Who marks?	Managing difference in marking
Individual design	Mark in teams: Members of the UG teaching CoP, Members of the PG teaching CoP	Discussion in team until consensus reached
Theory essays	Lecturer marks alone External moderates	N/A

The data in this case study pointed to two separate periods in the early stages of the typical career trajectory of an academic, during which there were strong formative influences on learning to judge student performance in Design. The first involved the experience while still a student at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The second arose out of the use of professional practitioners teaching and examining part time in the department. The widespread use of collaboration in judging student performance, either in pairs, or teams of markers, provided significant opportunities for conversations around assessment practice that were unique across the three case studies.

6.5.2 Learning to judge as a student

A major component of the Design curriculum at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels involved students modelling professional practice and having exposure to professional practitioners in their roles as part time lecturers and examiners. Through this teaching process students developed their abilities to evaluate their own work and to present and defend arguments in support of their work, abilities that lie at the core of professional practice.

You're sort of inducted into, let's call it the community of practice, very early on day one that you are a student. You're having to . . . understand the way in which you're working, be able to communicate that . . . to defend that and you're always in discussion with other people about that, your peers and your teachers. . . . You see other people going through that . . . it's very visible. [Frank 101-105]

The use of self and peer-assessment as an integral part of the curriculum helped students develop their ability to judge the quality of their own work and the work of others. It served as a basis for the development of the professional *habitus* that dominated academic life.

You learn to do it because you studied Design, you've been through that process, you've been reviewed. . . . It's our practice, its language. [James 196-198]

According to Stuart, participation in the assessment process as a student formed the basis of the process whereby new academics learned to judge student performance.

Don't underestimate the six, five years of education that all our graduates go through before they become teachers . . . where they're exposed on a daily basis with this form of assessment: reviewing of work, debating and so on, even though they're on the

receiving end of it, they do participate in it. . . . So I think that when people come to teach . . . there's a good knowledge of how the system works. [Stuart 92]

Significant parts of the assessment process were public and hence “visible”, both within the department, and at student conferences and competitions. Being “visible” it offered a range of opportunities for students and new academics to observe how judgements were made.

Everybody sees the work. . . . There are quite a lot of opportunities for students to get a sense of where quality is seen and therefore also new staff members. [Malcolm 242]

Those who did not form part of the particular marking team could learn how to judge student performance from the public assessment events.

I learn a lot from all contexts that I'm exposed to, sometimes as a participant or sometimes just an observer. For example the thesis exams²⁵ . . . are assessed [in] . . . public. . . . I learn a lot from that, about the sort of lines of enquiry that people take and how they develop a way of looking at the work. . . . One learns from everybody there about how it can be done. [Frank 235]

Much of the feedback at such assessment events was verbal and immediate, and involved the articulation of the assessment criteria by which the work was judged. The dominant use of the verbal mode of communication, together with the public nature of the evaluation process, provided students and new academics with regular access to the discourse for making judgements over an extended period of time. These provided important opportunities for the individual *habitus* to engage with the collective *habitus*. In Malcolm's view a similar curriculum process was followed in teaching Design throughout the world, and resulted in broad agreement on what was valued in the field.

If a student's been through it . . . in the States . . . or in Germany . . . if they come here, they kind of know what you're talking about when you say you think that's great and you don't think that's so great. [Malcolm 157]

The strong alignment between the curriculum and professional practice also created the opportunity for students to engage in LPP in the professional CoP. Learning to judge the quality of one's own work, and the work of others, formed part of this process and was a skill

²⁵ The “thesis” in this context refers to the final design presented at the end of the postgraduate programme.

highly valued by the professional CoP. This experience of LPP also helped to prepare those students considering an academic career for their future role as assessors of student performance.

6.5.3 Learning to judge as a professional

Working as a professional practitioner before embarking on an academic career, and in some cases serving as a part time lecturer or external examiner, further supported the process of learning to judge in both the professional and the teaching environments. Both newcomers in the department, Zaid and Majdi, had lectured part time while in professional practice. Majdi also served as an external examiner for several years before his appointment as a lecturer. Given the collaborative nature of assessment practice in the department, these early experiences provided important opportunities to learn from others.

Before coming here I was involved . . . part-time as well as . . . as an external examiner. So that kind of marking processes (sic) was a communal exercise generally. It's not me marking a paper or an exhibition as an individual but as part of a panel. [Majdi 362]

During his time as a professional teaching part-time in the department, Zaid had worked with several experienced staff in a range of teaching contexts.

I taught an elective with Roger, and then spent one project in second year with Malcolm . . . and . . . I had the opportunity to teach in the thesis year. . . . It offered me a kind of exposure to quite experienced staff. [Zaid 12]

Pat had first served as an external examiner at another institution in South Africa while in professional practice. She had initially been worried about playing this role and phoned two of her previous lecturers for advice. They drew her attention to the close relationship between the practice learned as a student and what was required in judging student performance as a lecturer, or as an external examiner.

They just took me through what had always been class discussions. . . . It's part of your education. . . . You learned to answer the questions that your lecturers asked and you learned to do them quite confidently. [Pat 161- 164]

Despite this help she described the initial experience as being “scary” but, as a member of the marking team, had been able to work out what was required.

You come in as a sort of uneducated. . . . I would give a mark and then I would compare it to everyone else's mark to see whether it was close. . . . I always was kind of more or less within the ballpark, never really too far, so I thought: “Well I must be thinking the same thing as you are”. [laughs] [Pat 153]

During the study I observed two sessions where student design was marked by teams of five markers within the undergraduate programme. In both instances I observed that those members of the team who had taught on the course brought knowledge of the students, while the professional practitioners brought their knowledge of professional practice to the process. In one team, the external examiner was a relatively young professional practitioner whose contribution seemed tentative. He often deferred to the senior academic who chaired the marking team.

Working intensively with students in design studio and small classes meant that the academic staff, unlike the external examiners, developed a thorough knowledge of the students and their work.

By the time that you assess the work you're familiar with the work, . . . you're familiar with the process that it followed, you're familiar with the complexities that it deals with, you're familiar also with the material that the student would have consulted. You know what . . . you might have suggested along the way and you can assess whether that's been addressed or not. [Hanlie 155]

This knowledge of the student introduced an additional, sometimes uncomfortable, dimension to the assessment process for new academics. Neville felt one could get too involved with one's students and “become less objective”. He felt it was easier for external examiners to make judgments because they did not feel the same level of responsibility for the future of the students and they had not “invested” themselves so much in them.

The experience of interacting with other lecturers and participating in group discussions provided significant opportunities for legitimate, and at times peripheral, participation for professional practitioners serving as part-time lecturers and examiners. Those who eventually joined the department as full time academics, such as Pat, Majdi and Zaid, brought this

experience with them, together with the priorities and values of professional practice, strengthening the dominant role of professional capital in the field. This cultural capital formed part of their *habitus*. Those academics who had not had this professional experience, such as Neville and Hanlie, arrived in the department with a very different *habitus*.

6.5.4 Learning to judge by marking in teams

The collaborative nature of assessment practice and the resultant discussions in the marking teams played an important role in supporting the process of learning to judge within Department C (Design), both for part time professionals as previously described, and for full time academics. Marking in teams provided an important opportunity for the individual *habitus* to engage with the collective *habitus* in the community of practice. This ethic of collaboration in assessment practice contrasted with the otherwise lonely experience of academics within the department as described by Zaid, Majdi and Frank in section 6.2 of this chapter. James confirmed this experience by his comment that discussion only happened within marking teams, “otherwise you’re on your own”.

As previously described, the teams of markers in design consisted of the academics teaching on the course together with the part-time lecturers and external examiner who were usually practicing professionals. The task of reaching agreement on a mark for each student often involved lengthy discussions, providing opportunities for newcomers to acquire the discourse associated with making judgements about student performance.

*Key learning places I suppose is . . . the process of evaluation and discussion. . . .
What makes it easier here is that it’s a consensus mark and it has to be argued. . . .
People have to motivate why they think a mark should be a certain mark or what is
wrong or what is right about a project . . . then it becomes quite clear. [Pat 186]*

*Evaluation is usually shared, so you learn from other people how that’s done, and
there is a lot of opportunity to question that or agree with that or disagree with that or
to internalise that or to take a different view on that. [Frank 177]*

James described how, within the panels, each examiner made the case for their mark and discussion often went on for a long time until agreement was reached. Frank explained that agreement had to be reached on the “value” of the piece of work. He felt that the final

decision was strengthened through the process of negotiation and reaching consensus and did not regard the fact that everyone experienced the students' work differently as a problem.

One can expect there to be differences of opinion where one is using a sort of value judgement to assess a piece of work holistically. . . . These things are not a problem in my experience because you have to get to consensus to give the mark. So you have to work your way around the issue to find either a compromise or an agreement of some sort. So it's I think quite a good thing that there's a difference of opinion, because it's like a check and balance. [Frank 156]

Majdi acknowledged the value of working alongside experienced academics when marking in teams.

In design . . . there's a tendency to think that it's . . . personal or it's a idiosyncratic kind of thing. . . . I certainly came to understand that there's a lot more rigor to it. . . . The experience in marking with senior staff was really invaluable in that sense. [Majdi 365-367]

Malcolm felt that the collective process reduced the sense of the judgement being "subjective".

The group thing also works because . . . working with design, which is where the subjective let's say could be seen to be stronger, . . . but because you've often got a few people working together on it . . . different people often focus on different things and out of that you get a sort of collective picture. . . . So you are seldom doing the evaluation in complete isolation . . . in fact, you never are. [Malcolm 185-187]

This "collective picture" that emerged during these discussions might be viewed as arising out of the embedded tacit knowledge of assessment practice within the community of practice. Marking in teams provided an important opportunity for newcomers to acquire this knowledge and facilitated the harmonization of the individual *habitus* and the collective *habitus*.

The marking teams also offered some degree of peripherality. In Malcolm's view it was possible for newcomers, whether full time or part time, to "listen into what's going on" until they felt ready to contribute themselves. Frank presented a similar description of how newcomers who "weren't sure" learnt by observing the process.

If you didn't have confidence, you could just listen to how that piece of work was discussed and what judgement was taken. [Frank 183]

In this case study I observed two marking teams, one assessing the first year and the other the second year final design portfolios in the undergraduate programme. There were five members in each team. The teams followed a similar format with each student being called in to answer questions about their portfolio of work. Once the questioning ended, each member of the team made a note of his or her recommended mark for that student. After two or three students, the chair facilitated a discussion around what mark to award each student. There was no explicit list of criteria.

Neville and Pat were members of the first year team chaired by an external examiner, a senior academic from another institution, who had previously lectured Neville. In his interview, Neville described how he learned a great deal by watching this external examiner interact with the students.

He asks . . . leading questions to test students' responses. . . . If they don't understand the significance of the questions he's asking . . . I think that's the most telling moment in the exam. So I think I've learned through watching [him] eke out of the students their level of understanding. [Neville 200]

As convenor of the first year design course, Pat played a prominent role in prompting students and providing background information for the rest of the team. The two part time lecturers, both professional practitioners, were young but had both been teaching part time for several years. The atmosphere was very collegial. In my field notes I wrote:

It seems like a very safe space. External is very supportive of staff. . . . The panel is young with an older mentor figure as external. The power relations are invisible – it seems so relaxed. No one seems threatened by the process. No sign of anxiety. [Field notes, Case C, 14/11/05]

I observed seven students being marked by this team. During this time the initial marks recommended by individual members of the team never varied by more than 10% and agreement on the final mark for each student was reached quickly. In discussion with me, one of the part time professionals commented:

It is amazing how as a newcomer you worry whether you will be out of line. Then it all comes out the same. We all have the same background I suppose. We all think alike. [Field notes, Case C, 14/11/05]

Given the lack of explicit criteria with which to assess these students, this process appears to provide an example of how the *habitus* “produces individual and collective practices” which “guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and the constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54).

The second year design marking team I observed was chaired by Malcolm, with Zaid the only other full time academic present. The external was a young professional practitioner. I observed four students being assessed and noted that Malcolm, as chair and senior academic figure, played a central role in the team.

The external is playing a much more secondary role – is this because he is outside academia – or because of his age and lack of experience? [Field notes, Case C, 17/11/05]

Discussions around the mark took longer than in the case of the first year team. Once again I was struck by the collegial environment and observed these marking teams as opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation in the process of judging student performance, for both new full time academic staff and part time professional practitioners. However, while I was able to witness the collective marking process, I was not in a position to understand fully the nature of the interpersonal relations within the community of practice. Pat admitted that it had initially felt “scary” sitting on a team with her former lecturers.

I was also unable to observe how the particular racial dimensions of the social space within which this study was undertaken played themselves out in the assessment process. This dimension of practice only became apparent in my interview with Zaid.

In his interview, Zaid, as a black academic, highlighted the complexities of learning to judge student performance in the context of a historically white South African university. His experience suggests that issues of race influence both the practice of assessment as well as the process of learning that practice. He described how on a previous occasion he had sided with a black external examiner in opposing what they perceived to be a tendency amongst their

white colleagues of marking black students more leniently than white students. In response they had judged the performance of black students more strictly to balance out the effect of the white members of the team. This can be understood as an example of an individual *habitus* positioning itself in response to the perceived racial bias within the practice of a collective *habitus*.

Afterwards they had raised their concerns openly with the marking team; there had been frank discussion during which their white colleagues had admitted to adopting a more lenient approach to students from “disadvantaged backgrounds”. Zaid expressed strong disapproval of this practice as, in his view, “as part of . . . black responsibility . . . we can’t say it’s okay if it’s not okay, to black students . . . or to anybody”. In confronting his white colleagues he was asserting the identity of a black academic in the South African context in a way that Joe in Department B (Natural Science) was unable to do.

Zaid tried to explain the behaviour of his white colleagues by describing how, given South Africa’s particular history, assessment practice occurred within a “sensitive climate” in which a white person did not want to appear as being “prejudiced against a black person”, and this influenced how they judged the performance of black students. None of the white academics interviewed referred to this difficulty. He argued that this experience had reinforced his view that it was important to have a “representative²⁶” examining and teaching body making these judgements on student performance. His comments echo the arguments underlying the transformation agenda, both at SAU and within South Africa nationally.

6.5.5 Learning through working with senior academics

Collaboration not only happened in the teams of markers formed to assess design, but also amongst colleagues who were assigned to work together on particular courses. The practice in Department C (Design) of assigning a new academic to initially teach on a course with a more experienced academic also played a significant part in facilitating learning how to assess for the newcomer.

When I joined . . . I worked with Malcolm. . . . He was phasing himself out and I was going to take over that course . . . so I could . . . follow his process . . . for two years

²⁶ Representative of the racial profile of the South African population as spelled out in the Employment Equity Act.

*. . . and go through all the cycles of assessment . . . get a sense of how that was done.
. . . He was also very good at saying: "This is how I do this, and this is why". [Frank
112-118]*

As had been observed in Department A (Social Science), the notion of mentoring was vague and usually referred to any occasion where more senior academics took on a support role in respect of new academics. However in Department C (Design), Malcolm's mentoring role in teaching was referred to by several of the interviewees. Malcolm himself commented on how the opportunity to work alongside a range of experienced staff enabled the newcomer to acquire the knowledge distributed within the community of practice.

Zaid taught with me for a while . . . then he taught in other parts. . . . So wherever he's going he's sort of getting pieces of . . . understanding and know-how. [Malcolm 195]

Zaid, while acknowledging the existence of "a power relationship" in working alongside his former lecturer, Malcolm, had particularly valued the opportunity of "marking together" with someone as experienced and had learnt a great deal from working with him.

Malcolm comes with lots of experience, having taught for 30 years, and me being a first time staff member . . . one's learning all the time. . . . I might kind of expect a standard that's too high and I think working with someone experienced at that level helps a lot. [Zaid 46] . . . That's the person I learn the most from for now. [Zaid 295]

On her arrival in the department, Pat found that Stuart, the HOD at the time with whom she had previously worked in practice, had assigned himself as her mentor. In her first year of teaching she co-taught two courses with two experienced lecturers, one of whom was Malcolm. She described the courses as having been well organised, with clear outcomes and where "the way of marking . . . was all very clearly set out". Because Stuart was often away, she arranged for Malcolm to be assigned as her mentor. She remarked that one disadvantage of having had such a supportive environment was that she often felt that much of what she had to do was "predetermined" and she had not been able to bring much of her own focus to it.

Recently though, with the restructuring of the undergraduate curriculum and the departure of some of the older academics, several of the new academics were required to set up the new courses on their own. She referred specifically to Majdi, who she felt had struggled to put his

course together when he arrived, as there had not been a previous course that he could just “take over . . . and re-work”.

As was evident in Department B (Natural Science), newcomers also provided each other with significant support. In this case Majdi had been teamed up with Neville in his first year to manage a design course. Despite both being new, he found that they had provided significant support for each other.

Neville and I . . . did things together all the time so there was a lot of support . . . even though . . . it was a first time for both of us. [Majdi 264] . . . We were both maybe in a similar position, so . . . it was a basis of discussion. . . . The fact that we shared the responsibilities for one year was very good. I am now maybe a lot more confident than I would have been then. [Majdi 291-294]

Hanlie had spent nine years teaching elsewhere before joining SAU three years previously. Like Neville she had no experience of practice and was currently working on her PhD. She often compared her experience of working in the two departments, repeatedly referring to the welcoming and supportive environment that existed for new academics at her previous institution, and expressing concern at the lack of support for newcomers at SAU. She described her previous working environment as one in which junior academics learnt from senior academics. Much of this learning had taken place during discussions in the staff tea room.

I learned to teach at the feet of other people. . . . I would be there just listening to how somebody else . . . were doing it. . . . I used to just sit in on sessions. [Hanlie 121-123]

She felt that through this process she had been well prepared for her role as an assessor of student performance.

I really just think I was prepared well. By the time that I was given the responsibility to assess work, I had in many other instances been forced to articulate my opinions and I'd honed my own interpretation of work and the ability to judge work. [Hanlie 131]

She had experimented with using detailed criteria in judging student work, but had found that all her marks had ended up in “a range between about sixty two and sixty eight”. As a result she just relied on her “experience” and her “knowledge” and expected her colleagues to

accept her “integrity and good judgement”. In her interview she presented a very confident face. When asked to explain the source of this confidence, she replied that it was based on her understanding of the “current practice and theory” of the discipline.

Maybe it will sound very arrogant but I do trust my own opinion because it's not founded only in what I believe, it's founded in the academics of Design. . . . It might be my individual assessment of what somebody has written . . . but . . . it's never personal to the level that it's only my opinion. I can locate it in . . . current practice and theory of Design. [Hanlie 192-193]

6.5.6 Learning to judge theory essays

Unlike the case in Department A (Social Science), where essays were a significant vehicle in preparing students to write research based articles, the theory essays in Department C (Design) did not have an obvious connection with what was valued in the discipline as it did not fit in well with professional practice. As such, the process of marking essays seemed to be quite separate from the main activity within the department and new academics were unable to draw on previous experiences. Majdi drew the distinction between the skills required to “mark” an essay and “review” a design.

[To] mark is different than to review because in essence we have to review our work all the time . . . from student days, and I think we're taught . . . how to appreciate work or how to give work value. [Majdi 367]

He described his first experience of marking a theory essay as “horrible”. He had just completed his Masters thesis at the time and felt that all he had to draw on was what he had learnt in a Masters course.

I've got very limited experience in terms of understanding structure and content . . . and organisation of papers [Majdi 221]. . . . I went through a course in my Masters which essentially went through how to write a paper. . . . So that is what I learnt on. It is in fact all I had. [Majdi 360]

He had asked for advice from other academics and part-time lecturers on how to mark theory essays but had found no agreement on what approach to use.

I was looking for some consistency in the methodology of marking across all the different staff members that were looking after these papers. . . . I was told there was no consistent methodology in marking it. [Majdi 237]

He had obtained useful feedback from the external examiner on the first examination essays he had marked, that he was “too generous” and wasn’t “tough enough on mistakes students were making”. Zaid also reported that positive feedback from an external examiner had helped to build his confidence in marking essays.

Individual members of the department appear to have developed their own criteria to help them with the marking of essays. Zaid had been shown a template used by James that gave details of “different criteria” and had found it “very useful”. He had also been helped to develop criteria for marking essays while working on a course with a part time lecturer.

It was quite a nice working relationship in that we developed certain criteria and tutorials kind of on a mutual basis. When it came down to assessing tutorials we’d always check . . . and get some sense of how we marked to get some evenness across the two groups, and then in the final essays we then developed certain criteria and weights for assessing the essays and that proved useful. [Zaid 41]

In the case of academics following the PhD route into academic life in Department C (Design), learning to judge theory essays appeared to link more naturally with the experience of membership of a research community elsewhere while doing a PhD. In marking an essay, Neville said he looked for “the structure of what you’re trying to say”, and proof that the student “can analyse”. In developing his approach he felt that he drew on his experience of interaction with his supervisor during the process of writing his PhD.

Maybe this is just something that through doing the PhD . . . I was always kind of given those prompts by my supervisor “What’s going on? Why?” [Neville 179]

6.5.7 Discussion

The structuring features of the field in this case study relate to the valuing of professional capital and its close association with teaching. The large number of professional practitioners working part time in the department served to strengthen this relationship. However in ways very similar to that in Department A (Social Science), it also served to reinforce the privileged

position of the more senior academics within the department, giving them time to pursue their private professional practice.

In contrast to the second case study, an analysis of the data revealed a range of support mechanisms for the process of learning to judge student performance.

- a. Significant opportunities for learning through LPP were evident in this case. Opportunities to participate in peer and self assessment activities in relation to Design in the undergraduate curriculum provided a substantial LPP experience for academics-in-training whilst they were still students. For most academics this was followed by a period of part time teaching or external examining of design while working as professional practitioners. This experience provided further opportunities for LPP in relation to assessment within the undergraduate teaching CoP.
- b. The departmental environment “afforded” further opportunities for newly appointed academic to learn through the highly collaborative and public nature of assessment practice in Design. Given the team teaching approach to the design course across all years in the curriculum, all academics had the opportunity to mark in teams and to learn through the “indirect guidance” (Billett, 1999) offered by the opportunities to listen to and observe other workers. Malcolm, as a retired academic teaching part time in the undergraduate programme, played a pivotal role in the informal mentoring of new academics into teaching and in alleviating the limitations caused by the separation of sites of participation of junior and senior academics in the department.

The opportunities for LPP, including the public nature of assessment practice, the extensive discussions around judgements and the collaborative forms of marking, all served to assist with the development of the individual academic *habitus* and its harmonization with a collective *habitus* of the undergraduate teaching CoP.

- c. As was found in Department A (Social Science), interviewees described participation in a series of increasingly complex assessment tasks that can be mapped onto a typical career trajectory. The mapping revealed a relatively structured learning to judge trajectory for design tasks that in some respects was similar to the one described for

academics in Department A (Social Science), in that it could be tracked over a substantial period of time and began while the academic was a student (Figure 15).

Career Trajectory			
Student – on periphery of UG teaching CoP	Professional – on periphery of UG teaching CoP & in professional CoP	Academic – in UG teaching CoP	Academic – in PG teaching CoP & in Professional CoP
Mark design as student; self and peer assessment.	Mark design as Part time design teacher/ext examiner	Mark design at undergrad level	Mark design at post grad level
LPP experience	LPP possible	LPP possible	
		Mark undergrad theory essay	Mark post grad theory essay

Figure 15: The learning to judge trajectory in Department C (Design)

Key: Learning to judge trajectory for design ———→
 Learning to judge trajectory for theory essays→

The experience of learning to judge student performance in theory essays did not appear to develop in the same way. Theory essays seemed not to relate to the professional dimension of the discipline and appeared to align more strongly with the traditional research dimension of academic life as evident in Department A (Social Science). As such, learning to judge essays appeared to lie on a separate trajectory, one that was marginalized within the discipline (Figure 15). Assessment of these tasks only began once one was appointed as an academic, and was usually conducted by academics on their own. However new academics often found support in this learning by the departmental practice of initially assigning new academics to teach theory courses alongside other, sometimes more experienced, academics.

- d. There is significant evidence of an emerging shift in the department in relation to the valuing of research capital. While the dominant mechanisms within the department support the process of harmonization of *habitus* with respect to the traditional relationship with the profession, the increasing focus on research by some academics in Department C (Design) points to a growing research CoP and the possible

emergence of new forms of support for learning to judge student performance in theory essays.

This analysis of the three case studies is followed in Chapter 7 with a discussion of the overall results of the study. In the final chapter, Chapter 8, my conclusions are presented along with a discussion of their implications for the practice of academic staff development.

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Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This study has addressed the question: “How do new academics learn to judge student performance in complex assessment tasks?” A case study approach has been used to investigate how academics learn in three academic departments representing substantially different contexts in terms of the relationships between the communities of practice focussed on teaching, research and the profession.

The capital that formed part of the individual *habitus* that accompanied each new academic on arrival in the department varied significantly across the three case studies. In Department B (Natural Science) new academics arrived with a high level of academic expertise in research, with an expectation from their colleagues that they would be able to research, and teach, on their own. In contrast, in Departments A (Social Science) and C (Design) most new academics were appointed without having obtained a PhD, and in some cases even a Masters degree, and were regarded by their colleagues as being on a developmental path requiring some degree of support, particularly with respect to their research development.

Common to all three cases was the context of higher education in South Africa. The experiences of two new black academics in this study highlight aspects of the relationship between race and assessment practice in South Africa and point to the need for further studies in this area.

At one level, the answer to my research question emerged, across a wide range of the interviews, in the form of two Discourse models; namely, that academics “learn by doing” and that “help is available – all one has to do is ask”. In Chapter 6 it was argued that these Discourse models form part of the collective *habitus* and serve to misrecognise the way in which learning is facilitated, by disguising the distributed nature of the knowledge of practice, reinforcing the view that the responsibility for learning lies with the individual academic and justifying the lack of institutional investment in supporting the learning of new academics.

The key concepts of Lave and Wenger's social learning theory, communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation, while providing valuable tools for analysing the academic workplace, were found to have limited explanatory power in relation to how academics learn in that context. The notion of harmonization of *habitus*, developed from Bourdieu's theory of practice, provides a more comprehensive explanation of how academics develop a "feel for the game" and an understanding of the embedded rules that govern assessment within communities of practice. Learning to judge occurs as part of the process of newcomers developing their academic *habitus* in the field within which a department is situated. Individual academics are positioned and position themselves along a learning to judge trajectory shaped by their particular identity trajectory. In this process, the individual *habitus* was harmonized in relation to the "collective *habitus*" of the communities of practice that formed a key feature of the field, and, to a certain extent, the collective *habitus* adjusted to the concerns and interests that new academics brought with them. The data in this study provided substantial evidence of the former process and only a few examples of the latter, suggesting that the latter process is an area requiring further study.

7.2 The three case studies

By mapping the experiences of judging student performance in key complex assessment tasks onto the typical career trajectory in each case study, a set of "learning to judge" trajectories was identified that formed part of the field associated with each department. The experience of following a learning to judge trajectory was closely associated with the identity trajectory of each individual academic, which was found to depend on three factors; the particular configuration of communities of practice that constitute the field associated with the department, the capital valued within this configuration, and the nature of the capital that the newcomer brings into the department. These "learning to judge" trajectories provide a framework within which the development of an academic *habitus* can be understood.

Learning to judge in Department A (Social Science)

On the surface there appeared to be no support for new academics in their learning to judge student performance in Department A (Social Science). However, the learning to judge

trajectory revealed in this case study was relatively well structured. It began with the process of marking essays as a postgraduate tutor within the department on the periphery of the undergraduate teaching CoP, and extended over several years across a range of increasingly complex assessment tasks to the marking of Masters theses as a full member of the research CoP. This trajectory provided a practical illustration of how the notion of “learning by doing” can in some contexts arise out of an engagement over an extended period of time with a particular “learning curriculum” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that forms part of the field within which an academic department is situated.

Participation in the assessment activities along this trajectory was central to the development of the academic *habitus* in general and to judging student performance in particular. Various mechanisms appeared to support the process of harmonization of the individual *habitus* with the collective *habitus*, including the experience of LPP as a postgraduate tutor, the management of the marking of large classes by tutors, the double marking process of the Honours research paper, and the interaction with colleagues through informal mentorships.

The only opportunity for LPP arose out of support activities for postgraduate tutors in their marking of undergraduate work. These activities provided a safe environment for potential academics to learn how to judge student performance with limited responsibility and no risk to their reputations as academics. For the new and junior academics responsible for managing these support activities, this experience formed an important part of their own learning to judge trajectory.

The marking of the Honours research paper was situated at the boundary of two key communities of practice in this department; namely, the research CoP and the undergraduate teaching CoP. The concept of LPP was of limited value in explaining the nature of learning to judge student performance at this level, as there was no peripherality. Often the reputation of the newcomer was at stake, particularly when significant differences occurred between markers in the double marking process. The negotiations that took place to resolve such differences highlighted the power relations between senior and junior academics. The fear of having to defend one’s mark against that of a more experienced colleague had a significant impact on the process of marking amongst new academics. The dominant experience of new academics at this level was of having to work it out alone, assigning marks in their judgement

of student performance that did not draw attention to themselves, thus requiring them to defend their marking decisions against more senior and experienced colleagues.

The development of confidence in marking the Honours research paper appeared to rely on access to research capital and was facilitated by an academic's increased participation in the research CoP. The collective *habitus* within this context appears to centre on the research CoP. In some cases there was evidence of limited assistance in the development of the individual academic *habitus*, resulting from an informal mentorship relationship with a more senior member of the department.

Given the changing nature of the context in Department A (Social Science), the learning to judge trajectory identified in Chapter 6 is itself susceptible to change. For example, the recent appointment of PhD graduates from elsewhere as lecturers in the department signalled a break from the traditional career trajectory that included substantial LPP in marking essays as post graduate tutors in the department prior to appointment as lecturer while still completing postgraduate studies. A similar study undertaken in a few years time might reveal a significantly different learning to judge trajectory.

The way in which the individual *habitus* of a newcomer impacted on the collective *habitus* was evident in the agency of individuals such as Henrietta, who wished to develop her identity as a teacher as well as a researcher, and sustain her membership of both the undergraduate teaching and research CoPs. Her role in initiating the restructuring of the management of the undergraduate education programme to include greater participation, her rejection of the use of MCQs and her experimentation with alternative forms of assessment were signs of her individual *habitus* impacting on the collective *habitus*. Her actions, and those of others like her, could give rise to an alternative career trajectory, centred on developing expertise in educational development and research. It is uncertain how many academics would be likely to follow such an alternative trajectory and whether it would ever pose a significant challenge to the trajectory associated with the dominance of research capital in the field associated with this department.

Learning to judge in Department B (Natural Science)

In the second case study, on appointment all new academics possessed the necessary research capital, in the form of a PhD and several years of experience of research as a postdoctoral

researcher, for entry into the research CoP, but no experience of teaching. The view of teaching and assessment in Department B (Natural Science) was strongly influenced by the rationality of scientific research. The aim of the teaching programme was to produce skilled researchers so, for example, the Honours research paper, in the form of a journal article, was an artefact of the research community of practice. The ability to judge what constituted a “good” paper was strongly aligned with the ability to judge what constituted “good” research, and it was assumed that, given a new academic’s membership of the research CoP, the making of such judgements would be unproblematic. Teaching capital was not viewed as separate from research capital. The system of marking in this department relied on the development of the appropriate *habitus* prior to arrival in the department through the process of attaining a PhD and gaining research experience as a postdoctoral researcher. The assumption appeared to be that the ability to judge student performance formed part of the development of the research *habitus*.

The view of assessment as an “objective” search for the “right mark” was pervasive. Judging student performance was regarded as an individual and private activity to be conducted independently and in an “unbiased” way. As a result, discussion of student work between markers of the same student was discouraged. In an acknowledgment, however, that the “subjectivity” of markers could not be entirely ruled out, various mechanisms had evolved to cope with cases where markers disagreed about the “right mark”. For example, significant differences in the double marking process were resolved administratively, by appointing an additional marker and by calculating the final mark using the arithmetic average of the marks awarded, often without the knowledge of the supervisor or second marker. This process did not give rise to any significant conversation or feedback about the judgement process, and as a result new academics had to work out what was expected of them on their own.

Not only was there no sign of opportunities for LPP in judging student performance in complex assessment tasks, but new academics were required to mark several such tasks in quick succession during their first year of appointment, a process that was repeated annually. There was no evidence of the kind of learning to judge trajectory over an extended period of time identified in Department A (Social Science). There also appeared to be no explicit mechanisms related to assessment practice that served to harmonize the individual academic *habitus* with the collective *habitus* in relation to teaching.

The initial discomfort evident amongst newly appointed academics, with the lack of agreed criteria for assessing student performance, soon gave way to an acceptance of dependence on individual “gut feel”, secure in the knowledge that the departmental procedures would resolve any difference in ways that would be unlikely to reflect negatively on any individual marker and would not require a defence of their mark. Given the lack of communication and the absence of a need to defend one’s mark, it could be argued that there were no effective mechanisms operating to bring about a harmonization of *habitus* in relation to the judging of student performance in the department. The initial anxiety amongst new academics was replaced by a realization that individuals were left to mark in any way they pleased, but in effect drawing on their *habitus* developed through research, and that mechanisms were in place to ensure an appropriate mark would be awarded the student. The evidence of this case suggests that the “latent function” of the “discourse of practice . . . [was] to protect individual practitioners from criticism and to maximize their autonomy” (Eraut, 2004, p. 266).

The experience of the only black male academic within the department revealed some of the racial dimensions of the academic workplace at SAU and the complex nature of the relationship between the individual *habitus* of a black academic and a collective *habitus* of his white colleagues.

Learning to judge in Department C (Design)

The presence of professional practitioners as part time lecturers and examiners, the use of authentic assessment tasks linked to professional practice throughout the curriculum and the time devoted by senior academics to sustaining their professional practice, were evidence of the valuing of professional capital within Department C (Design). Furthermore, the process of judging student performance in Design was strongly aligned with the process of project evaluation in professional practice.

The dominance of the verbal mode of communication, together with the public nature of the evaluation process, was a unique feature of this context and provided regular access for newcomers to the discourse of making judgements on the performance of others. The practice of working in the profession prior to embarking on an academic career and serving as a part time lecturer or external examiner further supported the process of learning to judge student performance in Design.

The learning to judge trajectory in Department C (Design) bore some resemblance to the one in Department A (Social Science). In both departments the learning to judge trajectory was spread out over an extended period of time, and began with an experience of LPP while still a student.

In Department C (Design) there were several significant opportunities for LPP. Firstly, the experience of the assessment of Design while still a student had a strong formative influence on learning how to judge the performance of others. Secondly, the widespread use of teams of markers and the substantial discussions that occurred within these teams provided opportunities for new academics and part time lecturers to acquire the discourse associated with making judgements with some degree of peripherality. Because of the public nature of much of the assessment, newcomers were often able to observe and listen until they felt ready to contribute.

Putting forward a mark representing a judgement of student performance within a team, and arguing for it until consensus was reached, formed a significant part of the process of harmonization of the individual *habitus* with the collective *habitus*. While newcomers were vulnerable to the power relations in the department in this process, with time they were able to work out how to make judgements in line with those of their colleagues.

The process of learning to judge theory essays appeared to draw on different expertise from that required to judge design projects. Judging essays appeared to be more closely aligned with the development of research expertise through postgraduate qualifications. It also appeared to be dependent on support from others in the form of informal mentoring relationships. The recent appointment of academics without professional expertise, but with significant research capital, suggests the possible emergence of an alternative career trajectory, one that is more comfortable with the process involved in judging performance in theory essays than in design projects. This would suggest that the collective *habitus* in this department might at some point in the future face a challenge from those who represent expertise in research. A way in which this challenge might manifest itself could centre on the demand for the increased importance of the essay or project report within the curriculum.

This case study revealed further challenges faced by new black academics in the development of their academic *habitus*. Zaid experienced the collective *habitus* amongst his white

colleagues in Department C (Design) as having a particular racial bias. He resisted being “harmonized” into this practice by challenging his white colleagues about their judging of black students more leniently than white students. His account highlighted the link between the development of the academic *habitus* at historically white institutions in South Africa and the broader transformation agenda in higher education.

7.3 Limitations of social learning theory

In Chapter 3, I explained my choice of Lave and Wenger’s social learning theory as part of the theoretical framework of this study, and in particular my use of communities of practice and LPP as analytical tools to explore learning in the academic workplace. The three case studies have revealed limitations in the explanatory power of social learning theory centred around three areas; the notion of stability, the opportunities for LPP, and the notion of knowledge being distributed.

The notion of stability

The concept of “field” incorporates the notion that within the *habitus* of those participating in the field, a common understanding of the “rules of the game” evolves over time. A similar assumption of relative stability is implied in the concept of a “community of practice” with its repertoire of “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). What level of continuity and stability, both at an organisational and disciplinary level, is required for communities of practice to establish common understandings amongst participants? What if the levels of change are so high that common agreement is rare, as might happen when two departments and their associated disciplines merge, as in the case of Department B (Natural Science), or when new sub-disciplines emerge out of cross-disciplinary collaborations, or when there is a change in the racial and gender profile of academic staff, or just a moderate turnover of staff?²⁷

The rapid departure of significant numbers of senior academics and the appointment of many new, in some cases, black or female academics, as happened in Department A (Social

²⁷ By the end of this study, four of the 36 academics interviewed had left SAU. (Department A – Cindy and Alan; Department B – Claire and Dash)

Science), could “destabilise” the field and associated communities of practice. Such processes were welcomed by some, such as Johan, as providing the opportunity for newcomers to re-shape the departmental practice, as happened when Henrietta and Julius re-structured the management of the undergraduate education programme to facilitate greater participation.

Department B (Natural Science) represents the case study in which the impact of change was most clearly evident. Formed out of the recent merger of two previously separate scientific disciplines, and the increased participation of women in what had previously been all male disciplines, meant that the practices observed and reported on in interviews were relatively new. Most stories referred to contexts that no longer existed, in which relatively small groups of academics lived, and fought, together. The emergence of systems of rules to manage the larger department represented a significant change from the previous culture of the two smaller departments.

Furthermore the new department encompassed a set of sub-disciplines that were undergoing significant growth and reconfiguration, resulting in the emergence of new areas of expertise and specialization. In some of these areas, the newer academics were more expert than the older ones. These developments at the disciplinary level further served to undermine established forms of seniority within a community of practice, and strengthened the significance of the research group and laboratory as the focal point of expertise.

Significant change was also evident in the relationship of academics to teaching and the profession in the history of Department C (Design). The focus of all academics in the early days of the formation of the department was on establishing a strong and respected educational programme. However, a period of increasing involvement in private professional practice by key senior academics resulted in their gradual disengagement from the undergraduate education programme and in some respects from the administration of the department. At the time of this study, several academics in the department, particularly those who were relatively new, argued for a refocusing of attention on teaching and strengthening the educational programme and a disengagement from the practice of trying to sustain private professional consulting practices.

This study has provided a view of practice at a particular point in time. The change evident in each of the three cases suggests that these practices are dynamic and might look very different in future studies of this kind.

The opportunities for LPP

The evidence in this study suggests that a significant feature of the academic workplace at SAU was that new academics were required to participate fully in the making of judgements on student performance in complex assessment tasks, and their participation at this level was central and had strong legitimacy, with little sign of peripherality as they settled in. As such, the concept of LPP contributed in only a limited way to explaining how learning to judge happened within the academic workplace. It has, however, provided a way of understanding learning at certain points along the typical career trajectory, and the process of academic *habitus* development in certain departmental contexts.

While substantial opportunities for LPP in assessment practice were identified in Departments A (Social Science) and C (Design), most of these occurred prior to appointment as an academic, while a student (Department C), a postgraduate tutor (Department A), or while a professional practitioner serving as a part time lecturer or examiner (Department C). Furthermore these opportunities to learn through LPP were only available to those who followed the typical career trajectory. Within Department C (Design) the public and collaborative nature of assessment practice provided further opportunities for LPP, with academics able to learn through observing and listening to what was “going on”.

Several examples were found of learning having been facilitated by informal “apprenticeships”, where new academics initially were assigned to teach in partnership with older academics, such as Malcolm in Department C (Design), or where individual senior academics, such as Johan in Department A (Social Science) or Malcolm in Department C (Design), took it upon themselves to play a significant mentoring role, albeit informally.

However, in the case of Department B (Natural Science), there was very little evidence of opportunities for LPP, or examples of “apprenticeships” in teaching. Individual lecturers were regarded as being autonomous, separated into labs representing particular disciplinary subfields and specialisations. The lack of any discussion or feedback about marking and the use of administrative procedures and an arithmetic consensus-reaching mechanism to arrive at

a final mark without engagement by the individual markers, meant there were no direct consequences for the individual academic in arriving at a mark. This lack of LPP challenges a central notion of how learning occurs in situated learning theory. This case study reflects a context where there is a reinforcement of Shulman's (1993) "pedagogy of solitude" and a valuing of the individual academic working in isolation rather than in a community.

The notion of knowledge being distributed

One of the assumptions of situated learning theory is that knowledge is distributed within a community of practice. Accordingly the knowledge of how to judge student performance in complex assessment tasks is assumed to reside within the academic community of practice. This study has attempted to answer the question of how academics learn in the academic workplace by exploring the ways in which new academics gain access to and master this knowledge across three different case studies.

But what if, in their interpretation of the notion of academic autonomy, members of a community of practice implicitly accepted the view that academics reach their judgements on their own using their own criteria, and created mechanisms to address difference in ways that did not influence the individual academic's approach to judging student performance, as appeared to be the case in Department B (Natural Science)? In such a case knowledge of assessment would be viewed as belonging to the individual.

As described in Chapter 6, assessment in Department B (Natural Science) was viewed as a private affair, requiring academics to reach independent judgements without influencing each other through discussion. There was little general discussion about assessment criteria in the department; new academics were expected to work out how to judge student performance on their own. The use of double marking was the central mechanism for ensuring reliability in complex assessment tasks and difference in marks was resolved by taking the average rather than by negotiation. A departmental policy that discouraged markers from talking to each other, and an arithmetic solution to variation in assessment judgements, served to align assessment practice with the "scientific method" and views on the need for "objectivity" that dominate disciplines in the Sciences (Handal et al., 1990).

Implicit in this approach is an acceptance that judging student performance can mean different things to different academics. Some might choose to develop agreed criteria with one or two

other colleagues in the department. Others might choose to use criteria from outside the department, from another university or from an institutional staff development workshop. Others might simply choose to work alone, or, in an idiosyncratic way, experiment and innovate from year to year. These academics could live and work alongside each other, secure in the knowledge that a mechanism existed to ensure that each student they marked would be awarded a final result that the department found acceptable. Ironically, it could be argued that this approach, reflecting the practice in Department B (Natural Science), involved an acceptance of what interviewees referred to as the “subjective” nature of assessment practice.

Efforts by new academics to learn how to assess within this context eventually gave way to an acceptance that there was no agreed way of judging student performance within the community, and to a reliance on a very individual approach, or simply a “gut feel”. As such, this case study reflects a context where the knowledge of judging student performance resided with the individual academic rather than the community.

Assessment practice in Department A (Social Science) displayed similar features to that in Department B (Natural Science), with a reliance on double marking of complex assessment tasks and little opportunity to discuss the process, although such discussion was not discouraged. Where disagreement in marks was slight, the average was also used. However, in cases of more substantial difference, a third marker was appointed and allowance made for some level of negotiation between markers before arriving at a final mark. There appeared to be more, albeit limited, open acknowledgement than in Department B (Natural Science) that the process of assessment at this level was “subjective” and that some of these negotiations occurred within the context of ideological differences in the department.

In both Departments A (Social Science) and B (Natural Science) the external examiner was an academic from the same discipline at another university whose role as an “impartial” assessor was to strengthen the “objectivity” of the assessment exercise. In both cases the capital most valued in the process was that gained from experience in research, and the alignment of complex assessment tasks was with research activities and its most valued product, the journal article. The judging of student performance appeared to be guided by knowledge and experience gained from reading, reviewing and producing such articles.

In contrast, assessment practice in Department C (Design) had a strong public aspect, involving individual students presenting and defending their designs to teams of markers who negotiated a consensus mark amongst themselves, with several broadly defined and commonly agreed criteria forming the basis of such judgements. In this case knowledge of assessment could be regarded as being distributed amongst the community of practice. The public assessment process involving the use of professional practitioners as assessors alongside academics was strongly aligned with the practice of evaluating projects in the profession producing a strong sense of authenticity. It was only through extended exposure to professional practice that the knowledge being valued could be understood. As a result students, and in some cases new academics, were not always clear as to how the final mark was reached.

7.4 Agency and the collective *habitus*.

Across all three case studies there was some evidence of new academics asserting their agency with respect to teaching and potentially impacting on the collective *habitus*. It appeared that the separation of junior and senior academics in Departments A (Natural Science) and C (Design) facilitated opportunities for the junior academics to exercise their own agency in reshaping the practice with respect to teaching. In Department A (Social Science) Henrietta and Julius established a committee to manage undergraduate education and engaged in innovative teaching practice indicating that they had substantial freedom to shape the teaching practices within the department. Similarly, in Department C (Design), Frank had taken the initiative in the management of the undergraduate teaching programme committee. All three drew on input from outside of the department in helping them tackle these initiatives. Frank took a Masters course on teaching, while Henrietta and Julius participated in a regular faculty-based education forum. In these instances, Henrietta, Julius and Frank sought membership of a broader community of practice that transcended departmental boundaries within SAU and centred on the development of the scholarship of teaching and learning. At a different level, there was also the initiative by Mel and Carl in Department B (Natural Science) to introduce the rule-based systems that governed assessment practice at the Honours level.

The study also revealed the potential for the new generation of black academics at SAU to assert their agency with respect to practices they find within their departments and the institution. Zaid's action in confronting his white colleagues about their practice of marking black students more leniently than white students in Department C (Design), a department with significant numbers of black academics, contrasts with Joe's identification with the perceptions of racism of black students in Department B (Natural Science) and his inability as a new academic, and one of only two black academics in the department, to raise his concerns with his colleagues. These contrasting reactions illustrate the complexities of the situation facing new black academics in higher education in South Africa and suggest this as an area requiring further study. However, the efforts of the newcomers have the potential to affect the collective *habitus*, and, in some cases, cause changes that might facilitate the harmonization process by helping the collective *habitus* to adjust to the concerns and interests of new academics.

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Chapter 8: Conclusion

From the multidimensional data, we have constructed the best interpretation we could of their professional lives and learning. However these constructed stories are ours, not theirs. . . . We have presented . . . an authentic, supported and plausible way of understanding parts of their identities, as they relate to learning.

(Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004b, p. 169)

8.1 Learning in the academic workplace

One of the substantial findings of this study is the significance of context in understanding learning in the academic workplace. The significant variation in configurations of communities of practice, career and identity trajectories across the three case studies emphasises the importance of understanding the field in order to understand learning in the field. The significance of context was further emphasised by the way social and disciplinary factors were found to shape assessment practice and the kinds of judgements newcomers were required to make. The alignment of assessment practices with particular forms of capital, such as research capital in the case of Departments A (Social Science) and B (Natural Science) and professional capital in Department C (Design), are important considerations in understanding the ease, or difficulty, some new academics experience in learning to judge student performance.

Situated learning theory alone, and its concept of LPP, was unable to fully explain the processes by which new academics learn how to judge student performance in the academic workplace. In two of the case studies, the key experience of LPP within the career trajectory occurred prior to appointment as an academic. While these experiences were important in themselves, they did not explain how learning continued within the academic workplace after appointment. In Department C (Design), however, several ongoing opportunities for LPP were evident within the department, arising out of the public and collective nature of the marking process throughout the curriculum.

I have argued that learning to judge student performance in the academic workplace occurs as part of the process of the development of the academic *habitus* within the newcomer and its harmonization with the collective *habitus* of the communities of practice within the department. Opportunities for such harmonization, including opportunities for LPP, depend to a large extent on the particular sequence of activities that make up what I have called the learning to judge trajectories within the departments concerned. The idea that learning in the academic workplace follows a particular trajectory, or “learning curriculum” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), challenges the view that workplace learning is unstructured, serendipitous and characterised by informal “learning by doing”. In two of the case studies, relatively structured “paradigmatic” learning to judge trajectories were identified, that, along with the particular configuration of communities of practice, formed a significant feature of the field within which the particular department was situated. It is the experience of these learning to judge trajectories that forms a key part of the collective *habitus*. It forms the basis of the contextual experience of assessment practice.

Identifying the ‘paradigmatic’ learning to judge trajectory, as well as the alternative trajectories, helped to surface some of the underlying assumptions about how academics learn in particular departmental contexts. For example, in Department A (Social Science) it was assumed that all new academics learn to judge student performance through LPP in assessment practice while tutoring as a post graduate student. Similarly, in Department C (Design), knowledge of and experience of learning to judge firstly as a student, and then as a professional practitioner was assumed of all new academics. However, these assumptions did not hold true for all new academics in these departments.

Within each context the study revealed the central role played by relationships between colleagues and opportunities for conversations in facilitating learning in the academic workplace. For example, in making judgements about student performance in Department C (Design), newcomers needed to engage with the process of collective consensus reaching through conversation, while in Department B (Natural Science), and to a lesser extent in Department A (Social Science), new academics needed to learn to make judgements about student performance entirely on their own.

Signs of growing confidence in one’s assessment practice signal the development of an academic *habitus* that “fits” into the field. The basis of the confidence that emerged in the

case studies can be interpreted in two different ways. There was the confidence that one was beginning to make the “right” judgements, usually articulated as feeling comfortable to use one’s “gut feel” and still be able to defend one’s decision. This confidence appeared to grow through increased engagement with the activity of assessment and through the process of establishing relationships with colleagues, both within the department, and externally with examiners or staff development practitioners, that provided opportunities to have conversations about the judgement process and get feedback on one’s practice. But there was also the development of a different kind of confidence, one based on an increasing sense that one understood how to “play the game” and knew how to make the kinds of decisions that would not require justification or would not lead to possible confrontation with one’s colleagues. The development of confidence, based on either of the above interpretations, indicated the maturing of the newcomer’s academic *habitus* and its growing harmonization with the collective *habitus*.

The use of the concept of harmonization has its limitations, as it implies a one way accommodation, with the *habitus* of the newcomer fitting in with the collective *habitus*. While this appeared to be the dominant experience across the three case studies, there were a few examples of harmonization in the other direction; namely, of the collective *habitus* having to accommodate the *habitus* of the new academic. The actions of individual academics in their particular forms of help seeking behaviour, or their responses to their concerns about the transformation process, student learning or the mentoring of their colleagues, provided examples of ways in which the individual *habitus* impacted on the collective *habitus*.

8.2 Implications for practice

In the first chapter of this thesis I stated that I wished this study to contribute to an improved understanding of how new academics learn to be effective in their roles as educators in higher education in South Africa. I also indicated that I wished the findings to be of use to those who, like me, bear some of the institutional responsibility for developing systems of support for academics in the development of their teaching and assessment practice.

The impact of the two Discourse models, that serve to locate the responsibility for learning within the individual academic, and “misrecognise” the distributed nature of the knowledge about teaching in the academic workplace, has implications for academic staff development programmes. The effect of these models needs to be confronted as they downplay the importance of facilitating opportunities to learn in the workplace and in this way justify the low levels of institutional investment in academic staff development related to teaching.

However, within South Africa, following trends elsewhere in the world, there is an increasing demand that higher education institutions provide support for academics in the development of their teaching and assessment abilities. This study has provided evidence of the importance of the departmental and disciplinary contexts in the design and development of such systems of support. As such the findings support the argument that

. . . to ignore disciplinary differentiation – a seemingly inevitable tendency in institution wide assessment regulations – may serve seriously to undermine the main learning outcomes and intrinsic requirements for effective educational programmes in particular knowledge areas. (Neumann et al., 2002, p. 414)

Strategies adopted by academic staff development practitioners need to be sensitive to the complex and context dependent nature of the process of learning to judge student performance. This study has revealed the importance of understanding the nature of the academic workplace in terms of the particular configuration of communities of practice in relation to research, teaching and the profession, the range of identity trajectories available to academics and the learning to judge trajectories that form part of the collective *habitus*.

Any programme of support to develop assessment practice needs to recognise that learning to judge in the academic workplace involves the development of confidence to make use of or create opportunities to learn rather than the mastering of techniques of assessment. There needs to be an understanding of the highly contextual nature of assessment practice in terms of disciplines and the dependence of opportunities to learn on relationships within the departmental communities.

One of the main objectives of an academic staff development initiative should be to provide opportunities for new academics to access the knowledge about teaching and assessment embedded within their own communities of practice through the engagement of the individual

habitus with the collective *habitus*. There would appear to be little point in sending individuals off for “training” in assessment outside of the department without providing ways for such “external” learning to be incorporated into the conversations and activities within the departmental communities of practice. The experience of Joe and Jane in Department B (Natural Science) on the Academic Staff Induction (ASI) programme points to the need for such external staff development initiatives to address ways of facilitating such conversations. Where conversations already take place, such as within the marking teams in Department C (Design), such initiatives need to strengthen ways in which these conversations help newcomers to gain access to the embedded knowledge of assessment.

An important starting point would be for academic staff development practitioners, in partnership with academics in the departments concerned, to identify and make explicit the range of learning to judge trajectories available within particular disciplinary fields. Following on this, together they need to develop ways of both supporting and supplementing the opportunities for engagement of new academics in the assessment process along these trajectories, and to address the obstacles and challenges that new academics face in judging student performance in the increasingly complex assessment tasks.

A second strategy would be to find ways to facilitate relationships between new academics and more senior academics within the department that specifically support the development of teaching and assessment. Examples of approaches that arise out of the cases in this study include:

- Identifying and addressing ways in which the configuration of communities of practice within a department reinforces a separation of the sites of practice between junior and senior academics and makes it difficult for newcomers to gain access to the distributed knowledge of assessment practice.
- Promoting and supporting the assignment of new and more senior academic staff to work in collaborative teams that are conceptualised and structured to facilitate learning within the community of practice, rather than to simply share out the teaching or marking load or bring together diverse disciplinary expertise.
- Strengthening the informal systems of mentoring by developing a clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities and providing support for senior academics in their roles as mentors.

- Promoting the use of key concepts in assessment, such as assessment criteria, in the conversations within departmental communities so that academics can develop a common language with which to discuss assessment practice and enabling them to draw on conversations across a range of boundaries, including external training opportunities and assessment documentation from other educational institutions.

The emphasis needs to be on creating learning communities rather than simply providing opportunities for individuals to learn. As such, the findings of this study strongly support the position that

. . . there is a danger in putting too much faith in the strengthening of the processes of individual socialisation. Agreed, good mentoring, and induction routines are desirable, but they are most potent within activity systems, such as departments, that constitute professional communities and which are sites of professional learning. (Knight & Trowler, 1999, p. 24)

This position requires that academic staff development programmes facilitate engagement by enabling conversations within departmental communities of practice, and by helping to make explicit the embedded knowledge of assessment practice for analysis and critical appraisal.

While acknowledging the effect of power relations within these communities, a central contribution to the learning of new academics would be to strengthen the frequency and nature of conversations about assessment practice that occur along the learning to judge trajectory in the context of both the private and public notions of assessment within the departmental communities of practice. This can only happen through a partnership between institutional academic staff development practitioners and the disciplinary communities themselves.

8.3 Conclusion

There is at present contestation as to who should bear the major responsibility for ensuring that new academics are adequately supported in their introduction to the complex nature of the academic workplace and the development of their professional learning. There is also contestation as to what form this support should take, in particular with respect to facilitating learning in relation to the teaching aspects of academic work.

This study has pointed to the need for such support to facilitate mechanisms for the harmonization of the academic *habitus* of the newcomers with the collective *habitus* of the communities of practice of the academic department. This involves not only an alignment of the *habitus* of new academics with the collective *habitus*, but also a supporting of new academics in their challenging of the collective *habitus* and a supporting of the departmental communities of practice in adjusting their collective *habitus*. This requires a focus on supporting relationships within communities of practice that encourage conversations and the sharing of understandings and negotiations around the taken for granted distributed knowledge. The aim needs to be the improvement of the quality of the overall experience of the academic workplace within the department. Working within a department in such a way would ensure that all academics in the workplace participate and contribute towards the development of practice, rather than just those who choose to attend external staff development opportunities.

While the issue of resourcing and rewarding such development needs to be addressed at an institutional level, the highly contextual nature of the development of the appropriate teaching and assessment abilities suggests that the responsibility for such an approach must lie with the academic leadership at the departmental level. However, HODs are themselves products of the field they bear responsibility for, and therefore may themselves need support in conceptualising new ways of leading, particularly with respect to teaching and learning in the changing field of higher education in South Africa.

Furthermore, the effect of the transformation process in higher education in South Africa is likely to involve the appointment of increasing numbers of new academics who do not have the matching forms of cultural capital valued by the fields within which their specific

departments and disciplines are situated. The recognition and valuing of the forms of capital that new academics bring needs to form part of a strategy that aids the collective *habitus* in its adjustment to these new academics.

This study represents the kind of research that can help reveal some of the complexities underlying current practice, and point to ways of enhancing professional learning. The interpretation of its results, and the application to practice, needs to evolve from a dialogue between academic staff development practitioners and members of the academic communities of practice. It is hoped that this research will contribute to such a dialogue.

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Appendix 1: Departmental statistics for the case studies

	Dept A (Social Science)	Dept B (Natural Science)	Dept C (Design)
Year of study/data	2004	2005	2006
STAFF			
Full-time academics	29	16	10
Full-time academics with PhDs	14 (46%)	16 (100%)	1 (10%)
Black academics	7 (24%)	2 ²⁸ (13%)	4 (40%)
Female academics	9 (39%)	8 (50%)	2 (20%)
Part-time lecturers /tutors	Many, including postgraduate tutors	None	Many professional Practitioners
STUDENTS	2004*	2005	2006
Undergraduates (1 st yr)	1489	Not Applicable	63
Undergraduates (2 nd yr)	1350	201	62
Undergraduates (3 rd yr)	475	96	59
Postgrads (Honours)	156	27	Not Applicable
Postgrads (Masters)	61	48	58#
Postgrads (PhD)	26	35	1

* Student numbers in 1st to 3rd years taken as the largest class registered in the department in that year.

Fifty-five students were registered across two years of a structured Masters-level programme and three for a Masters by dissertation only.

²⁸ I interviewed three black academics, one of whom, Dash had already resigned.

Appendix 2: Overview of the interview data set

A) Key features of the interview data set in each case study

Interviews	Dept A (Social Science)	Dept B (Natural Science)	Dept C (Design)
Selection of interviews	Purposive sampling to ensure diverse perspectives, gender, race, length of service	Whole department approached – interviewed all those who agreed and responded to emails	Whole department approached – interviewed all those who agreed and responded to emails
Number of interviews	8 full time academics (out of 29) and 2 postgraduate tutors.	13 full time academics (out of 16)	9 full time academics (out of 10) and 1 retired part time academic.
Female academics	2 out of 9 (Cindy & Henrietta)	All 8 females in dept	Both females in dept. (Pat & Hanlie)
Black academics	2 out of 7 (Cindy & Julius)	All black academics in dept. (Joe, Clara, Dash (left dept))	All black academics in dept. (Zaid, Majdi, Roger & Pat)
Post grad tutors	Peter (WM) Patrick (WM)	Not applicable	Not applicable

B) Teaching experience of interviewees in each case study

Teaching Experience	Dept A (Social Science)	Dept B (Natural Science)	Dept C (Design)
New academics 2 yrs or less	Braam* (WM) Cindy (BF)	Joe (BM) Jane ⁺ (WF)	Majdi (BM) Zaid (BM)
More than 2 but less than 10 yrs	Alan (WM) Julius (BM) Henrietta ⁺ (WF)	Clara (BF) Claire ⁺ (WF) Peter (WM) Marge (WF) Dash ⁺ (BM)	Pat (BF) Frank (WM) Neville ⁺ (WM)
10 yrs and more	Johan ⁺ (WM-ex HOD) Bob (WM-HOD) Mark ⁺ (WM)	Carl (WM) Paula ⁺ (WF –HOD) Mel* (WF – ex HOD) Max (WM) Tamara (WF) Monica ⁺ (WF)	Roger (BM – HOD) Stuart ⁺ (WM – ex HOD) James (WM) Hanlie ⁺ (WF) Malcolm ⁺ (WM – part-time)

* a graduate from SAU in different discipline

+ not a graduate from SAU

BM – black male

BF – black female

WM – white male

WF – white female

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