

Chapter 5

Establishing a Community of Practice of Leading African Scholars in Mathematics Education: The Significant Contribution of Prof. Jill Adler

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Introduction

Jill Adler began supervision of her first cohort of doctoral and postdoctoral students in 1998 at Wits University. In this endeavour she did not proceed with the supervision of six individual students but rather with the establishment of a supportive community of practice in which students actively engaged and participated. Most importantly she navigated ways for the activities within the community of practice to support the development of research trajectories that imagined themselves as African leaders making their mark on the local, African and international landscape and contributing to the many challenges faced by mathematics educators and learners. She inducted us into becoming researchers with a focus on making a contribution to the landscape we researched in.

While many African mathematics education researchers have completed their Ph.D.s and postdoctoral studies at institutions outside the country Prof. Adler's leadership allowed for African mathematics education research to be grounded in an African community of scholars and this grounding provided our research with a powerful edge that our stories, included in this chapter, will point towards. She however made sure that this local grounding was supplemented by international opportunities to work with leading academics in institutions around the world for periods of time and drew on Prof. Stephen Lerman as a key advisor and several other international visiting professors to our research community of practice.

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Prior to 1998 the number of mathematics education doctoral graduates from South African universities was extremely low. This extreme shortage in doctoral level academics in the field not only affected the quality of research and research publications in the field but also inevitably impacted on the mathematics teacher education community in Higher Education institutions in the country. Growing a strong community of mathematics teacher educators, academics and researchers was of national and regional importance.

Supervision styles differ. We have come to realize over time that there are supervisors who expect competence from their students (i.e. meeting the basic requirements) and those who expect and support students in attaining excellence, going beyond the basic requirements, to contributing substantially to the field and the community of educators and researchers. Jill's supervision style clearly falls into the latter and external examiner reports of her students' Ph.D. theses bear testimony to this. For example, examiners consistently pointed to excellence and innovation. For example, comments pointed to theses being among 'the best doctoral dissertations' read and those that extended under researched areas, such as multilingualism in South African classroom practice, 'in such a brilliant way' that enabled reconstruction of interpretations in the field in 'substantial ways'.

Having read through the 'notes of thanks' written to Jill for her supervision in several of Jill's Ph.D. students' theses over the past 20 years we note the following recurring themes:

Theme
Unfailing patience
Strong encouragement and faith in students ability to work independently and to choose their own path
Creating opportunities for working with a wide range of experts in the field
Humility and warmth
Critical insights and especially in relation to the complexities of the South African/African context coupled with pragmatic advice
Genuine interest and development of broader professional being
Excellent listener and detailed reading of student's work

Some examples of the above themes in the words of the students include:

Thank you for your:

- 'unfailing patience';
- 'enthusiasm and confidence in the value of this research';
- 'critical and insightful comments';
- 'expertise humility and warmth';
- 'insights into classroom practice in South Africa proved invaluable to my understanding of the complexity of conducting curriculum research in rural schools';
- patience to allow the foci to emerge, the independence to choose my own theoretical and analytic tools. . .and your carefully considered insights and pragmatic advice';

‘[enabling the] privilege of meeting wonderfully interesting lecturers and researchers . . .’

To illuminate and provide a thicker richer description of these themes we reflect on our own stories as students in Jill’s first cohort of doctoral students (beginning our studies in 1998 and graduating in 2002). We use Wenger’s (1998) framework of communities of practice to analyse these stories and the critical contribution of Jill’s ‘way of being’ and her style of induction into broader overlapping communities of practice, which enabled strong active and centrally participating career trajectories to develop for each of us. We know that many other students can tell stories which will differ as to the specifics of the studies, and the individuality of the student. However, our experience of our continuing engagement with Jill’s many other Ph.D. graduates, as colleagues in the field of Mathematics Education, leads us to argue that the themes emerging from those stories would be similar to those we discuss in this paper.

Reflecting on Communities of Practice as a Means of Reflecting on Our Stories

Jill’s own Ph.D. (Adler, 1996) and subsequent academic work (e.g. Adler, 1998) drew strongly on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of learning and later on Wenger (1998). She embraced this theory in her own teaching/supervision thus exemplifying key aspects of it in her lecturing and supervision practice.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is located in the process of co-participation and not in the heads of individuals; not located in the acquisition of structure but in the increased access of learners to participation, and it is an interactive process in which learners perform various roles. They prioritize the importance of participation in the practices of a community and identity as primary features of learning:

As an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities—it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person. . . Learning thus implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations. . . learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership. (p. 53)

In fact, we have argued that, from the perspective we have developed here, learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: They are aspects of the same phenomenon. (p. 115)

Since participation in the practices of a community is essential for the development of identity (and therefore of learning) they refine the notion of community for the purposes of learning and define a ‘community of practice’ as follows:

A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it

provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning. (p. 98)

Following from this definition it is clear for us that Jill's cohort of Ph.D. students was a community of practice. We met regularly as a research group, with the common purpose of furthering and strengthening our research, and our engagement overlapped with various other national and international education, mathematics education and research focused communities of practice.

For Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) learning is not located in the acquisition of structure but in increased access of learners to participating roles in expert performances. Thus the notion of access to engaging with members of the community is central in relation to a community of practice. Indeed, as we will see in the stories that follow access to both high quality resources (including leading members of research communities) and opportunities for us to participate in roles of expert performance (such as conference presentations and publications) was a priority for Jill in the supervision of her students.

Wenger (1998) relates communities of practice to the learning components of meaning, practice, community and identity as follows:

On the one hand, a community of practice is a living context that can give newcomers access to competence and also invite a personal experience of engagement by which to incorporate that competence into an identity of participation. On the other hand, a well functioning community of practice is a good context to explore radically new insights without becoming fools or stuck in some dead end. A history of mutual engagement around a joint enterprise is an ideal context for this kind of leading-edge learning, which requires a strong bond of communal competence along with a deep respect for the particularity of experience. When these conditions are in place, communities of practice are a privileged locus for the creation of knowledge. (p. 214)

The range of many local and international peer reviewed journal publications authored with Jill (e.g. Adler, Pournara, & Graven, 2000; Setati & Adler, 2000) and alone (e.g. Graven, 2002; Nyabanyaba, 1999; Reed, Davis, & Nyabanyaba, 2002; Graven, 2005a; Setati, 2005a; 2005b), both during and following our doctoral studies, is a clear indication that indeed this community of practice that Jill created was a 'privileged locus for the *creation* of knowledge'. Jill encouraged us to share our research in local conference communities and in locally respected journals so as to positively influence and move the field of research forward in our own context. However she also encouraged us to share our work with international communities through conference presentations and publishing in leading journals such as *Educational Studies in Mathematics* and the *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* (e.g. Graven, 2004; Setati, 2005a) where she supported us to make our African research both visible and influential. The influence of this research is visible in the over 700 citations that the publications in this paragraph have attracted to date.

Wenger (1998, p.5) identifies four components of learning namely: meaning, practice, community and identity. These components of learning are defined as follows:

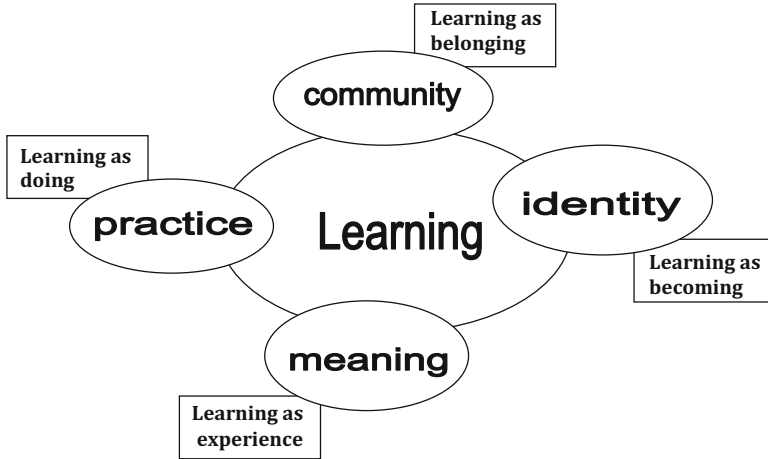


Fig. 5.1 Components of a social theory of learning: an initial inventory

1. Meaning is a way of talking about our ability to experience the world as meaningful
2. Practice is a way of talking about shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that sustain mutual engagement in action
3. Community is a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprise is defined and our participation is recognizable as competence
4. Identity is a way of talking about how learning changes who we are

These four components together provide a structuring framework for a social theory of learning. Wenger (1998, p. 5) summarizes this framework in Fig. 5.1.

Jill's supervision style enabled each of these components to develop strongly and we will refer back to these as we reflect on our stories.

Narrative Vignettes

In the words of Sfard and Prusak (2005, p. 20) what follows is our 'story about stories'. Kgethi's reflections and story:

I have had a relationship with Jill since 1989 when I first came to Wits to study towards an Honours degree. That was during apartheid and black students were very few at Wits. In fact I was the only black African woman in our class of about ten students, two of whom were black men. Then I admired her as a teacher, how she interacted with her students and how she cared without the usual patronization that we used to experience from many

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white South Africans. So I was drawn to her and so when she approached me in 1992 to collect data for her Ph.D. research in my Grade 11 mathematics class in Mohlakeng township in Randfontein, I agreed without hesitation despite the political challenges of the time. During the year 1992—2 years after Nelson Mandela was released from prison—black townships were not very friendly to white people. There was still anger and several of my students were members of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) and so the notice board at the back of my mathematics class had APLA written all over. However given who Jill is, her history of political activism and the manner in which she interacted with people, I had no doubt that my students would accept having her in our class. I did not even have to discuss all these complexities with Jill and she managed well and my students followed her everyday after her recording and helped her carry her video-recording equipment to the car. Jill's way of working inspired me so much that I used to travel about 140 km from Mohlakeng to Johannesburg to meet with other teachers in whose classrooms Jill had also collected data to discuss our lessons. This is how my love for research into mathematics teaching started—with Jill's research into my mathematics teaching.

Jill never pursued me to do my masters degree under her supervision, others did, but I chose her. I had developed a keen interest in the relationship between language and mathematics and what it means to teach mathematics in multilingual classrooms. So my Masters research focused on the use of code-switching in a multilingual mathematics class of Grade 4 learners. Jill's expertise as a supervisor came through for me during the Masters research, which introduced me to the international community. My first publication in an international journal as well as my first invitation to give a plenary lecture outside South Africa came out of this work.

When it comes to mentoring Jill is a master, she knows how to be a strong support without being visible. This is what made her ideal for me as a Ph.D. supervisor. My Ph.D. research was a follow-up from my masters, exploring language practices of intermediate phase mathematics teachers in multilingual classrooms. It started with Jill encouraging me to apply for the Presidential Educational Initiative grant, which I won and it powered the start of my Ph.D. in 1998. While there was an intersection between her research and mine she made sure to keep the two separate. With Jill supervision was not just about getting a degree but about developing a career. She made opportunities available and supported us to pursue them. Of course she never forced anyone to participate but she prepared the ground very well for those who wanted to participate and benefit from the opportunities. She introduced us to the international community in a very special way. Not only did she invite top scholars to come and work with us at Wits, she also had briefing sessions with us when we went to conferences. We looked at the programme and identified

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the people we wanted to meet with and when we got to the conference she would introduce you and move away. She allowed you the student to take the relationship forward without her interference. It is Jill who introduced me to David Pimm, Robyn Zevenbergen, Candia Morgan and Ole Skovesmose among many. When she received invitations from others, which she could not take because she was too busy she passed them onto her students. This is how I got to meet with Richard Barwell who had written to Jill to start an international group on multilingual mathematics education. At the time Richard was like me completing his Ph.D. and so when Jill referred him to me it was just what I needed—a collaborator who was at the same stage of career as I was. While it may be argued that Richard and I would have met anyway given the focus of our research, the truth is that the timing of our meeting was crucial and it has served both our careers very well. Thanks to Jill!

One of the most profound things that she said to me during my Ph.D. studies, which has stuck with me till today, is that when I finish the Ph.D. she will have done a good job if I know more than she does. So when I decided that I would like to go and work with Jim Gee at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for a while during my Ph.D. because I wanted to use Discourse analysis to analyse my data, she encouraged and supported me. When I came back from Wisconsin-Madison she treated me like I was the discourse analysis expert in the group. Of course she did that with each of the students—each one of us had an area, which we were experts in and could introduce the rest of the group to.

Ph.D.s are spoken about as a very lonely period where one works alone and occasionally gets to meet with one's supervisor. This was not the case with us because Jill set up a community of practice that met regularly. During the meetings we got to engage closely with one another's work. Jill set up a programme/time table, which indicated when workshops would happen and then 'in camera' supervision meetings in which she and Stephen Lerman would engage with the student's work. Students went in twos and that is how I got to learn what questions to ask during supervision. It was not surprising that when I visited the University of Wisconsin as a Ph.D. scholar some of the doctoral students thought I was a professor—this was all as a result of the training I had received here at home with Jill.

Co-authoring academic papers with Jill was another instructive experience. She never positioned herself as the knowledgeable other whose voice is the only one that should be heard in the paper. She backed off and oftentimes allowed the student to lead the writing and when that happened she allowed the student to be the first author. It is due to this way of working that it was not difficult to work with her as a colleague after completion of our Ph.D.s. Of course it is important to note that before 2002 Jill was one of only two

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mathematics education researchers at Wits with a Ph.D. and the only one with an NRF rating. After 2002 the community grew and Wits became known as the leader in mathematics education in South Africa.

I got more than a Ph.D. from Jill, I got a career in academia. Truth is that before working with Jill I had no idea what academia was about and I had never considered it as a possibility. Academia was an unthinkable for me. However, on that cold night in June 2002 when I ascended the stage to graduate with a Ph.D. I was not only getting a degree, it was the beginning of a career—I already had publications in international journals and had co-authored two chapters in an edited volume. Jill modelled what it means to be an academic—her knowledge of the field was always current, she worked long hours, won research grants and used them to support her students, led large successful research teams, collaborated with peers, presented papers at conferences and published her work. That I obtained a C1 NRF rating¹ three years after obtaining my Ph.D. is largely due to the quality of the mentoring I got, the research I did during my Ph.D., where I published it and the collaborative relationships I had developed internationally. I now have a B2 NRF rating and I know for sure it is all because of the excellent foundation I got through Jill’s mentoring.

While I was a Ph.D. student I also watched how she navigated office politics. I can still hear her voice when she called me into her office every time I got worked up and angry. She would say, ‘Is this how you want to be known? You have so much to offer, you are so good and this is not how you should want people here to know you for’. The words still ring in my head whenever I get worked up at work in my current position.

Mellony’s reflections and story:

My supervisory/mentee relationship with Jill has been enormously influential across my career and studies. I began my doctoral studies under her supervision in 1998 with little experience of empirical research and only superficial analysis of simplistic ‘impact type’ data on my development work. This pointed largely to the failure of in-service workshops enabling change. Jill pushed me to delve much deeper into the complex issues at play both in my research and in the development work that I was conducting.

Jill’s supervision style involved regular supportive meetings where she would engage with my writing and ideas and ask probing questions. She brought

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¹A C1 NRF rating indicates that one is an established researcher with some international recognition.

with her a depth and breadth of experience of working with leading international educators and kept us up to date with all the latest work and trends in our field. She also brought leading members of the international community to engage with our cohort of Ph.D. students. So, for example, during our doctoral studies Stephen Lerman, Christine Keitel, John Mason, Candia Morgan, among others, all provided seminar sessions focused on aspects of our research and provided us each with individual time to engage with them on our particular research grappings. We also were encouraged to socialize with them in evening functions that Jill would arrange. She further arranged, through spearheading funded research collaborations (enabled by joint NSTF-NRF and British Council-NRF partnerships), for each of us to visit with relevant leading academics in their institutions. So, for example, I had the privilege of working with Stephen Lerman at South Bank University and Ken Zeichner of University of Wisconsin Madison at their institutions for a month at a time both during and after my Ph.D. This enabled a powerful supportive space for publishing articles both during and post the Ph.D. Jill also supported and encouraged us to attend key national and international conferences and always provided input to our papers and presentations prior to conferences. She was always encouraging and her ability to articulate clearly what one was contributing helped to build my confidence. She also drew on our feedback for her own writing which gave us the opportunity to learn from her process of writing and also to reciprocate the relationship of providing critical constructive feedback. This too had an enormous confidence building effect on our work but also enabled a sense of a two-way relationship where we both were learning from our relationship. While she led me into the journey—she did so in a way that developed my confidence, constantly reminding me that I was the expert on my doctoral topic and that I must remain mindful on this while I draw on her insights and experience. At conferences Jill would make a special effort to introduce me to key mathematics educators in the field especially those related to my work. She would explicitly ask me whom I wanted to meet so that she could introduce me to them. In this way I became inducted to the broader national and international community and Jill's warmth, relaxed and fun-loving way of interacting with scholars in the community enabled me to participate 'centrally' rather than peripherally. A strong sense of my belonging in national and international mathematics education communities developed. The significance of this was critically important—particularly because I had always felt that I did not fit in well with academic research communities. I often felt the competitiveness and academic snobbery that I encountered at conferences and in my university pushed me away from wanting to pursue an academic research career. Jill changed all of this for me. Through her supervision style, that in a relaxed way inducted me into groups of scholars who engaged in

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affirming, supportive and meaningful ways, I made the decision to move from my position as a development officer to an academic position within the university. I have no doubt that I would not have taken this step without Jill's demonstration that within the many traditional challenges of academia—the competitiveness and often verbose rhetoric—there was an alternative 'way of being'. She inducted me into pockets of communities who defied and contrasted such practices with warm supportive collaborative ways of engaging powerfully, meaningfully and deeply with critical issues that demanded our ethical involvement to 'make a difference' in our education contexts and 'make our mark' as researchers both nationally and internationally.

Thabiso's reflections and story

My time under Jill's mentorship was the most fulfilling period of professional growth and certainly very satisfying at a personal level. I joined Jill's Ph.D. group in 1998 following a fairly easy passage through Honours and Masters programmes. Although I had extensive experience as a mathematics teacher and a curriculum developer while in Lesotho, I had very little exposure to the rigours and intensity of Ph.D. studies. Having rapidly gone through the Honours and Masters programmes and enrolling in the Ph.D. programme without much time for considering my career trajectory, I think I was more confident about my ability than I was clear about my direction in the Ph.D. programme. As a result, it took me four proposals before I finally found a line of research that really ticked all the boxes for a credible and sustainable Ph.D. study. All this time, Jill continued to provide very deep and helpful feedback, without ever imposing her preference.

I wonder how conscious Jill was of the things she did that assisted us so well with the Ph.D. journeys she guided us through. First with little research experience, Jill engaged me closely with some of her projects and I gained deep insights into the field of mathematics teacher education and research through my participation in projects involving a number of very experienced researchers.

The relationship with Jill grew in a very balanced and extremely fruitful manner with the highlight being the publication of my very first, and perhaps my best article to date in 1999. The manner of this publication highlights the very unique personality and professional qualities that Jill has. First she would encourage us to attend conferences and provide valuable support including funding. During conferences she would let us develop our own interests, only checking from time to time that we were making the best use of the time. One of these times she then connected me with a journal editor who guided me through the torrid times of publishing for the first time. One of the

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most lasting comments she made during the difficult times when I was trying to deal with the feedback on my draft article was ‘a good research report is not necessarily a good journal article’. Both the research assistance in her projects and the support towards publication provided me with some preparation for the Ph.D. studies. However, I was still relatively raw and directionless when I started the journey.

I settled into my Ph.D. research direction rather late and only with the help of one of the expert researchers that I had worked with in a previous research project led by Jill. Jill’s manner of supervision provided a wide range of supportive opportunities. She engaged with submissions in a very deep and thoughtful manner before each meeting. During meetings she would listen very attentively, probing and providing useful leads. The most memorable picture of Jill is when she would lean back in her seat and go quiet, followed by a remark: ‘Yah, but Thabs, this is very interesting’. This could mean that I had gone completely off or it could be followed by those fulfilling moments when Jill would say ‘I had never thought about it that way’. A better listener and a more accommodating professional I have not met. To this day, her manner of conducting meetings with mentees remains the example I try to follow. This extended to seminars where she listened to every input and enriched the engagements with her wide experiences. It took me time to settle into the sometimes robust discussions in these seminars, but Jill had a way of noting when even I had an important point to make. The Ph.D. group of 1998 engaged deeply with a range of issues often with help from seminar presentations by very able researchers raising current and pertinent issues.

Under the NRF funding she had organized for us, I had the privilege of working with Stephen Lerman at South Bank University and Mairead Dunne at Sussex University and both provided phenomenal growth to my Ph.D. studies. However, the studies were not without serious challenges. As a full-time international student, I often had to deal with the responsibilities long distance family life added onto my studies. And when a major research company offered me a senior research position on the third year of studies, it was a choice between finishing in time and the family responsibilities. The intensity of the demands of the new job would not have allowed me to complete the studies otherwise. However, Jill continued to encourage and support me to completion, albeit rather later and with much less opportunity for establishing better research impact of my thesis than I probably would have done under her close supervision. Still I owe my insights to research and teaching mathematics education to Jill’s great balance between deep research knowledge and a warm personal touch to her supervision.

Reflecting on our stories several themes emerge across them. These themes resonate strongly with the recurrent comments of other students supervised by Jill, which we shared earlier in the paper. We discuss each of these themes in turn.

Access to High Quality Resources

Across these stories we note Jill's foregrounding of access to high quality resources, including grappling with a broad range of current issues within our Ph.D. cohort community, and opportunities for participating with leaders and members of key overlapping communities (at conferences, in invited seminars, in funded research collaborations in which we could work with these 'experts' in their institutions and so forth). In these ways we were provided access and opportunities for learning as experience; learning as doing; learning as becoming and learning as belonging. Thus in our stories we noted that while Jill 'sets things up for you' she left us 'to do the work'. She acknowledged that it was our journey, and that given access to key resources in our field, we had the knowledge and agency to make our own research decisions. This coheres with Lave and Wenger's (1991) critical emphasis on access to high quality resources. Thus they argue that 'in order to become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation. The issue is so central to membership in communities of practice that, in a sense, all that we have said so far is about access' (p. 101).

Career Trajectories: Supporting Learning Trajectories and Respecting Our Agency for Deciding Our Own Research Path

Across our stories we talk of how we got more than a Ph.D. from Jill's supervision and that our careers were launched through our working with her as we became centrally, rather than peripherally, involved in a whole range of academic practices. As noted in our stories, before this we were unsure of what 'being' an academic and a scholar meant. Jill passed on invitations to participate in leading academic research committees and forums to us. She introduced us to leading scholars; supported us to publish in leading journals; supported us in our career decisions and academic work more generally, and in so doing we formed powerful academic career trajectories that sustained and guided us to this day. Furthermore Jill continues to support us in our career trajectories and key decisions we need to make more than a decade after the completion of our doctoral studies.

Respect for Our Expertise and Emphasis on Two-Way Learning: Developing Confidence in Our Potential to Contribute to and Influence the Field

Jill's way of working with us emphasized that we must be the experts on our topic and she supported us in this becoming. She built our confidence by requesting our input into her writing, co-authoring articles with us during the Ph.D. process, and encouraging us (and supporting us) to publish in leading international journals. The positioning of herself as a learner, in relation to our increasing knowledge and expertise of our research, enabled us to develop a confidence in the way we engaged with our work and prepared us for sharing our findings in key spaces.

A Strong Ethical Approach That Foregrounded Making a Difference

Jill demanded high ethical standards of all her students. She enabled this in the way she pushed us to engage and grapple with the many ethical challenges confronted in researching within our post-apartheid and post-colonial contexts. She furthermore encouraged us to share these tensions, and how we managed them, so that others facing similar challenges could benefit from our ethical grapplings (see, for example, Graven, 2005b; Setati, 2005b). She pushed us to our absolute best and held a high standard for us to aspire to. She reminded us that our research was critically important both for moving knowledge forward in addressing the many challenges of mathematics education in Southern Africa and for influencing the international field because our contexts enabled insights that were often absent (or backgrounded) in international research. In this way we were encouraged to 'make our mark'. Jill's support enabled our doctoral work to have influence (as evidenced by the extensive national and international citations of her students' work) and this intention to both influence the research field and impact positively on mathematics education in our countries continues to guide our scholarly endeavours.

The Relationship Between Affect and Mastery

While Lave and Wenger (1991) talk of mastery, and indeed as noted in Kgethi's story above 'when it comes to mentoring Jill is the Master', what is not mentioned in their work is the importance of affective qualities of a master that enables and nurtures full participation and access to increasingly central roles within the community and overlapping communities of practice. Across our stories, and the comments of Jill's other students noted earlier, Jill's qualities of *warmth*, *good*

humour, care and friendship stand out as enablers within her mastery at induction into being and becoming influential scholars. As Mellony's story notes it is precisely these qualities that enabled a different, and far more appealing visioning (or imagination as Wenger (1998) would note), and way, of being a scholar. Wenger's framework does however point to the critically important aspect of mutual respect among community members and our stories also foreground the extent to which Jill respected our work, we respected hers and the way in which she encouraged us to share our work among each other in ways that involved critical input and mutual respect.

Concluding Remarks

Our stories above lead us to conclude that we are who we are and where we are today thanks to the relationships we have had with Jill as supervisor, ongoing mentor, colleague and friend. Nobody succeeds on his/her own. There is no such thing as self-made success. We are where we are today in our careers because of the nature of Jill's support for us. She secured funding to support our research and challenged us to give our best. She advocated for us in a range of forums and fought on our behalf when institutional functioning impeded our work and progress. She inspired us by making high level academic participation and scholarly endeavours not only seem doable but worthy of the struggle towards achieving excellence. We are eternally grateful that she is who she is—simply exceptional all round!

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