
CHAPTER THREE

Mapping the Theoretical Landscape of NATHEP

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Introduction

The meta-theoretical framing that guides the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP) draws on critical realism (CR) (Bhaskar, 1979, 1990) and social realism (SR) (Archer, 2000) to inform the theoretical basis and vision for the project methodology (residential workshops) and the scholarly outputs. While the field of CR and SR are too extensive for discussion here, key components used explicitly in NATHEP are discussed to provide the intellectual rationale and basis for choices staff developers made when they created their contextual and customised induction programmes and later case studies. In this chapter, the theoretical tools used to theorise induction are explained; then each conceptual tool is discussed in relation to NATHEP in the italicised text. In this way, we share how theory was used in NATHEP and how it scaffolded the design and enactment of the project. The approach taken is to facilitate understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, rather than this chapter being an exposition of the theory per se.

Critical realism (CR)

Ontology: Critical realism (CR) as a philosophy of reality has “its main focus on ontology, not epistemology” (Sayer, 2000, p.78). CR acts as an “underlabourer” to social research (Bhaskar, 1975) to diagnose and resolve problems at their roots. It works well with complementary social theories such as social realism (Sayer, 2000) and critical social theory. CR is premised on the existence of a dual reality: the real world (ontological realism) and our knowledge of that reality (epistemological relativism) (Bhaskar, 1979).

Epistemology: Our knowledge will always be fallible because knowledge of the natural and social worlds is not identical to those worlds, as these worlds exist independently of us (Bhaskar, 1998). To conflate reality with what we can say or think about it is a one-dimensional view that would constitute an “epistemic fallacy” (Bhaskar, 1979). Knowledge according to Bhaskar (1979) is two-fold: the intransitive dimension, which is not dependent on our conceptions for its existence (Sayer, 2000), and the transitive dimension, which constitutes our theories and is produced as a result of human agency (ibid.).

What does this mean for NATHEP?


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In NATHEP, we observe the CR tradition of a dual reality by acknowledging that existing induction practices at our universities are influenced by a host of underlying mechanisms including finance and culture. These are out of the control of the institutional unit or staff developer. The reality that exists is also independent of new academics' experience of the programme; and response to programmes and ultimately students' ability to exercise their agency to enable success. This reality refers to institutional reality or reality in its broadest sense. In addition to critical realism, participating universities drew on theories such as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1994), Watson's theory of human care (2007) and Mezirow's transformation theory (1994).

Critical realism and its three pillars, ontological stratification and depth, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality assert that the social world is stratified, differentiated and intransitive. "What the world is and how we think about the world can affect what we know about it; and how we can shape or change it" (Bhaskar, 1998). The work of CR can be likened to an iceberg. Rather than restricting our theorising to that which we can see and experience (Wheelahan, 2007), CR excavates to find the underlying causal mechanisms of experiences and events by identifying the generative mechanisms that produce them (Danermark et al., 2002). The concern with causal mechanisms is what sets CR apart from positivism, which sees the empirical as the only possible explanation for the existence of objects and phenomena (Collier, 1994; Sayer, 2000).

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In using the above CR pillars to theorise induction, NATHEP sought to make explicit the generative mechanisms that give rise to certain responses and to lay bare the reality that exists, and to account for it. Only after surfacing the tacit, can one hope to change it, if needed. To assume that professional staff developers or new academics in this project and study are no more than the sum total of their performative competence constitutes epistemic as well as ontic fallacies (Danermark et al., 2002. This denies the richness and depth involved in the complex construction of what it means to be an educator or a new academic in HE today.

Emergence

The concept of “emergence” is a salient feature of CR (Elder-Vass, 2010) and refers to something new that comes about as a result of the interaction of two or more things (Archer, 1995; Sayer, 2000). Both structures and agents have emergent powers and properties. These can be activated in different ways and can trigger agents to make choices in response.

Human action and social structure act on each other differently based on properties possessed by social forms, which may be very different from those possessed by the individuals upon whose activity they depend. Emergence may be applied to the three pillars; namely, ontological stratification and depth, epistemological relativism, and judgemental rationality, which together integrate and overlap in ways that advance the importance of agency in the structural and cultural domains.

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In NATHEP, we created conditions for emergence in the various sessions and retreats. While we had a specific plan and design, we could not predict or determine the outcomes of our deliberations. The social and cultural contexts are imbued with nuances that influence agents, or in this case NATHEP participants, from making choices that are unexpected or contrary to what was envisioned. It is the concept of emergence that advances the dynamic and critical nature of CR projects. This is where we saw that staff developers need to be acting as critical agents who can counteract the compliance-driven ethos at many universities. While compliance is necessary at times, it is a severe impediment to innovation and advancement. When staff developers can assess a context and use its properties to inform their choices (agency), there is confidence that the system can change and allow something new to emerge. Critical agency is therefore important when academic staff developers work with new academics who in turn work with students to mediate their structural and cultural conditions to bring about change. As an outcome of emergence in the was the creation of a critical framework for NATHEP. This heuristic is unique to this project and as such relates specifically to aspects that we found relevant. In using the framework in other contexts, be aware of the conflation between meanings of the different levers and what these purport in different contexts. Our project participants used the framework as a heuristic to see if and how they had addressed criticality in their induction programmes.

Margaret Archer's social realism: the parts and the people

As an outcome of emergence in the project was the creation of a critical framework for NATHEP. Using critical realism (CR) as an underlabourer for her social realist theory, Margaret Archer (1995, 2000) offers a fully theorised account of what it means to be human and how this is linked to agency. Social realism perseveres in linking “the parts” (structures and culture) and “the people” (the agents) by trying to be more precise about the properties and powers of human beings, and how these emerge through our relations with the world (Archer, 1995). Agents, whom Archer always refers to in the plural sense, are people who operate in specific contexts that are structurally and culturally nuanced. The individual shapes his or her identity by prioritising concerns, and exercises agency in a social context with an acquired self-understanding and a broader social understanding of the relationship between the self and the broader context (Wheelahan, 2007).

Social realism was an important lens for NATHEP as it foregrounded the importance of agency, i.e. that things do not happen without agents. Agency points to the capacity of people to act on their social worlds in a voluntary way, based on their personal and psychological constitutions. Social realism allows one to explore the varying levels of agency exercised through personal emergent properties, which respond to structural emergent properties (SEPs) and cultural emergent properties (CEPs). In other words, Archer foregrounds the relationship between the parts and the people. Applying this to HE at a systemic level, we see that SEPs and CEPs contribute to the frustrations or advancement of the academic project in different but consequential ways. The full responsibility of the success and failure of the teaching and learning endeavour cannot and should not be at the behest of academics or academic developers alone; rather, the responsibility needs to be shared across the system.

What does this mean for NATHEP?

Drawing on social realism (SR) as an explanatory framework for this project and study, NATHEP explores how individuals understand, exercise and reflect on their voluntary efforts (agency), given the opportunities and constraints (through structural and cultural systems) at their university (Archer, 1995, 2003). To recognise the personal emergent properties (PEPs) of staff/professional developers as agents, as they face up to the corresponding emergent properties of the institutional and national contexts they confront (structural and cultural), is



to acknowledge that there is not a linear relationship between what practitioners do in their classrooms and the outcomes for learners in these spaces. For staff/professional developers as they try to make sense of their teaching and learning contexts, in relation to induction practices, they have to weigh up the losses and gains in making choices for the professional development of their academics. When university teachers and students come together in any pedagogic relationship, the “outcomes” cannot be predicted, since contextual powers and properties are activated and triggered, and influence what people do in different or similar situations.

Roy Bhaskar’s seven levels (laminar) of scale or seven scalar being (2010)

To inform and guide the methodology of the project and the research study, NATHEP used an organising framework derived from critical realism, namely and Bhaskar’s seven levels (laminar) of scale or seven scalar being (2010). The term “laminated system” was first introduced by Collier (1994) to refer to ontologically different levels or layers for the exploration of social and natural phenomena. The analogy of a laminar conjures up an image of a flexible but hard structure made up of ontological levels that cannot be separated and cannot be dissolved. Much like the layers of an onion, the laminated system radiates from smallest to largest layer in inseparable and irreducible ways. In their seminal work in the field of disability, Bhaskar and Danermark (2006) used the first “laminated system” to analyse the ontological features in their study in relation to social interaction and reality. This system allowed for a significant depth of analysis as well as a conceptualisation of social interaction in interconnected and relational terms.

Each social level, according to Bhaskar, must also be located in “a hierarchy of scale, that is of more macroscopic or overlying and less macroscopic or underlying mechanisms” (Bhaskar, 2010, p. 14). In this project, the seven scalar being allows for analysing and accounting for relationships at different orders of the hierarchical scale, through which critical realists develop the concept of a relational social science (Nunez, 2014). The distinct levels of ontology, agency and collectivity with which this project is concerned incorporate the seven levels of scale, defined in the list below (Bhaskar, 2010):

- i. The sub-individual or psychological level
- ii. The individual or biographical level
- iii. The micro-level, for example, the classroom
- iv. The meso-level, for example, faculty or institutional level
- v. The macro-level, for example the national context
- vi. The mega-level, for example the international context
- vii. The planetary (or cosmological) level, concerned with global level

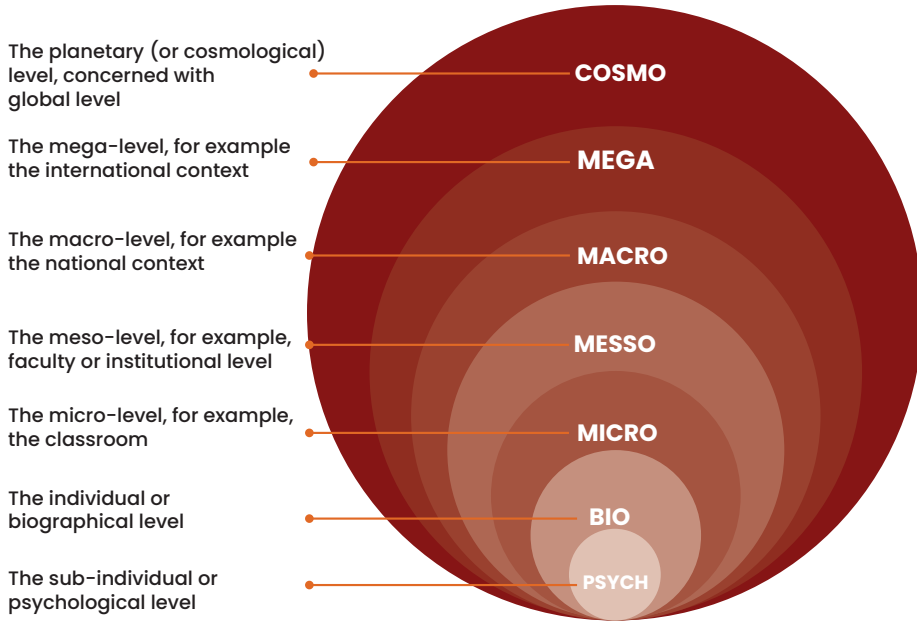


Figure 3 Bhaskar's Seven Scalar Being (1996)

What does this mean for NATHEP?

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Drawing on Bhaskar's seven scalar being (1996), we analysed how the project enabled us as participants and facilitators to engage with our contexts at seven different layers. At each level we had to confront and uncover our own biases, assumptions and preconceptions about inducting "new" staff, by becoming "unstuck" ourselves. Data generated through a dialogic and reflective process among the facilitators enabled us to theorise and analyse our scholarly practice, in order to gauge how we may or may not be creating impulses for waves of change needed in the sector today. The intricate "laminations" from the levels of self to cosmology offered by the Bhaskarian model provide a framework for us to raise deeper questions for the field of professional development (PD) in relation to the purposes of higher education today, especially in the context of heightened awareness of the need for critical social and cognitive justice.

The internal conversation

For Archer (2007) internal conversations allow individuals to identify their primary concerns or those areas of one's life that are personally most important, and then decide how to act upon these concerns in pursuit of 'projects' (Barratt et. al., 2020). Archer's 10 mental activities involved in the internal conversation or inner dialogue include to plan, rehearse, mull over, decide, relive, prioritise, imagine, clarify, imagine conversations, and budget (Archer, 2003; 2007b). In this project, the structural and cultural conditions at universities are mediated through the exercise of academics' agency through a nuanced and complex unfolding of different sets of emergent powers and properties. To explain agents' actions, one has to understand agents' intentions, arrived at through "external inspection and inner dialogue" (Archer, 2000). The way that they do this is through their powers of critical reflection upon their social contexts and of creatively redesigning their social environments, their institutional or ideational configurations, or both. How it is possible for human beings to become agentially effective in these ways, is at the heart of Archer's argument on agency. It is also the focal point of this project and this research study.

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How university representatives (staff developers) on NATHEP respond to the above during the project involves a dialectical interplay between their "concerns" and their "contexts" (as they reflexively respond to them) (Archer, 2007). These are derived through an internal conversation, made external in NATHEP through the participatory learning and action methods used (discussed in Chapter 4), which encouraged participants to reflect openly with the rest of the cohort about reasons for their choices in their new, customised induction programmes. This project is particularly concerned with whether staff developers draw on the discourses of social justice and social inclusion within and outside of higher education (HE) when they formulate and develop their induction programmes for their universities. Or do they, shaped by more personal ambitions, draw on discourses related to the conveyor-belt system used in many induction practices currently?

Archer's morphogenetic model (M/M) framework

To explain the process of change, we refer to the morphogenetic model (M/M) (Archer, 1995, p.135) which consists of three phases: T1 = time 1; T2-3 = time 2; T4 = time 4. Each aspect of the MM was used in the design of the phases in NATHEP.

Structural and cultural conditioning phase (T1)

The first stage describes and analyses the conditions at T1, which is the first stage of the morphogenetic (M/M) cycle in this study. This phase is concerned with structural and cultural conditioning at all scalar levels of the HE system. When new academics enter the university, they confront contexts that predate them, and in this moment, various powers and properties are triggered or activated in the incumbents. The extent to which agents can effect change depends on their ability to negotiate the enablements and constraints that structural and cultural contexts afford them (Archer, 2000).



What does this mean for NATHEP?

This is known as the structural and cultural conditioning phase. In this project, this phase must be viewed against the backdrop of the crisis in higher education currently as well as the historical context that leads us to the present moment. This historical context implies that current challenges in higher education could be easily traced to complexities and problems that span the colonial situation into post-independence social institutions. According to Ekeh (1982) the current higher education sector is the residue of migrated social structures and constructs which were parcelled from metropolitan centres of the imperial West to Asia and Africa.

What is significant about these migrated social structures is that they were disembodied of their European moral contents and unfortunately, were also not recontextualised into morality of Africa and Asia. Consequently, these disembodied social structures are locked into their archaic hierarchical and authoritative models of colonial university structure both in organisation and administration.

It is therefore not surprising that three decades into democracy, South African HE faces a crisis of identity, relevance and legitimacy. Students are calling for higher education to be more responsive to historical and contextual constraints so that they feel less alienated, marginalised and invisible. Institutional reforms such as the UCDP and now the framework document, have nudged universities to focus on transforming their culture, practices and traditions so that students feel included and become the successful graduates that society needs i.e. informed, responsible and critical citizens who can contribute meaningfully to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge for the public good. While some gains have been made in this regard, the sector has been criticised, especially in the last 10 years, for not being rigorous enough in its attempt to redress systemic inequality and injustice in HE associated with the legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

These factors have affected student throughput and success rates significantly and attention is now being placed on curricula and pedagogy to see what can be done there to overcome the constraints and hurdles that prevent students from graduating in time and from achieving the success they are capable of. Calls for curriculum interrogation and transformation have been expressed as “decolonising the curriculum, advancing epistemological diversity, advancing a post-apartheid knowledge agenda, developing responsive and relevant curricula and so on” (DHET, 2017).

Social interaction phase (T2-3)

In the next phase, known as the social interaction phase, agents interact with contexts (structural and cultural) to exercise their agency in specific ways, in an open system. While social agents have influence over their social conditions based on their vested interests and bargaining power (Archer, 1995), there are also consequences of interaction (context dependent) that cannot be predicted. In this phase, social actors and primary and corporate agents interact to demonstrate their agency in relation to context. These actions or choices show agents’ personal emergent properties which through concerns, dedication and deliberation interact with structural and cultural emergent properties of the context. Based on how they read and respond to the challenges and opportunities before them and by analysing agents and their choices, we are able to see how power is mediated and whether systems can actually change.

What does this mean for NATHEP?

The emergent properties of context have a bearing on the choices and actions of staff developers, new academics and students, and the actual enactment of staff developers’ reflexive decisions in creating induction programmes for their cohorts and their contexts. In the interactions, SC members used two interventions to condition the contexts for uptake by staff developers. Firstly, a cascading model of staff development was used in this phase to enable the cascade or flow of input from one level to the next, creating the ideational conditions for change to occur. Secondly, a critically reflective and critical approach to professional development, to model goals and intentions of NATHEP at all levels of the scalar being, was used.

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Elaboration phase (T4)

In the third and last phase of the MM, known as the elaboration phase, the project aimed to identify whether genesis (change) or stasis (no change) had occurred. This is a period where the outcomes of the interaction between agents and contexts result in reproduction of the status quo or transformation. Either way, the system is described as “elaborated” (Danermark et al., 2002). Future agents encounter the outcomes of elaboration (T4) as the new conditioning context (T1) for the next morphogenetic cycle (Archer, 1995). The explanatory power of social realist theory allowed for explanations of how and why the parts and the people interacted in the way they did, and by implication, what can be done about it.



What does this mean for NATHEP?

Given that the project sought to better understand how induction practices were being conceptualised and delivered across the sector and how these could be strengthened to achieve the transformation goals of the sector, the elaboration enabled the evaluation of whether the project had succeeded in its attempts to “level the playing fields” by initiating and establishing inclusive induction practices where these were non-existent and at institutions that needed it the most.

How staff developers exercised their agency in the design of their induction programmes revealed much about their PEPs, but also illuminated the underlying and systemic conditions that influenced events and experiences in the HE system. In most cases the project identified overarching constraints that prevented or stymied the induction programme from being enacted as a mechanism to induct newcomers to the teaching and learning contexts, where they are expected to be agential with students. Given the complex ecosystem of the HE classroom, new academics need to be able to consider many levels of context, ranging from the self, the disciplinary and to the ability to teach, assess, design curricula, mediate online teaching etc. When this level of agency is enacted towards creating new programmes that enable new academics to exercise discretion in their teaching and learning choices, instead of being robots or automatons who carry out technical tasks, this means that there is elaboration of the system and a morphogenesis of agency, which can in turn lead to changes in the structural and cultural systems as well.

This also told us about the current context, and how new academics without proper training or orientation were doomed to fail, even before they began their academic careers, contributing to the “revolving door” syndrome of high staff

turnover in the sector. Those who remain are often overlooked for developmental opportunities when ironically, they are in most need of support. It is mostly new academics who, almost as a rite of passage, are given large classes to teach and a packed teaching workload with little wriggle room to take up development opportunities. While opportunities are available for the further professional development of established academics as teachers, either through teaching development grants or other staff development initiatives, there has not been a corresponding response to the induction and development of new academics, who are often thrown into the deep end of academia with no support and are expected to sink or swim, almost as a way of proving their tenacity in a “survival of the fittest” competition to stay in academia. Professional staff developers on NATHEP will reveal if they have gained a thorough understanding of the needs of new academics and their challenges in order to plan effective induction programmes to address their needs. The elaboration will also tell us if NATHEP as a national project is based on real challenges and needs experienced in different contexts and whether it has managed to develop strategies and ways to address these needs.

Putting the theory to work: A critical framework for NATHEP’s

curriculum and pedagogy

Emerging from the project work in 2018 and 2019, NATHEP created its own critical framework to guide its curriculum, pedagogy and methodology, but more importantly to act as an indicator of the different levels of criticality NATHEP was engaging in. The central question guiding NATHEP was whether the critical professional development (Kohli et al., 2015) approach embraced by the project creates the necessary and sufficient conditions for the positive exercise of responsive agency required by academic staff developers from differentiated institutions in the current context (Behari-Leak, 2020).

This critical framework draws on critical social theory (CST) (Collins, 1998; Calhoun, 1995), which brings together two strands of a multidisciplinary knowledge base. CST uses a language of critique at the centre of its knowledge production, to explore tools and frameworks by highlighting their contradictions, thereby advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge (Freire, 1993) and encouraging the production and application of theory as part of the overall search for transformative knowledge (Leonardo, 2004). CST resonates well with the aims of critical realism in that critical social theorists try to link theory to the immediacy of lived realities (Said, 1983) and opens up interpretations of theories to human and social needs, resonant with social realism.

The NATHEP critical framework also draws on decolonial theory (Mignolo, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Mills, 2017; Mafeje, 1998). As written about elsewhere (Ganas et.al, 2021), we assert that the legacy of colonial education challenges academics to constantly examine ideological biases inherent in colonial education, which renders education incapable of facilitating liberation and shared democracy (de Sousa Santos, 2007). If induction is designed to reproduce unequal relations of power towards an African subjectivity and colonial stereotype characterised by lack and deficit, it is difficult to transcend this level of epistemic and ontological injustice to reimagine a world beyond the present (Ganas et.al., 2021).

“To achieve epistemic justice requires ‘centring of African culture’ at the heart of the academy and development” (Nyoka, 2017). Decolonial pedagogies challenge academics to reimagine theoretical frameworks able to account for our lived experiences (as African people) and our relationality with other learners rooted in our cultures, histories, and heritage (Dei, 2012; Ganas et al., 2021). Two critical decolonial concepts that became important for NATHEP’s work on reframing induction practices helped us to understand the CR and SR framework in contextualised ways that kept the project grounded in an African reality. The first is “endogeneity” (Mafeje, 2011) which is centred on the need for an authentic African scholarship, grounded in African ontological discourses and experiences. The second is “extraversion” (Hountondji, 1990) which challenges Eurocentric assumptions about the existence of universal knowledge and theories used to explain social phenomena across space and time.

Through the lens of extraversion, we were challenged to recentre our knowledge and pedagogies imposed by Eurocentric models. This did not mean complete rejection of theoretical tools from the Global North but a critical curation of the epistemes and methods used from the West. We actively challenge the project to resist being “captured” (Alatas, 2022, p.8) where uncritical application of theories from elsewhere means a reproduction of Western social sciences without appropriate adaptation and contextualisation. In engaging the decolonial archive, NATHEP was able to complement the meta-theory (CR and SR) with decolonial pedagogies, which are realist pedagogies that require a focus on the realist transcendental question: what must the world be like given that black students (and academics) continue to experience alienation and marginalisation in South African HE? The NATHEP critical framework emerged from grounded transformative and decolonial practice in the project and demonstrated our understanding of a curriculum model relevant to a Global South context, one that speaks to our situatedness and positionality as professional developers. As the framework has already been written about by the SC in a chapter elsewhere (Behari-Leak et al., 2021), we reference that chapter here to avoid duplication of information and provide a summary of the framework next.

NATHEP CRITICAL FRAMEWORK

NATHEP



Each aspect of the CRITICAL Framework is unpacked below in relation to NATHEP’s epistemic onto pedagogical encounters. We are guided by the realist question

WHAT WORKS FOR WHO, IN WHAT CONTEXT AND WHY?



Conceptual, Contextual and Critical

- **Conceptual** - considered, creative and a thoughtful ideation
- **Critical** - linked to issues of power, race, class, gender and other systematic underlying mechanisms
- **Contextual** - relate to time, place, space, people, historicity and socio-cultural dimensions of lived experiences

Responsive, Reflexive, Relational, Re-centered, Relevant

- **Responsive** - decisive and quick to present challenges
- **Reflexive** - use reflection for forward action
- **Relational** - connect, relate, guided by purpose & project
- **Re-centered** - Africa focused is locus of enunciation
- **Relevant** - closely connected to and appropriate to the time and substantive content of work



Theorised Praxis

Using theory in a functional application to explain, trouble, problematise, confirm, affirm, position, thoughts and ideas to relate directly praxis

Authentic

...with genuine commitment and original thinking towards enhanced practices and deep changes



Legitimate

...with authority and gravitas, founded on authentic purpose and goals based on context and towards realisation of goals of all concerned

Figure 4 NATHEP’s CRITICAL Framework

How was the CRITicAL Framework used in the NATHEP

curriculum?

Each aspect of the CRITicAL Framework is integral to the NATHEP's curriculum and its epistemic-onto-pedagogical encounters. The word "critical" is used as an acronym, CRITicAL, and each component is integral to the project's goal, aims, deliverables and curriculum (see Figure 4). Each component discussed below informs the staff development work in NATHEP. As such, each has a bearing on the ontology, epistemology and methodology of the project.

The "C" in CRITicAL refers to three different concepts. Conceptual aspects, which include "considered", "creative" and a thoughtful ideation of "concepts" related to induction programmes. The second "C" refers to "contextual" aspects, which relate to time, place, space, people, historicity and socio-cultural dimensions of lived experiences (Leibowitz et al., 2016). Context is understood as time and space that go beyond geographical boundaries (Conrad, 1998). We have underscored the maxim, "context matters" in all our engagements thus far. The third "C" points to the need for invisible and intangible aspects, which are linked to issues of power, race, class, gender and other systemic underlying mechanisms (Quinn, 2012) to be given "critical" attention when induction programmes are designed. Critical agency in both disciplinary and departmental programmes is crucial, as structural and cultural contexts can serve as triggers that advance or dampen efforts, in this case to create robust new academics' induction programmes or to perpetuate instrumental ones. Both contexts and concepts needed to be embedded in a critical orientation to practice and knowledge generation (Smyth, 2003). A critical approach to professional development is informed by critical theory and critical pedagogy and draws attention to social justice, decoloniality, equality and change.

The "R" in CRITicAL stands for being "responsive" where decisive, swift and integrative thinking is needed in relation to present context and challenges (Loads & Campbell, 2015). The "cascading" model of staff development in NATHEP encourages responsive praxis (Groves, Price & Mencke, 2013) across different levels of agents. The "R" is also about the NATHEP curriculum working "reflexively" by exploring what it means to engage with enabling and constraining conditions at national, institutional, faculty, departmental and teaching and learning levels (Hayes, 2019). This reflexivity is critical for designing well considered, theorised and contextualised models of induction relevant to new academics at differentiated universities (Trowler & Knight, 2000). The "R" is "relational", referring to the need for rich relationships between academic staff developers and their new academics through induction programmes (Su & Wood, 2023). Building relationships encourages newcomers to see their own potential as change agents who can adopt effective curricula, pedagogic and assessment practices to respond to challenges across a wide

range of disciplinary backgrounds and institutional contexts (McGrath, 2020). Further, the “R” is also linked to “recentering” as a reminder to respond to the call for a decolonial pedagogy (Mignolo, 2013; Walsh, 2003) by foregrounding Africa as our locus of enunciation in induction programmes. Recentering the induction programme in this way addresses the experiences of mainly black students and staff, who still feel alienated, marginalised and invisible at the university (Bhana, 2014; Arday et al., 2021). This offered an additional challenge for NATHEP to address. Finally, the “R” also links to the need for curricula to be “relevant” to the needs of all involved (Blignaut, 2021). Professional development practitioners need ongoing development too as they are equally challenged by the complexity and contested nature of the current higher education landscape (Ingleby & Hedges, 2012). Many find themselves between a rock and a hard place, having to occupy a third space between university management and academics in the various faculties (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018).

The “T” in CRITicAL stands for “theorised” praxis. NATHEP was intent on promoting the induction programme for new academics as a theorised model, using theory in a functional application to explain, trouble, problematise, confirm, affirm, position thoughts and ideas to relate directly to praxis (Hayes et al., 2021). It is important for staff developers to believe in, enact and promote the idea that teaching is not a commonsense or craft activity (McLean & Bullard, 2000; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). Disciplinary knowledge alone or holding a PhD in a specialist disciplinary area is not a licence to teach or the basis for pedagogical engagement. In fact, “disciplined” knowledges (Garuba, 2017) have historically constrained pedagogical approaches and have failed to engage with how students’ backgrounds, history and context affect the teaching and learning process (Bartolome, 2004; Behari-Leak & McKenna, 2017; (Hindhede & Højbjerg, 2022).

The “A” in CRITicAL stands for “authentic”. Here NATHEP was concerned with genuine commitment and original thinking towards enhanced practices and deep change. Since 2015, universities have been trying to respond to calls for decolonisation of the curriculum by student activists insisting that who teaches matters (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). The lack of diversity in teaching staff, they claim, results in a dearth of a representative teaching body and role models to attend to the needs of diverse student groups who struggle with issues of identity, cultural displacement and language, to name a few (Jabbar & Mirza, 2019). Academics who are not reflexive about how their positionality, background and cultural values shape students in particular ways for success or failure, unwittingly reproduce socially unjust pedagogies, and perpetuate high attrition and low participation and success rates (Davis & Steyn, 2012). Induction programmes must focus on the positionality of new academics and their orientations within their curricula and their response to possible tensions (Ndebele, 2013; Reddy et al., 2016).

The “L” in CRITicAL stands for “legitimate” and refers to practice that is done with authority and gravitas, founded on authentic purpose and goals. Practice is based on context and towards the realisation of goals of all concerned (Conrad, 1998; Smyth, 2003). The who (teachers) and the how (teaching methods) are important markers of change in NATHEP and play an important role in mediating the what (content) of teaching through knowledge production and the design of learning experiences. Historically, we have taught in an alienating and marginalising curriculum environment, where content represents examples that South African students struggle to identify with (Le Grange, 2020; Mahabeer et al., 2016). Being a university teacher in Africa must mean something, least of all that the content used to teach concepts and frameworks draws richly on what it means to be an African, in relation to the world. Situating Africa as the centre of epistemic diversity is an important positioning that teachers need to understand.

Limitations

When working with CR and SR, it is important to note that these are meta-theories and as such, do not automatically provide the contextualisation needed. Theories derived in studies located in different settings do not always travel well and cannot be transported without a deep level of interrogation and recentring. This chapter aimed to elucidate how the theoretical framework was applied to NATHEP, using our context and reality to inform the theory, rather than the other way around. This discussion also laid the foundation for understanding how the project partners applied the theoretical lens and NATHEP’s CRITicAL Framework to the case studies presented in the chapters that follow. This was not driven by a formula but emerged relative to how much or how far the project partners were prepared to include these, given their institutional contexts. The application of CR theory in the NATHEP project concerned an examination of whether structures, culture and agency as they are embodied or presented in induction practices, worked to include or exclude new academics and students in the higher education environment. By focusing on context, the theory allowed the project to explore the nature of conditions that either enable or constrain the exercise of agency of academic staff in differentiated higher education structural and cultural domains. Given the legacy of South African HE, the structural and cultural conditioning that predates both staff developers and new academics is complex as a result of a double layer of oppression through apartheid and colonisation. This history cannot be ignored when trying to understand the contextual baggage that many universities carry, despite being in a new dispensation since 1994. Professional development programmes must acknowledge and engage with these contexts as the tacit triggers and intersectional discriminations are still present and pervasive through HE today.

Conclusion

The theoretical interrogation and exploration that informed NATHEP's CRITicAL Framework and its application in the project was brought to light in this chapter. By looking into historical imbalances in induction practices across the sector, and bringing to the fore the structural and cultural conditions that exist, this project encouraged academic developers to evaluate their interactions with their contexts, universities, and induction programmes, and they had to engage in a self-reflection of how they had exercised their agency to bring about elaboration in their newly formed or amended induction programmes. The examination of the interplay of these elements in situational contexts accounted for the nature of induction programmes developed by academic developers, how they related to institutional concerns, and linked with the idea of inclusive practices in the sector. The case studies that follow in part two of this book are guided by and draw on the theory detailed here, and which influenced the project through its cycle from conditioning to reflection to creation and implementation.
