CHAPTER ELEVEN

SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

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Induction of New Academic Staff at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University through Connection and Care

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Introduction

Integration of new academics into the academic role and their academic socialisation through an induction process at institutions can be fraught with obstacles, difficulties and contradictions (Boyd, 2010). New academics, the world over, struggle with the transition into the academic role and at times come into their academic positions without sufficient understanding of this role. The role of academics often differs depending on the type of institution they enter. Boyer's (1990), idea of scholarship provides an important lens in understanding the role of academics beyond teaching and offers a conceptual lens into how newly appointed academics become scholars (Jansen, 2006). The ever-changing higher education landscape globally and in South Africa, particularly, is characterised by differentiation (Reimer & Jacob, 2010), massification (Fanghanel & Trowler, 2007), changing structures (Arum et al., 2007), reduced funding and of late institutional instability (Jansen, 2017). The recent global COVID-19 pandemic places even more pressure on academics as part of further institutional change (Behari-Leak et al., 2020). The demands for technological innovations, inclusive pedagogies and new modes of delivery such as blended learning are further challenging and changing the academic role (Teferra, 2016).

Induction plays a crucial role in the academic or professional socialisation of new academics and in the lives of early career academics. It lays the foundation for career progression and provides support to new academics who may be appointed after obtaining postgraduate qualifications but without the necessary capacity to teach in a higher education institution (Behari-Leak et al., 2020). This case study explores the development of an induction programme for "new" academic staff at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), a new comprehensive higher education disciplinary specific institution located in Ga-Rankuwa on the outskirts of the country's capital, Pretoria.

The case study spans a period of 17 months from June 2018, when no induction was held to October 2019 when the first iteration was held. During this period, SMU, and specifically the Centre for University Teaching and Learning (CUTL) was part of the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP). Funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) under the University Capacity Development Plan (UCDP) (DHET, 2017) NATHEP worked with academic staff developers to initiate or enhance their institution's induction programme for

new academics. The case study also reflects on the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the induction programme at SMU since its 2019 CUTL inception, and the consideration of the future of induction programmes. It focuses on the development of an induction programme at SMU within its specific context as a new health sciences university but a historically disadvantaged institution.

We believe that developing an induction programme at SMU was important to enhance the foundation for the professional development of newly appointed academics and influence an academic culture characterised by high-quality scholarship, student-centeredness, reflexivity and critical consciousness. Further to this, the development and delivery of such an induction programme by the CUTL enables academic and professional staff to develop a rapport with the centre, elevating CUTL's current institutional profile. Simultaneously, the increased connection with the centre enables its academic development (AD) practitioners an opportunity to develop their skills, scholarship and agency.

Theoretical framework

This case draws on Archer's (2000) social realist framework of structure, culture and agency in reflecting on the SMU's induction practices of the past, present and future possibilities. Particularly important in thinking about our actions as academic developers, is the concept of agency.

We draw on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998, p.963) argument that agentic action should be "analytically situated within a flow of time" and not just viewed at a particular point in time. When analysing our actions on the induction programme, as academic developers, we consider our actions over a period of time. Using Archer's thinking we explore the influence of structure on agency (Archer, 2007).

Understanding the "new" academic

It is important for teaching and academic development practitioners, in developing an induction programme for newly appointed academics at a health sciences institution like ours, to understand the possible range of who these "new" academics are. In literature the people targeted by induction programmes are often referred to as early career academics (ECAs) (Reddy et al., 2016; Teferra, 2016). When academics join an institution, they arrive with varying experiences and any assumptions made need to be grounded in deeper understanding of the academic trajectories of each individual. While some new academics coming into the university are at the beginning of their professional careers (essentially ECAs), others come with a wealth of experience from other health science professional contexts, and some come with experience of teaching at other institutions. Developing programmes that respond to the needs such a diverse group with different professional needs can be challenging and needs careful consideration.

This may require an understanding of the professional trajectory of every individual and their professional development needs, followed by developing programmes that respond to the need of the individual.

Induction at SMU: "what was"

SMU was established as a separate institution in 2015 after demerging from the University of Limpopo (UL). Prior to the merger with the University of the North that created UL, SMU was established in 1976 as the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA). As a historically black institution, SMU shares the legacies of historically disadvantaged institutions that were underfunded, neglected and never given the opportunity to thrive and be among competitive higher education institutions. Still considered a "new" university, SMU continues to grapple with the effects of inadequate and decaying infrastructure, shortages of key staff, lack of stable leadership in executive management, and ongoing student and staff protests. Induction programmes were held during the institution's various phases as MEDUNSA, as part of UL and currently as SMU. We explore how the interplay of structure, culture and agency at SMU impeded the institution from developing new academics and ultimately delivering a contextually relevant induction programme.

Induction programmes do not happen in a vacuum. They need careful planning and human resources as well as a conducive policy environment that gives expression to staff development. After the establishment of SMU in 2014, induction programmes continued to be held by the human resources (HR) department and an outsourced external facilitator. This induction programme run largely by the external facilitator was contextually flawed as it did not reflect the uniqueness of the institution and its health professions context. It was generalised and did not reflect the immediate needs of the institution or the needs of those varied new academics. Further, outsourcing to an external facilitator also hampered skills development amongst CUTL's practitioners, required to carry out professional learning activities for academic staff, and academic development within the broader SMU context. Running induction programmes is an important way of developing the capability and agency of staff working with academic staff development. Besides creating a sense ownership of the programme, these initiatives propel the centre and the academic development project as an important teaching and learning engine of the university.

In this section, we reflect on our university's induction programme from 2018. An HR-led induction programme was held in June 2018, as a three-day workshop on the SMU campus. The programme focused on varying topics, from facilitation of learning to a showcase of services available on campus. The main facilitator was sourced from another institution and compensated with facilitation fees, accommodation, travel and subsistence expenses. The main weakness of the

programme, however, was the generality of topics and the lack of relevance to the institutional context. There was a lack of focus on the vision and the mission of the university, nor were the topics unique to the SMU context. Further, the centrality of the external consultant as the main presenter silenced the agentic opportunity for internal actors to take the induction forward. Most of the programme was outsourced, CUTL was left with the responsibility of only providing logistical support. Topics like "Managing diversity in teaching and learning" did not speak to the unique SMU context and there were no specific topics on clinical teaching or related to the health professions education focus.

In 2019 there was a leadership change at CUTL and delays in HR caused the induction In 2019 there was a leadership change at CUTL and delays in HR caused the induction programme to be postponed from February to July 2019. During this intervening period, the new interim director and an academic developer of the CUTL team participated in NATHEP. Participation in the programme was timely in enabling the CUTL team to collaborate and engage with colleagues at other national universities to conceptualise and develop the institution's induction programme. The programme was designed from a teaching and learning lens rather than an HR one. NATHEP provided an important reference point as the programme's outcomes resonated with the team's outlook for the SMU induction program.

Developing an induction programme: "what is"

SMU's induction policy states that the "objective of the induction programme is to set expectations and assist new employees to perform their roles within the university" (SMU, n.d.). The policy goes on to state that the "line manager is responsible for the induction of the new employee with regard to job responsibilities, and the introduction to the section or department in which the employee will be working" (SMU, n.d.). Induction of newly appointed academic staff, as earlier stated, has typically been combined with onboarding of all staff organised by the HR department. The induction programme for academic staff has thus been seen as an extension of the HR onboarding process. Klein et al. (2015, p.263), define onboarding as "formal and informal practices, programmes and policies enacted or engaged in by an organisation or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment". However, induction of new academics into curriculum development and teaching and learning should not be conflated with onboarding. Induction of new academics has to do with what Behari-Leak (2017) has called the frame of "learning to teach". In this case study we problematise what it means to teach within the constraints and opportunities of a historically disadvantaged institution that is slowly trying to build a new culture, new governance structures and a new model of a health sciences focused institution.

The prevailing culture at the CUTL provided a space in the university to imagine the induction of new academics differently; a space that developed a theoretically rich and contextually relevant induction programme. This was because the centre was now home to different AD expertise such as teaching development consultants, curriculum development specialists, instructional designers and academic support officers. The induction of new academics had in the past been hindered by the absence of capacity and initiatives to promote theorised and responsive teaching in the university. The legacy of staff shortages prior to 2019 meant that induction was HR's responsibility that was largely outsourced and became contentious when CUTL was capacitated to take ownership of the programme.

Building capacity by bringing in new staff was going to be an important mechanism of building capacity within CUTL. This meant that, in future induction programmes, we could dispense with external facilitators and imagine a different yet contextually relevant programme. However, this shift raised some mistrust as some SMU stakeholders felt that there was really nothing wrong with the existing induction model. From a CUTL leadership perspective, this meant building confidence and agency within the team to believe in their capabilities and capacity to engage with staff development programmes including one for induction. It involved the staff at CUTL working together in developing programmes and most importantly changing the "I can't" culture to "We can".

In October 2019, about 17 months after the last induction, CUTL held an induction workshop on the SMU campus. Although the topics did not change fundamentally compared to the June 2018 workshop, the major development was that for the first time the induction programme was not outsourced and was run by CUTL. Based on our NATHEP participation, there were inputs and presentations from colleagues in the community of practice we had started developing with other units of the university, such as the Skills Centre. What was achieved here was that by using CUTL staff, the induction programme became a site of empowerment for CUTL, a place where academic development staff could collaborate in delivering programmes but also a space of thinking about and reimagining teaching and learning in a health sciences university. Further, the introduction of the concept of cultural humility elicited a reflective opportunity for the participants and staff developers for critical consciousness to be explored. It enabled the participant to reflect, introspect and enhance their critical consciousness. This aspect received positive feedback from the participants as did the overall induction, which proved to be a promising "team building" exercise for CUTL. It provided a foundation on which the next induction program could be built. The next induction was planned for March 2020.

As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic the induction in March was postponed with the focus of the institution being to "save" the academic year. As the year settled

and the "new normal" took over, it was decided that the induction programme like all the other activities of the university, would need to transition online. CUTL held a two-day online induction workshop in November 2020 with 11 academics from the five schools at SMU. The participants were academics who had been appointed in the period between October 2019 and November 2020 and were invited by the HR department to the staff onboarding and induction programme (CUTL, 2020). The workshop was composed of four interlinked online sessions, namely: "Scholarship and the academic role"; "Teaching and learning at SMU"; "Assessment of learning and assessment for learning"; and "Online learning and online assessment". Though the induction programme was also evolving in focusing on concepts such as scholarship, the programme seemed to lack contextual relevance from a health professions education perspective. An understanding of the importance of the health profession as a disciplinary focus is significant in thinking about what induction should be at SMU.

Further, we were aware in the online induction programme that virtual spaces by their nature are not natural dialogic spaces. Being physically present in a room enables people to hold conversation naturally supported by gesture, body language and eye contact. In a professional development activity that was premised on giving voice to participants rather than seeing them as passive subjects to be filled with information (Kohli et al., 2015), what was lost more palpably was the possibility of natural conversation between the facilitators and the participants. However, despite these difficulties, Blackboard, the learning management system (LMS) used for the workshop, has built-in tools such as an interactive whiteboard, polling and a chat box as well as video and audio contributions in real time for participation, which make a semblance of dialogic practice possible. The challenge in optimising virtual spaces for professional development going forward will be to ensure that they support "authentic dialogue" (Kohli et al., 2015, p.14) between participants and facilitators to build a trusting support network.

The content of the induction programme was driven by needs that were identified by academics in the questionnaire sent to them prior to the design of the programme. The focus was on exploring the idea of scholarship and the academic role; teaching and learning at university; assessment of learning and assessment for learning; as well as online teaching and learning. Though blended learning had been part of the SMU teaching and learning strategy, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the urgency to develop online teaching and online research capabilities among academics. It was therefore important that the content of induction programmes did not stay static but evolved contextually in response to changing needs, demands and opportunities.

At the time of the writing up of this case study we had not yet sent the formal workshop evaluation instrument to the participants. Notwithstanding the absence

of the formal evaluation, we received positive feedback from the participants during the online session and drew important lessons about the future of the induction programme at SMU. Central to the lessons from NATHEP (Behari-Leak et al., 2020) is the understanding that critical professional development cannot take place on one day. This realisation, coupled with insights from the workshop about knowledge gaps and the expressed needs of staff, made us resolve to strive for an induction programme that could be presented to staff over a longer period. Critical professional development of teachers that involves "cooperative dialogue", builds unity and meets "the critical needs of teachers" (Kohli et al., 2015, p.11) cannot effectively take place in one day. It requires that CUTL builds a community of practice among the newly appointed academic staff supported by faculty and established academics within their disciplines to develop critical scholarship that responds to contextual dynamics of the different academic units our participants find themselves in.

Looking into the future: "what will be"

At CUTL we have experienced a number of constraints in developing a theoretically sound and contextually relevant induction programme. The absence of an institutional management drive that promotes the transition of new academics in purposeful ways into the university has contributed to the lack of emphasis on induction. The historical CUTL outsourced staff induction, largely driven by HR, was conflated with the general staff onboarding and created a gap in this crucial professional development space.

Despite the multiplicity of constraints on developing an SMU induction programme, the NATHEP project provided a renewed impetus and an opportunity for support from colleagues from other institutions in a critical and robust community of practice. This enabled the opportunity to focus on developing the induction programme in a way that ensures that our practice engages with theory and develops reflective practitioners in the process. Other institutional enablers have included HR sharing the list of newly appointed academics that we could target and work with in enhancing an induction programme.

CUTL has begun the process of developing a contextually relevant and theoretically sound induction programme for academics. We started by administering a questionnaire, before the design of the programme, to newly appointed academic staff. The questionnaire focused on understanding the career trajectories of newly appointed academics, their understanding of the academic role, their teaching and research needs, as well as a consideration of how prepared they are for their role and the level of support they have received and require. This will ensure that the program delivered is contextually relevant and responsive to the academic within a health sciences university.

Threats and opportunities for induction at SMU

The continuing COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa and globally will possibly pose significant threats to the ability of the Centre for University Teaching and Learning (CUTL) to manage an induction programme over an extended period. Developing a viable and sustainable community of practice requires active engagement and meaningful collaboration. However, restrictions that the COVID-19 pandemic comes with, such as reduction of physical meetings and social distancing means that we cannot meet and collaborate in ways that have traditionally made such collaborations possible. However, Hodgkinson-Williams et al. (2008) illustrate the possibility of developing a virtual community of practice with collaborators both from within the institution and beyond. More recently Behari-Leak et al. (2020) have detailed how a national collaborative programme continued and thrived virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic when physical meetings between collaborators were not possible. In this situation developing an induction programme at SMU must take into consideration and draw on institutional affordances of technology and connectivity to sustain the induction programme. One of the main problems that SMU faces, like other historically disadvantaged institutions, are infrastructure limitations such as ICT infrastructure (DHET, 2019). Developments such as Blackboard Ultra to be launched at SMU and the refurbishment of ICT infrastructure will improve the ICT infrastructure and connectivity that makes the building and sustainability of virtual communities of practice possible. A health sciences university like SMU requires that ICT infrastructure capability is developed not only on the university campus but also in other spaces where teaching and learning happens, such as hospital training platforms as well as other off-site curricula spaces.

Conclusion

SMU is the only health sciences university in South Africa and presents a unique yet daunting opportunity to develop an induction programme for academics coming into a teaching-led, health sciences-focused institution. This however requires enabling structures, culture and agency from not only those responsible for these programmes but from all university stakeholders and university spaces. The active involvement of participants is required from identification of topics to the actual professional development activities. The global COVID-19 pandemic presents a further challenge in efforts to develop professional development programmes premised on communities of practice and authentic dialogue. Nonetheless, agile learning management systems such as Blackboard, which provide affordances to maximise the dialogic potentials of virtual mediums, are an opportunity for SMU to ensure new academic staff are provided an opportunity to build successful academic careers while influencing student access and success.