

CHAPTER TWELVE

WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY



Reimagining Academic Induction Programme for a Multi-Campus, Comprehensive, Historically Disadvantaged University: The Case of Walter Sisulu University

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Introduction

Universities, just like other organisations, induct academics into organisational culture to ensure that they are fit for purpose. This is often viewed as helping academics to become competent, efficient and effective professionals, who are ready to hit the ground running. In many South African universities, the induction of new academics bears a strong human resource management (HRM) focus, with the goal of introducing newcomers to the institution's services. Theoretically, this HRM focus is influenced by Taylor's scientific management, which suggests that scientific methods can be used to rationally match people to organisationally defined jobs (Searle, 2009; Scholz, 2017). In this sense, induction becomes one of the HRM mechanisms employed to ensure that recruited personnel match the jobs or tasks they were recruited for, which is known as the job-fit HRM approach (Searle, 2009; Scholz, 2017).

Job-fit HRM induction approaches are widespread in induction practices of academics in the South African higher education (HE) sector as these approaches embody the discourse of "good practice" driven by the assumption that good teaching can be modelled across time and space. Boughey and McKenna (2021) trace the genesis of this approach in HE to 2004 to the introduction of the funding formular in what seems to be the emergence of the neoliberal agenda in the South African HE sector. Boughey and Mckenna (ibid) observe that in this era, teaching was linked to government subsidy that universities received for student throughputs, which was withheld until the student graduated and just a like a commodity, it was to be managed through quality assurance regimes to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. Induction of academics in their role as university teachers was thus linked to an efficiency discourse and was viewed to be an important mechanism to facilitate student success and throughput rates.

As academic developers at Walter Sisulu University (WSU), we asserted that such a positivist induction approach could not equip academics with contextualised and relevant scholarship of teaching needed to facilitate student success. We were of the view that such an approach to induction ignores the politics of knowledge (Apple, 2010; Giroux, 2010; Popkewitz, 2012; Boughey, 2009) as it downplays the historical and social conditions of the institution in which academics teach as well as its structural practices and beliefs (Behari-Leak et al., 2020). An induction of this type presents decontextualised and narrow instrumentalist teaching models that

are viewed to be applicable everywhere and thereby universal.

In this case study, we reflect on the development of a new induction for new academics at WSU following our participation in the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP). Contrary to mainstream “best practice models” of induction, NATHEP foregrounded reflexive pedagogies with the objective of unmasking certain biases and prejudices embedded in university practices (Ganas et al, 2021; Behari-Leak, 2017) in an effort to facilitate epistemic justice. The strength of engaging with reflexive pedagogy lies in the view that reflexivity is a unique feature of human beings which enables them to imagine new social forms or to think beyond circumstances in which they were born and effect changes.

This pedagogic praxis was framed through the CRiTICAL Framework (Behari-Leak et al., 2020) which identifies imperatives for change as conceptual, critical, contextual, responsive, reflexive, relational, recentred, relevant, theorised and legitimate. At the heart of this framework is the development of well-conceptualised and customised induction programmes in response to each university’s contextual realities. In this case study, we present our journey as academic developers from WSU as we develop an induction programme that is critically driven and relational, with potential to contribute to decolonial pedagogy with liberating effects.

Meta-theoretical framework

In accordance with NATHEP, our approach was guided by critical realism (CR) developed by Roy Bhaskar (1979) and social realism (Archer, 2000) to explain the ontological and epistemological assumptions which informed our approach. CR embodies the notion of depth ontology which signifies the existence of the “real world” of unobservable structures that condition practices in the present. This real world is called the intransitive world and exists irrespective of whether we know about it or not. According to Bhaskar (1979), the intransitive world is stratified into structures, powers, and mechanisms (referred to as the real), the events which they generate (are the actual), and the subset of events that are experienced (are the empirical). The intransitive world, therefore, manifests in the three domains of reality, the real – generative structures and causal mechanisms (such as an organisation’s historical structure), the actual – events resulting from various real tendencies and counter tendencies in a particular context and the empirical – observations of the actual events (in this instance, the induction practices at WSU). Bhaskar (1979) believed that the world cannot be changed rationally unless it is interpreted adequately. His realist approach takes into consideration the historicity of the organisation as the basis to understand the emergence of causal powers of the parts of organisations and the broader context within which they are embedded. In our journey to developing the WSU induction programme, we made use of Archer’s (2000) social realism as the organisational framework which guided the enactment of the project methodology.

WSU's historical background

Our assumption was that WSU as a social entity is made up of individuals who occupy various positions. We were cognisant that it is through the actions of actors in the present that social entities like WSU can transform. A brief consideration of the university's history illustrates the importance of why we speak of transformation in the context of our university. The establishment of WSU as a university dates to the apartheid period between 1948 and the 1990s when a group of higher education institutions were established to drive apartheid higher education policy with its intended objective of separate development (CHE, 2017). These universities were mainly established to train civil servants for the homelands and therefore were never intended to be involved in research activities.

Following the birth of South African democracy in 1994, the South African higher education sector was restructured in accordance with the transformation agenda enshrined in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997. Given that under the apartheid regime, tertiary institutions that catered to historically disadvantaged communities were under resourced, many universities and technikons were merged to maximise resources (CHE, 2017). WSU was similarly conceived out of a hybrid merger of the former University of Transkei and two former technikons in the Eastern Cape, namely the Border and Eastern technikons, resulting in the formation of a comprehensive tertiary institution. WSU operates under a divisional governance and management system and has four campuses, which are spread across four distant locations in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

Ekeh (1983) observed that all universities in postcolonial Africa are the remnants of migrated social structures which were parcelled from metropolitan centres of the imperial West to Asia and Africa. This suggests that while WSU is traceable to the institutions established during apartheid, the relational network structure resembles that of migrated social structures which were imported from the West. Such social structures were developed around models of social organisation imported to colonised Africa and embedded into the new colonial context. The organisation and administration structure of historically black universities (HBUs) like WSU resembles the archaic hierarchical and authoritative models of colonial universities. While these institutions are led by predominantly black leaders, the practices of actors in the present continue to reproduce hierarchical and authoritative models of the past.

Structural and cultural conditioning phase (T1)

Contrary to studies which locate the problems of the former HBUs in apartheid (Habib, 2010; Ndebele et al., 2016; Leibowitz et al., 2016), this case study shifts the gaze to the effects of colonial structures. In terms of the research methodology,

this case study locates and analyses WSU within the framework of the historical evolution of HBUs in South Africa beyond the narrow white liberal gaze. We pay special attention to the understanding of how structural and cultural mechanisms enabled/constrained NATHEP ideals at WSU.

In examination of culture, it is clear that the neoliberal agenda enables the reproduction of hierarchical colonial structures over time. Prior to our interaction with NATHEP, the induction of new staff at WSU was the responsibility of the human resources (HR) department. While the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLTD) was in existence, its role was merely aiding assistance to the HR department to familiarise new academics with teaching- and learning-related aspects as made clear in the WSU induction policy (2012):

**The human resources department shall be responsible for the programme.
In case of Academic Staff CLTD will be responsible in consultation with
Human Resources.**

The policy also shows encroachment of neoliberalism and new managerialism, which enables reproduction of authoritarianism in HE. Induction policy speaks to issues of productivity and foregrounds efficiency, adaptability and positive attitude towards university. This is captured in the principles of this induction policy as it notes:

3 Policy

3.1 An induction programme shall be compulsory on all new employees for the following reasons:

- a) To make employees productive quickly;
- b) To make employees confident about their roles;
- c) To help create realistic employee expectations;
- d) To facilitate a positive attitude towards the university;
- e) To integrate employees into the university.

Figure 61 Excerpt from WSU Induction Policy

New managerialism and authoritarianism are clear in a way in which legalistic jargon is used to deal with non-compliance.

Social interaction phase (T2-3)

According to Archer (2000) the social interaction phase looks at how actors interact with context to exercise their agency in a field of relational struggles, position

takings and power relations. In this phase, social actors interact to demonstrate their agency in relation to context. However, their actions are always conditioned by their positions in relation to others and structures in a field of relational structures. Relational network structure refers to the European organisational and management structure of these social organisations, which remains the core of these social organisations, even though they have acquired contextual variations that make them peculiarly African.

Based on this understanding, NATHEP focused on capacity building workshops in ensuring that participants were better prepared to engage with their contextual realities. NATHEP not only introduced participants to new ways of thinking about induction programmes, but also provided a better understanding of the higher education context as a 'field' of relational struggles. As participants, during NATHEP, we were introduced to various social theories to understand their complexities in university contexts. In the next section, we briefly explain some of these capacity development initiatives to demonstrate how they guided our approach towards developing a new induction at WSU.

Cultivating agency for the new NATHEP induction programme

In the first workshop, NATHEP explored the importance of different layers of context – the self, departmental and faculty contexts, institutional differentiation, regional and national HE contexts, including global issues affecting practice in our universities.

Facilitated by the SC (SC), the second workshop focused on models of induction programs and provided critical reflection of induction practices in various HE institutions in South Africa. This critical reflection on the induction models presented an opportunity for us as the participants to critically evaluate our own induction practices at our institutions and created space to showcase how good practices can be recontextualised to suit the contextual needs of the different universities. The third and the last workshop provided space for the participants to consider various pedagogies espoused at NATHEP. This third workshop focused on pedagogies in context and the SC explored four different approaches and modalities while illustrating how each pedagogy could be used as a mediating tool to achieve goals of social justice. These pedagogical approaches resonated with the epistemological, ontological, methodological and axiological domains and were explored as a critical self-reflection by the four SC members as they facilitated the workshops. These were:

- Pedagogy of being and becoming (PoBB) focused on the complex notion of identity in context. It was emphasised that NATHEP recognises and acknowledges the self and who the self becomes through the process of engagement with pedagogical encounters. With the emphasis on PoBB,
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NATHEP is informed by the notion of wholeness, which encourages relational interactions between the teacher and student. Through PoBB, the SC emphasised that as practitioners we may have internalised the coloniality of being at our universities in ways that lead us to doubt our authentic selves and our ability to relate authentically to staff and students. It was made clear that NATHEP foregrounds decoloniality and acknowledges the self and who the self becomes through the process of engagement with the pedagogical encounter. We were also encouraged to be constantly reflexive in our interactions through acknowledgement of the influence of personal and institutional histories in shaping and conditioning particular ways of knowing, being, doing and becoming.

- Pedagogy of engagement (PoE) promoted engagements which are critical, conscious and social, to enable engagement with asymmetrical relations of power – such as race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The NATHEP SC recognised that power imbalances often keep people trapped in hierarchies of power and servitude, socialising them into reproducing the status quo. Induction was spoken of as a pedagogic encounter and participants were challenged to view pedagogy beyond narrow classroom interactions.
- As academic developers, we were challenged to see pedagogy as a liberating critique which seeks to unmask all forms of oppression embedded in various social practices. Through engagement with the PoE, the SC raised our awareness to the reality that we might have been socialised into particular engagement models which we may have uncritically mimicked and reproduced without considering context or purpose. In this regard, emphasis was put on the need for a decolonial pedagogy of engagement which takes the historicity of the university seriously.
- A pedagogy of knowledge generation (PoKG) advocates for engagement with theories of knowledge generation with clear conviction that they are socio-historical, political and cultural processes of meaning making. We were encouraged to critique some induction models as a form of a globalised localism of Eurocentrism which is universalised. It was stated that this monocultural Eurocentric knowledge tends to deny the validity of racially othered knowers and knowledges while promoting an alienating culture.
- The last pedagogy introduced was the pedagogy of transformation and decolonisation (PoTD), which encouraged participants to constantly interrogate the legacy of colonial education which continues to shape ways of thinking, acting and being of the victims of colonialism. We were reminded to constantly examine ideological biases inherent in colonial education which renders education incapable of facilitating liberation and shared democracy.

These pedagogies left us with an indelible mark as scholar-activists committed to struggles for a just and equitable HE that will enable generations of students and academics to reimagine a world beyond the present.

Enacting the NATHEP induction project

Our approach to enacting NATHEP induction programme at WSU was captured through a concept paper we have adapted from fellow participants in this project, Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT). We found MUT's induction programme very interesting, and this might have been due to what we perceived to be similar contextual realities. We developed our induction strategy with an idea of complementing the human resource policy of staff orientation and induction. Now drawing insights from NATHEP, we extended what was a one-day HR induction strategy into a six-month induction programme. Our new induction programme took shape as a collaborative induction with the HR department.

In 2018, our first collaborative induction took place at uMthatha campus and was viewed as a pilot project. Our induction programme was offered for each faculty (faculties are different in other campuses) as we were trying to ignite conversations about historical and contextual realities. This initiative generated much interest at uMthatha campus and due to the scope and complexity of the history of our merger, a heated debate ensued about who is the "new" academic and to what extent were the so called "old" academics aware of various issues raised during the induction sessions. The induction programme was converted into a university workshop and the faculty's newly appointed academic staff developers helped with logistics. The induction programme was well received, and we had positive feedback from academics through the evaluation forms. New academics who attended were fascinated with our approach and content and made a bold proposal that we should consider extending our induction programme even further, for a longer time.

Following what we view to be a successful pilot project in 2018, a proposal was made that the induction project be rolled out across the university. In 2019, induction was then conducted for each campus and the programme was stretched for the duration of three consecutive days. This three-day induction, which we now view to be the norm at WSU, was well attended at almost all campuses. In the next section we roughly highlight some of the activities that take place on each day of induction.

Day 1: Academic and support staff orientation

The first day of the induction programme is planned as a collaborative day where all new university staff members are introduced to the university's vision, mission and strategic goals. This day is attended by all new staff members and all university institutional management committee (IMC) members. On this day, the vice-chancellor and principal of the university welcomes new staff members to the university, unpacking the vision and mission of the university while also engaging ways in which the institution responds to societal needs and global relevance.

The vice-chancellor often uses this opportunity to challenge new academic staff members to always think about innovative pedagogies and to encourage them to contribute towards transformation of HE. All the executive institutional members are given an opportunity present about the role and vision of their respective divisions. Most importantly, the deputy vice-chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research uses the opportunity to explain their respective strategies and challenges academics to contribute towards the academic project through teaching and research. This prepares the groundwork for in-depth conversations about pedagogies espoused at NATHEP on the second day.

Day 2: Induction for academic staff

This day was earmarked only for new academics and was meant to ignite engagement with the academic project. Induction on this day is led by the office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC): Academic Affairs working in collaboration with the DVC: Research, Library and Information Services and the Directorate of Learning and Teaching as they are the strategic drivers of the academic project within the institution. The DVCs present their respective strategies and engage academics to think about how they will contribute towards the realisation of strategic goals. For instance, the DVC: Academic Affairs focuses on the philosophy of learning and teaching that frames the university's approach towards the scholarship of learning and teaching (SOLT). The presentation by the Senior Director of Research and Innovation usually focuses on publications and the university target of research outputs and provides insights on the support available to enhance research outputs. This would also include information on the support mechanisms available in the university to improve qualifications. The Library and Information Services additionally provides information on the resource hubs available for research, teaching and learning, and how the library is embracing technology to enhance innovations at WSU.

Day 3: Introduction to the pedagogies and professional excellence programme

The third day is what we view to be an enactment of the NATHEP-informed induction programme and is run solely by the CLTD. This day pays special attention to academic development, and we provide insights on all academic development support provided by the directorate of learning and teaching. Our sessions also include student support developments, teaching and learning with technology and more emphasis on pedagogic practices. In our academic staff development, we also offer programmes that focus on the professionalisation of academics as university teachers. In this session, we also investigate curriculum transformation and the infusion of technology into learning and teaching. We focus on the

infusion of teaching and learning with technology and new inductees will be also encouraged to showcase their best practices by modelling how to engage with students using various technological affordances available at WSU.

Day 1 – Academic & Support staff orientation**Day 2– Academic staff support****Day 3 –introduction of pedagogies and Professional Excellence Programme**

Figure 62 Road map of the Walter Sisulu University induction programme 2019–2022

Elaboration phase (T4)

In the elaboration phase we identify the extent to which our induction strategy achieved the intended objectives. This last phase presents an opportunity to evaluate whether genesis (change) or stasis (no change) had occurred. We can proudly proclaim that the newly developed induction programme, following our participation in NATHEP, has enjoyed successful implementation. We are also happy to share that curriculum transformation or decolonial agenda is also taking centre stage in our deliberations. While the induction has been successful, we believe that we should embark on an ongoing process which allows us to constantly reflect on our practice and improve over time.

We acknowledge that the enactment of various pedagogies learnt at NATHEP remains a challenge. Facilitators continue to use traditional PowerPoint presentations without active engagement while others take the historicity of the university for granted. In a context shaped by the history of colonialism and apartheid this is dangerous as these practices perpetuate colonial-apartheid relations of power. It is very clear to us that there is need for more focused interventions at the cultural realm, but challenges related to agency may continue to hinder transformative goals. It is also clear to us there remain challenges brought by the dominance of neoliberal discourse, which influenced stasis in the orientation of most senior managers. While staff development initiatives are mainly geared towards young and new academics, there seems to be a greater need to extend such initiatives to senior managers of the university. While these are people who should not be excluded from discussions about induction practices, it is at the same time difficult to engage with them on some of the contentious issues. We aim to continue to advocate for consciousness and decolonial pedagogies as we continue to strengthen our induction practices.

Professional Excellent Programme (PEP)

A short learning programme known as the Professional Excellent Programme (PEP) was introduced to extend the induction programme for a period of six months to empower new academics in specific ways. The PEP short learning programme is structured in such a way that it comprises three modules: Learning and Teaching in HE, Curriculum Development, and Assessment in HE, and it is offered face to face. There robust discussions generated insightful thinking and ideas from the diversity of academics (including middle managers who joined as participants) in this PEP programme, which foregrounds decolonial pedagogies and is facilitated through active learning to encourage fusion of technology. In this programme we are trying to embed most of NATHEP learnings, and these are sequenced in this following manner:

- Pedagogy of being and becoming (PoBB)
- Pedagogy of knowledge generation (PoKG) – this includes decolonisation and construction of new knowledge. The main purpose of knowledge generation was to make sure new academics were engaged in the learning and teaching process
- Pedagogies of engagement (PoE) – new academics discussed freely as they engaged with facilitators in knowledge sharing

Group work is also part of our teaching and learning process and the sharing of honest, theoretically informed reflections is promoted. Facilitators also shared their presentations with students on the MS Teams platform and we encouraged critique.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study is a reflection on our journey towards a reimagined induction programme which was inspired by our involvement in NATHEP. We started off by providing a description of the historical and contextual background as the basis to understand how the induction was conceptualised and operationalised in our university before our participation in NATHEP. This was followed by an explanation of our involvement with NATHEP and how we negotiated with management for the adoption of ideas we acquired through our involvement. We then provided full details about how the newly reimagined induction unfolded and explained challenges encountered in this journey. We concluded by providing insights about how our reflections on success and challenges we experienced led to the conceptualisation a short learning programme, the Professional Excellent Programme (PEP), which frames our current induction practice that is now spread over the period of six months.
