

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE



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Together in Excellence



Semantic Analysis of Induction Practices at the University of Fort Hare – Towards NATHEP’s Induction Approach

Luvuyo Ndawule and Siyabulela Sabata

Introduction

The role that ought to be played by induction in organisations can never be underestimated as it is critical in the rise and fall of any institution. In every workplace setting, induction of new employees supposedly takes place to assist new employees to adapt into organisational culture and this is often viewed to be the most important mechanism that enables workers to hit the ground running (Steward & Brown, 2019). Induction is also viewed to be key in the retention of employees as organisations are struggling in the war of talent. The challenges presented by staff turnover challenge organisations to respond by ensuring tight coupling between attraction and retention strategies. Induction is therefore cited as among the important aspects of human resource management (HRM), which contribute towards retention of employees (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2004). However, there is growing critique worldwide which shows that induction practices and HRM practices generally, tend to be dominated by a technical rationality which makes available techniques that can be utilised generically in every organisation to ensure that new employees fit into jobs they were employed to do (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2004). Such induction practices, largely derived from psychology and behavioural science and viewed to be neutral and applicable across time and space, are usually packaged as “best practices” (Taylor, 2006; Searle, 2009; Scholz, 2017).

Universities worldwide, just like other organisations, also induct new academics into their organisational cultures to improve student success (Dall’Alba, 2009; Trowler & Knight, 1999). Even in the HE context, professional development programmes like induction are influenced by neoliberalism and this manifests through a “best practice” approach. In the South African context too, most universities induct new academics, but approaches towards induction differ and are mostly influenced by the historicity of such institutions. In some universities, these induction programmes are driven from human resources (HR) departments and in others by academic staff developers (ASD).

HR induction programmes are predominantly information sharing and an orientation to the resources available in the university. On the other hand, ASDs focus more on professionalising academic practice even though this varies, based on university histories (Quinn, 2012).

As ASDs at the University of Fort Hare (UFH), we have committed ourselves to work

towards the professionalisation of academic practice through involvement in various capacity building initiatives nationally. This case study is our reflection on our journey with the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), which provided us with tools to reimagine academic induction at UFH. NATHEP created a platform for ASDs to reimagine the induction programme as a form of pedagogy that might enable new academics understand the complexities of teaching in South Africa's historically structured higher education (HE) contexts.

Meta-theoretical framework

Following NATHEP, in this case we are guided by critical realism (CR) as developed by Roy Bhaskar (1978), an Indian-British philosopher as a reaction to what he viewed as a positivist Western philosophy. In contrast to this positivist view, Bhaskar proposed a broader view of the world as an open system where reality/being/ontology is stratified (i.e. reality consists of three strata – the real stratum, the actual stratum and the empirical stratum) and therefore has depth. CR acts as an “underlabourer” to social research (Bhaskar, 1975) to diagnose and resolve problems at their roots. CR, as a philosophy, works well with complementary social theories such as social realism (Sayer, 2000) and critical social theory. In this case study, we employ various social theories to make sense of the induction programmes at UFH. We have used the work of Archer (1995) and Giner & Archer (1978) as the methodological framework to guide our approach in this case and Maton's (2005, 2013) legitimation code theory (LCT), particularly his semantic dimension, to analyse pedagogical models of the resultant induction programme.

Methodological/organisational framework

Archer's morphogenetic model (M/M) framework moves from the premise that social entities (like UFH) pre-exist the individuals and their current practices today. However, historicity of such entities is important if we are to understand the actions of actors in the present. In this case study, we were therefore concerned with how the structural and cultural conditions at UFH are mediated through the exercise of academics' agency and as such, changed/not their conception of their induction practices.

Historical background at UFH: structural and cultural

conditioning phase (T1/time 1)

UFH, a well-known institution worldwide and a respected university in the African continent, is viewed as one of the emergent structures of modern African nationalism. This university was founded in 1916, with a clear colonial agenda of facilitating indirect rule by educating a small minority of elite African leaders, who

would manage the majority of the African population on behalf of their colonial masters. The university was seen as the cornerstone in building legitimacy and hegemony of mission schools to drive western education for Africans (Wotshela, 2020). Despite this clear colonial agenda, the dominance and hegemony of this missionary education was always contested and at times, subverted. As a result, UFH prides itself in producing outstanding African leaders who have exercised their agency against missionary education. Marrow and Gxabalashe (2000) are of the view that this institution is one of the paradoxes in which South Africa abounds, and has become a shibboleth of modern African nationalism, priding itself on its illustrious alumni, which include many of the great names of the modern black elite in southern Africa. The most well-known alumni from the political sphere include icons such as Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Robert Sobukwe, Mzwakhe Lembede, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Seretse Khama, Robert Mugabe, Christopher Hani and Kaizer Matanzima. Some renowned icons from other fields include Mandla Langa (South African poet, short story writer, and novelist), Tichafa Samuel Parireyantwa (Zimbabwe's first trained black physician and a medical doctor), Joseph Diescho (Namibian writer and political analyst), the list is endless (Kerr, 1968).

Unlike other historically black universities (HBUs), which were established during the apartheid period between 1948 and the 1990s (CHE, 2016), UFH was simply reconfigured and placed under the Department of Bantu Affairs (DBA), thereby falling under the homeland government of Ciskei (Wotshela, 2020). To understand structural and cultural conditioning at UFH we invoke Ekeh's (1983) conceptual of different colonial structures which were parcelled from metropolitan centres of the imperial West to Asia and Africa. Universities, in Ekeh's framework, are presented as migrated social structures which resemble the archaic hierarchal and authoritative models of colonial university. What distinguishes the universities in South Africa could therefore be different forms and shape in which such hierarchical structures work and are mediated.

To understand the inner workings of these universities and complex challenges which they endure requires careful theorisation. Some studies simplistically reduce the problem to apartheid spatial planning (Habib, 2010; Ndebele et al., 2017; Leibowitz et al., 2016) and negate engagement with endogenous African scholars' theoretical contribution. In such studies, challenges which engulf HBUs are simplistically reduced to the lack of resources and corruption, which are then viewed to be effects of apartheid, not colonialism. Contrary to this view, in this case study we see the conditioning structure to be effects of what Mamdani (1996) calls "decentralised despotism". Simply put, we view the continuing authoritarian and bureaucratic nature of practices prevalent in HBUs to be a legacy of colonial university structures now reproduced by black people.

Today UFH operates on three campuses, namely: Alice, which is the main campus;

Bhisho, which is mainly meant for part-time candidates; and East London, which is more urban in terms of location. This is a predominantly black-led university and there is sense of continuing authoritarianism, even though currently playing out through new managerialism and corporate culture. For instance, before our encounter with NATHEP, our induction was led by the human resource department (HRD) and was predominantly information sharing (using a top-down approach). As part of the induction, HRD practitioners presented information about university culture, organisational structure (bureaucratic structure), policies and procedures (legalities), history of the university and information about the university mission and vision statements. Even though the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) was involved in the induction of academic staff, this was simply information sharing (to make academics feel at home) rather than a pedagogical encounter.

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 these agents and actors read and responded to the challenges and opportunities before them and by analysing agents and their choices, we can see how power is mediated and whether systems can actually change.

Social interaction phase (T2-3)

In this phase, we report on our interactions with context as we were trying to reimagine induction at UFH in line with lessons gained through NATHEP. Drawing from insights gained during deliberations at NATHEP, we felt strongly that induction at our university had to be reimagined. It became clear to us that academics have different needs, and expectations which relate to pedagogic challenges in the UFH context. A joint sitting between TLC and HRD was proposed to review the programme. This was followed by joint meetings and workshops between HRD and TLC whereby a new induction was eventually developed. This deliberative approach enabled the TLC to insist on the introduction of NATHEP-informed induction programme, which privileges the deliberations of academics over topics and issues around teaching and learning. We also introduced the idea of issuing certificates to motivate attendance at the end of the year, and the certificate is linked with completion of a reflective portfolio (we elaborate on this at T4).

Enacting the NATHEP induction project at UFH

Today, TLC is responsible for academic induction at UFH. Academic developers (AD) focus their presentations on teaching skills, pedagogies/methodologies. Academics are then inducted for three days and this usually takes place in venues outside the institution to allow focus and attention without interruptions. In this induction, new academics are exposed to various student and staff development programmes offered at TLC. We therefore cover topics related to student development and support, staff development, curriculum development and quality assurance.

Elaboration phase (T4)

In this phase, emphasis is put on whether the interaction between agents and contexts resulted in reproduction of the status quo or transformation. We wanted to understand the extent to which our encounter with NATHEP enabled the intended objectives of the project and if not, how such practices could be improved to achieve transformation goals. To capture nuances about efficacy of the pedagogical modality of our induction, we employed Maton's (2005, 2013) legitimation code theory (LCT).

Legitimation code theory

LCT is a sociological framework for the research and analysis of social practices (Maton, 2014). We use the semantics dimension of the LCT to analyse induction practices as forms of pedagogy. In this semantics dimension of the LCT, semantic structures whose organising principles are determined by two constructs which vary in strength, semantic gravity and semantic density, are explored. The continua of strengths of semantic gravity and semantic density can be visualised as axes of the semantic plane with four principal modalities (Maton, 2020):

- Rhizomatic codes (SG-, SD+), where the basis of achievement comprises relatively context-independent and complex stances;
 - Prosaic codes (SG+, SD-), where legitimacy accrues to relatively context-dependent and simpler stances;
 - Rarefied codes (SG-, SD-), where legitimacy is based on relatively context-independent stances that are relatively simpler; and
 - Worldly codes (SG+, SD+), where legitimacy is accorded to relatively context-dependent stances that are relatively complex.
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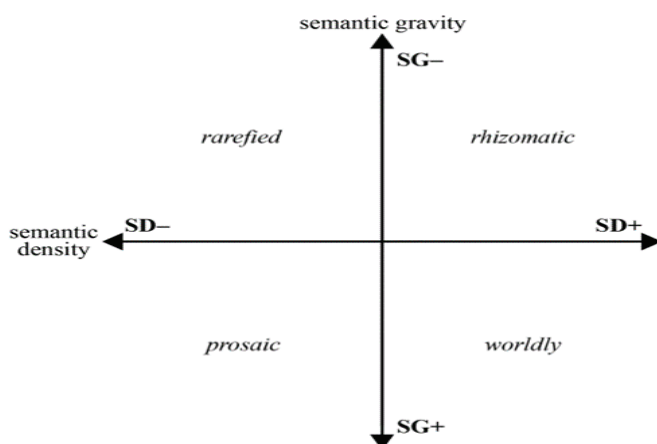


Figure 63
Semantic plane
 – adapted from
 Maton (2014)

Semantic gravity (SG) refers to the degree to which meaning relates to its context. Semantic gravity may be relatively stronger (+) or weaker (-) along a continuum of strengths (Maton 2013, 2020). The stronger the semantic gravity (SG+), the more meaning is dependent on its context; the weaker the semantic gravity (SG-), the less dependent meaning is on its context.

All meanings relate to a context of some kind; semantic gravity conceptualises how much they depend on that context to make sense (Maton, 2013). For NATHEP, context matters, and this is explained in depth in the development of NATHEP's CRITicAl Framework (see Chapter Three). The fundamental question which guided NATHEP was whether the critical professional development approach embraced by the project created necessary conditions for the positive exercise of responsive agency. We wanted to understand how this critical professional development was mediated by academic staff developers across historically differentiated South African universities (Behari-Leak, 2021).

Using the semantics dimension of the LCT, we interrogated the extent to which pedagogical interventions adopted in our induction programme enabled participants to understand our university context (SG+). In that way, we expected the strength of semantic gravity to be stronger when induction practices engage with complexities of our context and weaker when context is ignored. Semantic density (SD) refers to the degree of condensation of meaning within socio-cultural practices, whether these comprise symbols, terms, concepts, phrases, expressions, gestures and clothing (Maton, 2013). Semantic density may be relatively stronger (+) or weaker (-) along a continuum of strengths. The stronger the semantic density (SD+), the more meanings are condensed within practices; the weaker the semantic density (SD-), the less meanings are condensed. The nature of

these meanings may comprise formal definitions, empirical descriptions, feelings, political sensibilities, taste, values, morals, affiliations (Maton, 2013; Georgiou, 2020). The strength of semantic density is not intrinsic to a practice but rather relates to the semantic structure within which it is located (and thus can change). Again, NATHEP's CRITicAL Framework is framed through critical social theory (CST) (Collins, 1998; Calhoun, 1995), which brings together two strands of a multidisciplinary knowledge base. In LCT terms, this speaks to strengthening of semantic density (SD+). The CST adopted by NATHEP goes even further, to strengthen semantic density by embracing decolonial theory and praxis (SD++). One can therefore say, NATHEP embraces explanatory critique which allows for the emergence of new concepts as the theory travels across different contexts (SD++). We take motion to be the fundamental principle of being and as such, we embrace continuous development of theories (SD+++...) as long as people continue to face different forms of injustices. In the next section, we use the LCT semantic dimension to analyse evolution of induction practices at UFH from the pre-NATHEP period to date.

Academic analysis of the induction practices at UFH

As we indicated from the onset, there was a form of induction programme at UFH that was led by HRD. This was a two-pronged approach, in which the general induction was facilitated by HRD even though the academic induction was facilitated by the TLC. This TLC academic induction programme (IP) was initiated in 2007 at UFH through funding from the South African Norway Tertiary Education Development (SANTED). The objectives were:

- to make new employees feel at home in their new positions and working environment as quickly as possible;
- to allow them to contribute effectively as soon as possible;
- to assist new staff members to familiarise themselves with the institutional history, expectations, processes and procedures;
- to refresh their knowledge of teaching and learning paradigms;
- to introduce them to the institutional approach to community engagement and research (two other important pillars other than teaching and learning);
- to introduce them to the different support services;
- to provide opportunities for bonding and bridging with colleagues and important role players; and
- to facilitate their adjustment to the university community as smoothly as possible (UFH induction policy, see Scheckle, 2014).

Looking at these objectives it is clear that this induction model resembles what Maton termed prosaic code (SG+, SD-), as the focus was merely immediate context. Maton describes this code as a situation where legitimacy accrues to relatively context-dependent and simpler stances. The problem with this pedagogical modality is that it flattens the world. Everything is viewed as neutral and

there is no conception of a university as a sociological entity with positions and practices conditioned by history. It is for this reason that we felt that lessons brought by NATHEP required a new conceptualisation of the induction programme at UFH. However, while we have managed to reconceptualise the induction programme to focus on issues raised at NATHEP, the challenge continues due to lack of capacity at UFH. Another challenge is that senior managers would simply come and present information without engagement with complex issues as envisaged by our reimagined programme.

Reimagined induction

Our academic induction programme has been developed to align with insights derived from NATHEP. We have tried to provide workshops for our colleagues who have also tried to embrace the principles and theoretical tools from NATHEP. We note however that our challenge is that TLC does offer leadership capacity development programme and as such, cannot have influence over their presentations. We will therefore not analyse informational presentations, safe to say it continues to reflect a “prosaic code”. Even with TLC facilitators, there continues to be gaps which we believe present challenges that we might overcome through continuous and constant deliberations at TLC.

We have observed that induction about curriculum, teaching and learning assessment continue to be introduction to what Lange (2017) calls the “exoskeleton of curriculum”. This simply refers to the South African HE contexts’ obsession with forms and templates for curriculum development and renewal and this is mainly for compliance and accreditation purposes. In relation to this, academics are also introduced to complicated jargon like exit levels, assessment standards, constructive alignment and many other technocratic concepts associated with outcomes-based education. In our LCT analysis, this resembles what Maton calls “rarefied codes” (SG-, SD-). This is where legitimacy is based on relatively context-independent stances that are relatively simpler. This is basically “no code” as this cannot help academics understand fundamental curriculum problems, which require clear understanding of the constitutive relationship between knowledge and power.

Induction practices also pay attention to the use of technology as a pedagogical resource for learning. Here, we have an interesting move where technology is viewed as a pedagogical tool which can enhance flexible student learning and inclusion. This is captured nicely in one of the presentations: Technology Enhanced Learning (TeL) at the University of Fort Hare serves to enhance student engagement and provide inclusive learning environments through the leveraging of both existing and emerging technologies for the purposes of Teaching and Learning. The TeL team provides flexible support structures for the ongoing support and development of

teaching and learning strategies in the context of Technology Enhanced Learning, informed by pedagogical principles and practices. It is clear that TEL facilitators are conscious that some students are marginalised and therefore pedagogies need to be “inclusive”. This also takes into consideration that technology support should be ongoing to cater for different student needs. At a theoretical level, we also see awareness of different knowledge bases that should be integrated to develop pedagogical technological agency. This is illustrated in the following diagram:

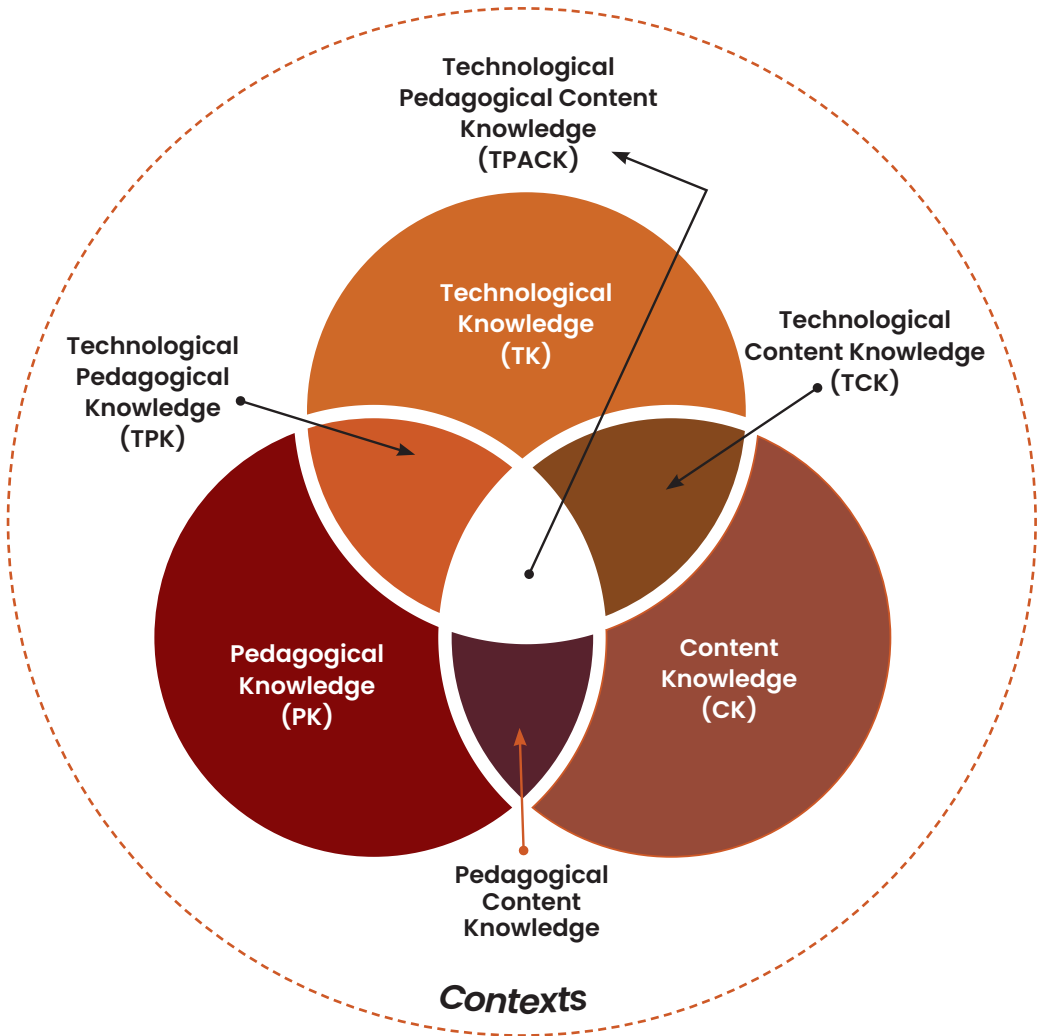


Figure 64 TPACK: Technological, Pedagogical and Content Knowledge

Using LCT semantics, this TeL resembles a worldly code (SG+, SD+). There is a clear understanding of the context (classroom or pedagogical) SG+ and TPACK provide theoretical tools (SD+) which are important for understanding classroom complexities. However, in the context with a history like ours, the strength of semantic gravity should be more strengthened by reference to contextual realities encountered by students from UFH who some, if not the majority, come from deep rural areas where there is a scarcity of resources. One would therefore question as to how these academics engage with TeL for “citizens and subjects” as conceptualised by Mamdani (1996). This therefore means that as the context changes and becomes complex there is a possibility of a more nuanced understanding of TPACK. In Maton’s terms we can therefore see strengthening of semantic density (SD++). Decolonial scholars would therefore see TPACK as mere extraversion if it does not speak to the realities of UFH.

Another interesting presentation was that of the teaching portfolio. Reasons for development of a teaching portfolio were presented as:

- To meet institutional requirements;
- To submit for consideration for the teaching and excellence awards;
- For promotion or tenure process, and
- For personal development and teaching satisfaction.

In this instance, the portfolio is simply presented as a tool for extrinsic factors not intellectual pedagogical development overtime. The e-portfolio is also viewed like a “fashionable” or trending tool with no justification of its pedagogical benefit. We can therefore code this portfolio as “rarefied codes” (SG-, SD-), where legitimacy is based on relatively context-independent stances that are relatively simpler. In this context, the value of this portfolio is not explained. This is not to say there can be no benefits for the e-portfolio but presently, these benefits are not explored.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we provided insights into our journey in enacting insights acquired through NATHEP at UFH. We started by providing the historical context, which we believe continues to condition the practices of actors at UFH. Drawing from the social realist approach embraced at NATHEP, we then moved on to show how we mediated buy-in for the reimagined NATHEP aligned induction programme. This was followed by details on how the revised NATHEP induction is implemented and challenges encountered. In the last phase, we provided an analysis of the current induction practices using the LCT semantic dimension. In conclusion, we want to note that the new MM cycle has begun. The current induction practices are influenced by our NATHEP participation and place emphasis on thinking about induction as a pedagogical encounter. Our new teaching strategy shows clearly how NATHEP played a role to change our orientations to teaching and learning.
