

**New Academics Transitioning
into Higher Education:
a case for critical professional
development and contextualised
induction practices**

**Editor
Kasturi Behari-Leak**



New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education: a case for critical professional development and contextualised induction practices

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First published in 2024 by UCT Libraries Press

<https://openbooks.uct.ac.za/uct/catalog/>

ISBN: 978-0-7992-2560-0

DOI: 10.15641/978.0.7992.2560.0



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Editor: Kasturi Behari-Leak

Language Editor: Robyn Alexander

Graphic designer and Typesetter: Faranaaz Rahbeeni

Printed by: African Sun Media

Typeset in Poppins (9PT – 12PT Leading)

This book has been independently peer-reviewed by academics who are experts in the field.

Acknowledgements

This national collaborative project is grateful for support received from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) through the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG).

FOREWORD

Never has the question of professional development been more important than now: how do we equip and support new academics in the higher education (HE) space (UNESCO, 2024)? This book, edited by Kasturi Behari-Leak, written by diverse and inspiring authors, begins to answer this question. The book offers rich case studies from universities across South Africa (SA) on how academics are inducted, supported and indeed inspired, to facilitate the teaching and learning project of higher education.

Each author shares Prof Behari-Leak's commitment and inspiration for meaningful professional development and relevant induction programmes of teaching and learning staff in higher education. Each chapter situates itself in a unique context, not only providing a rich case study, full of lessons learnt, but also inspires in ways that encourage each institution and the higher education sector on the whole to embark on a comprehensive and systemic approach to staff development in higher education in South Africa. Quality teaching is required to sharpen the impact of the HE sector on student success, and the book highlights the how, the who and the why.

While there are debates on what professional development means in the higher education sector, perhaps preceded by the question around which profession it even refers to, Behari-Leak and her co-authors provide a conceptual roadmap locating professional development in a theoretical context, followed by case studies from the 10 participating higher education institutions (HEIs) which all make the project real, show the applicability and relevance and how the project was articulated to the various HEI contexts and cultures. The last chapters (12 and 13) focus on meta reflections and implications for the HE sector.

I thoroughly appreciated the personal reflections by Prof Behari-Leak, which locate the motivation for this project and contextualises its relevance. The book is a cogent argument why staff development for academic staff is so sorely needed and raises key questions on how such development might be undertaken, who does it, in what way and for whose benefit. New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP) is shaped and designed in the 'cascading' quasi-train-the-trainer model which is adaptable and responsive to all contexts across SA HE as the case-study chapters illustrate so well.

This book focusses on conscientising the teachers/academics about their role and agency and how they need to be "better" and "different" teachers/academics to what they themselves probably had. NATHEP aims to awaken agency and responsiveness in the teachers/academics to become teachers/academics that

empower and embolden students in ways that are relevant to the needs of our institutions and our context. NATHEP equips us to shape the teaching and learning (T&L) context into a new, more relevant, and humanising context.

This concept of “apprenticeship by observation” embodies, for me, the very challenges that we face with our teaching staff and perhaps all staff in HE. We need to shift our ability and understanding towards a post-colonial teaching and learning paradigm which is new for all of us. The second concept that permeates the book is the idea of a “profession” or “professional development”. Prof Behari-Leak raises the discussion around professional development as it relates to a “profession” – perhaps defining, or at least attempting to define a profession, the gatekeeping aspects, the non-profession, the inclusion and exclusion factors, and what makes a profession, indeed, if at all, necessary, etc.

NATHEP locates itself in this debate and is not just a professional training but offers an argument to bring domains into closer relations. This can be extended beyond the T&L domain and is applicable to all of HE: indeed all management and leadership, including Student Affairs and Services, requires an NATHEP-type induction, so that we can shift the sector more significantly into a responsive, attuned and engaged sector. I would like to see the impact of NATHEP extended to all HE induction programmes – for all staff.

The book “aims to inspire” (pg. 5) and indeed it does!

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September 2024

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Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
UNESCO. (2024). Online consultation on the Revision of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel Confirmation. (1997). <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-status-higher-education-teaching-personnel>

PRELUDE

The New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP) was launched in August 2018 with 20 academic staff developers from 10 universities nationally, each represented by two staff developers from that institution. The overarching aim of the project was for each participating university to develop a relevant and theorised approach to induction practices for their university, without minimising or essentialising the specificities of contextual constraints faced. Through NATHEP, university participants were supported to initiate well-conceptualised induction programmes in their institutional contexts, where these were non-existent or needed enhancement. The vision of NATHEP was to address historical and systemic challenges in higher education by promoting a critical approach to staff development and professional learning, and to creating enabling conditions for a new cadre of academics to respond meaningfully to the pressing challenges of institutional and national contexts.

It was the intention of NATHEP to disseminate its work widely to share insights, reflections, challenges and responses garnered through the project. As a scholarly endeavour, emanating from the practically implemented project, this book serves as a collaborative research output, where each university partnership had to reflect, theorise, create, critique and apply what was learnt in the project to their real contexts of induction. Throughout this process, we encouraged staff developers to work in the nexus between teaching and research to legitimise and validate staff development programmes as a rigorous scholarly activity, embedded in a field of educational/academic development practice that has been long established.

Through this book, we become acutely aware of institutionally differentiated contexts and the structural and cultural constraints that work against staff developers, and by extension their institutions and their new academics, in optimising induction as a scholarly practice. The book showcases the opportunities and affordances of professional development interventions already in place for new academics, and how these can be adapted. This book thus provides the container and the conduit for the dissemination of critical insights gleaned regarding induction programmes in the interest of student and staff success.

The book is also pertinent in that it recognises the work of educational/academic development as a necessary practice to support staff and student development. In “commissioning” and supporting this project, the DHET demonstrated its recognition of the important work done by academic staff developers in their teaching and learning centres, nationally. Enhancing the capacity of professional staff who provide support for university teachers and teaching through professional development interventions is also critical to the success of the entire academic enterprise.

This book is written for anyone involved in teaching and learning at universities to inspire them to exercise their agency towards meaningful change. It especially addresses academic and professional staff developers to provide creative strategies for enhancing professional development practice, based on rich theorisation, contextualisation and relevance in the current context. This book can support new and experienced staff developers in understanding the design of new programmes and interventions by reflecting on what counts as effective pedagogy. It engages with how teaching is/should be conceptualised if relevance to context is critical to creating more inclusive, represented and socially just university classrooms.

In using the phrase “university classroom” instead of lecture hall, we retain the focus on teaching and learning as interactive engagements between teacher and student; not unidirectional as suggested in the use of traditional nomenclature such as “lecture”. Also, the university “classroom” extends beyond the physical space into online and virtual spaces which have opened up since the pandemic. This phrase also encompasses the symbolic coming together of teacher and student in this partnership. By engaging in the methodology the book offers, university teaching can become less reliant on external frames and tools or outside experts. If academics and staff developers know how to harness what they know already to be change agents, we have a good prognosis for the sustainability of the HE system and university teaching and learning centres as well.

It is also relevant for new academics who must navigate what it means to be an academic today in the current context of global and societal challenges. Given the diverse teaching staff and student body in HE, contextual continuity no longer exists as a predictable and sustainable marker for students or staff. Intergenerational gaps exist in social and cultural capital as well as in the access to the kinds of knowledge needed to succeed. New academics entering the field are especially vulnerable, only partially understanding the full complexities of the social world of the university they are expected to enter, mediate and/or change. Where once being an academic had more to do with what one knew than who one was, in the current ethos, one’s identity, positionality, position and agency are important in terms of these intersections as important levers to understand how one fits in, if at all. Moreover, the conceptual shift from discipline expert or professional to teacher/educator is an overarching challenge for many new academics, making it somewhat difficult to transition into the HE classroom with confidence and understanding.

We hope this book provides a useful channel for linking pedagogy with theorised practice. The journey of NATHEP sheds light on the possibilities in different contexts. It has been curated at the nexus of theory and practice, to assert that professional

development and teaching emerge from theoretical conceptualisations that are appropriately contextualised.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One, the introductory chapters 0-4 provide a framing for the project and its backstory, context, theory, discourses and methodology. Where relevant, field-specific knowledge is applied in the different parts to show its relation to how theories, concepts and discourses were activated in the project.

In Part Two, chapters 5-14 present the unique case studies of the ten participating universities. The case studies can be read in any order and may be clustered for different purposes, for example, urban, rural, comprehensive.

In Part Three, the final chapters 15 and 16 offer a cross-case analysis and a meta-reflection of the insights gleaned, assertions made, conclusions drawn and suggestions for future use by the sector as a whole.

It is with a sense of hope and courage that we exercised our agency in meaningful ways through NATHEP to imagine a different reality for higher education. This journey and commitment find expression between these covers. Even though it is a small contribution to change, relative to the seismic challenges that still confront HE, it is a hopeful one.

Onwards and upwards for us all!



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ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Academic Development
ADU	Academic Development Unit
CHATGPT	Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT	Durban University of Technology
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
EASCEP	Existing Academic Staff Capacity Enhancement Programme
ECAs	Early Career Academics
HBU	Historically Black Universities
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HoDs	Heads of Departments
HR	Human Resources
HR&D	Human Resources and Development
ICED	International Consortium of Educational Developers
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDs	Instructional Designers
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
IT	Information Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
MEDUNSA	Medical University of Southern Africa
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
NAs	New Academics
NA	Needs Analysis
NAQ	Needs Analysis Questionnaire
NAPP	New Academic Practitioners' Programme
NATHEP	New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project
NATRC	New Academics' Transitions into Higher Education Regional Colloquium
NBI	Needs-Based Induction
NFFEAUT	National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers
nGAP	Next Generation Academic Practitioners
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
OD	Organisational Development
PAD	Professional Academic Development

PDPs	Professional Development Practitioners
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
RDG	Research Development Grant
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa
SC	Steering Committee
SET	Science, Engineering and Technology
SMU	Sefako Makgatho University
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSAUF	Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework
TDG	Teaching Development Grant
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
UCDG	University Capacity Development Grant
UCDP	University Capacity Development Plan
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFH	University of Fort Hare
UL	University of Limpopo
UNIVEN	University of Venda
UniZulu	University of Zululand
UoT	University of Technology
VC	Vice-Chancellor
VUT	Vaal University of Technology
WSU	Walter Sisulu University
WITS	University of Witwatersrand
