Labouring on a journey in conceptualising a needs-based induction (NBI) programme: an autoethnographic reflections and experiences

Fhatuwani Ravhuhal (a)* Hlayisani F. Mboweni (b)

(a) DED, HOD Academic Development Unit, Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL), University of Venda, South Africa
(b) Educational Development Practitioner, Master of Microbiology, Academic Development Unit, Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL), University of Venda, South Africa

A B S T R A C T

This autoethnographic (AE) paper draws directly from a national collaborative project called the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), which is funded by the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG). We adopted evocative and narrative AE methodology to confront, interrogate, and uncover our own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions of induction before NATHEP, how it is now, and how it should be understood and conducted after being part of the NATHEP project. Our AE showcases our critical and reflective thoughts on the learning acquired throughout the journey, consciously and intentionally asking ourselves whether the NATHEP journey was worth it and how it benefitted the induction programme we conceptualised and implemented. Through a combined autoethnography study design and technique, we were able to gather qualitative data from the two of us and present it as written reflective narratives. Together, we developed an open-ended questionnaire in which we asked questions that sought to elicit our experiences throughout the journey as a way of reflecting on the overall learning acquired by being part of the NATHEP project. Our responses and narratives are reflectively and thematically analysed to make sense of how we interpret our eventful NATHEP journey thus far. We conclude and submit that this paper has implications for academic development practice and academic developers who aspire to be reflective practitioners, constantly reflecting on their practices to dismantle and disrupt cultural tendencies in their quest to transform their context of work and induction practices.

© 2024 by the authors. Licensee SSBFNET, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Introduction

Given the current dynamics in the higher education context, we constantly find ourselves striving to remain relevant and responsive to the persistent changes affecting professional development initiatives, such as the induction of new academics. This autoethnographic paper is not an exercise in self-glorification but rather emphasises the importance of reflection and reflective practice as academic development (AD) practitioners. As argued by Ganas et al. (2021, p. 15), this requires AD practitioners to reflect deeply and, most importantly, to disrupt and confront our own subjectivities and taken-for-granted assumptions to re-imagine our practices as academics responsible for engaging new academics (NAs) during their transition into their new institution.

Throughout our careers, and through our introduction to reflective and reflexive practices as key concepts in the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDipHE) for academic developers, we have learned that these practices are challenging. They involve decoding and revisiting both current and past experiences to improve our practices. Reflecting in and on practice, as argued elsewhere, requires bold interrogation of why we do what we do and why we did not do what we needed to do. Such interrogation should be accompanied by asking tough questions about the why, how, and what of our practices (Ravhuhal et al., 2020).

For us, being part of the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP) was about learning ways to theorise and create conditions that advance the transition of NAs from their previous contexts to their current one. This has both intended and
unintended consequences, enhancing our agency while requiring us to make bold decisions, which sometimes do not work. The importance of such bold decisions lies in the opportunities they provide for further learning in pursuit of perfecting our induction practices as AD practitioners.

On this basis, we believe our AE paper suggests that we should always critically reflect on our work and any workshop or project we engage in. Such reflections should centre around questioning the relevance of our participation and our role in the project, as well as ascertaining and positioning ourselves as key change agents.

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

**The Context of the Paper and its genesis**

The New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project, better known as NATHEP, is based at the University of Cape Town, which exercises administrative and financial oversight as well as monitoring and evaluation of the project. The strategic aim of the NATHEP project, as outlined in the NATHEP UCDG proposal (2018), is to offer training for academic developers in relation to inducting new academics (NA) and the next generation of academics (nGAP) into their roles as teachers in higher education (HE).

The NATHEP programme is aligned with UCDP goal 4.1, which aims to provide a development resource to address transformation imperatives in the university system. Moreover, the project specifically aims to strengthen staff developers’ agency and ability to conceptualise, convene, implement, and evaluate professional development programmes for the induction of new academics at their universities. Accordingly, NATHEP is a collaborative project focusing on engaging and supporting selected universities to conceptualise programmes tailored for the induction of new academics and the next generation of academics into higher education in the current context (Behari-Leak, 2018). The NATHEP project is guided by the realist question: what works for whom, in what context, and why?

Our view is that the idea and purpose of the NATHEP project are not to teach or impart knowledge on programmes or types of induction but to: firstly, provide a platform for knowledge sharing and generation on ways in which induction can be contextually conceptualised; secondly, assist with conceptualising an induction that is more transformative to support new academics (NAs) transitioning smoothly into higher education institutions; and thirdly, ensure their adaptability and even longevity in their roles as HE teachers. It is also important to note that our initial preconceptions and beliefs were that it was a project meant to teach or train us on ways to induct NAs, thereby introducing us to various modalities and types of inductions.

The NATHEP methodological approach is based on a cascading programme of staff development in which ten universities have been invited to participate, with two staff development representatives from each university making up the participant pool (Behari-Leak, 2018). The project has a three-year cycle, and participation requires attendance at national workshops, colloquia, and conferences to promote and support scholarly publications from the project (Behari-Leak, 2018). We are representatives or leaders from one of the universities that became part of the NATHEP project. It is worth noting that the NATHEP project provided us with a platform to interrogate our preconceived ideas and biases about the nature of learning and teaching, which is central to our reflexive process (Ganas et al., 2021, p.16). Thus, our engagement with NATHEP has focused on ensuring that we conceptualise an induction programme that is theoretically underpinned and sensitive and responsive to NAs’ context, in collaboration with colleagues from other institutions.

In this autoethnographic paper, we retrace and capture our NATHEP journey from 2018 to 2022 to make sense of what we have learnt from the NATHEP project, as shown in Figure 1 below. We also ask ourselves self-retrospective questions such as: What did we find easy? What difficulties and challenges did we encounter in relation to our context (culture and agency) when trying to conceptualise and implement our needs-based induction (NBI) programme?

**Experiential Learning Theory as a Theoretical Framework**

This paper is underpinned by Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory. Kolb (1984) argues for reflection to be central to the learning cycle, as it allows individuals to process what happens during an experience. Dewey (1933) also contends that it is crucial to ensure that a person is involved in a reflection process. Dewey argues that significant gains are achieved when reflective practice is incorporated, as it forms a critical part of personal development and transformation (Dewey, 1933). It is against this backdrop that this AE paper is primarily underpinned by the principle of reflecting on and after reflecting in for better induction practice.

Experiential Learning Theory consists of a four-stage process: concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. During the concrete learning process (Kolb, 1984), one uses new experiences or old experiences in a new way, learning new ways or procedures of doing things. During the NATHEP journey, we brought in our old experience of induction.

Reflective observation follows the concrete learning process, involving reflecting on the new experience to understand what it means to conceptualise a new model or programme of induction based on what has been learnt. At this stage, we were able to consider ways we could have improved our induction practices in the past, embedding theories as part of the process. This is followed by abstract conceptualisation (Kolb, 1984), where we adapted our thinking and constructed new ideas based on our experiences with NATHEP.
pedagogies. This process involved ensuring that all necessary resources, both human and financial, were in place before the implementation of the NBI programme of induction.

The active experimentation process (Kolb, 1984) follows, where we applied new ideas to the actual real-world situation of a theory-based needs-based induction programme to see if it works or not and to reflect further. This process began in 2019 and continues until now, in 2023, as we embark on the journey of conceptualising a needs-based induction (NBI) programme to determine if it is ideal and contextually sensitive to our university.

Conceptualising and Implementing our Induction Programme: Being Disrupted by NATHEP Project

As we have highlighted earlier, the NATHEP project aims to contribute to knowledge and practices by engaging academics and AD practitioners, so that they are capacitated to significantly enhance their induction programmes within their own contexts. All NATHEP participants were and are supported in interrogating and addressing historical and systemic challenges that shape institutional professional learning spaces, critically influencing a cadre of new academics who can respond to the pressing challenges of our time (Ganas et al., 2021, p.17). One of the most important aspects of the NATHEP project is the introduction to pedagogies whose portability from one context to the next depends on intrinsic aspects of knowledge generation, transformation and decolonisation, engagement, being and becoming, and socio-cultural and historical conditions (Ganas et al., 2021, p.15). We cover more on these pedagogies in the next section.

As AD practitioners reflecting on the NATHEP journey, we identified five critical aspects that changed how we see and conduct our induction. Firstly, we recognised the need to move beyond compliance or tick-box induction that is not theoretically based. Secondly, we ensured that our induction is theoretically underpinned, understanding it as a process rather than an event, which is key to any NAs in our institution. Thirdly, we incorporated various pedagogies: Pedagogy of Being and Becoming (Ontological), Pedagogy of Engagement (Methodological), Pedagogy of Knowledge Generation (Epistemological), and Pedagogy of Transformation (Current discourses such as decoloniality, academisation, Africanisation, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution) during induction to inculcate such practices in NAs for use in their own classrooms or lecture halls. Fourthly, we realised the importance of believing in ourselves as AD practitioners. Lastly, we understood the need to legitimise our beliefs in the needs-based induction programme, ensuring that this legitimisation is effectively communicated and shared with those who might be sceptical of its relevance and application.

Features of our NBI Programme of induction: thinking outside the box

The NATHEP project empowered us to think outside the box, liberating ourselves from the toxic comfort zones that perpetuate the adoption of the current status quo in the induction of new academics (NAs). Instinctively, we recognised the need to identify key features that would authenticate our Needs-Based Induction (NBI) programme. Four key features became central to our NBI programme: a theoretical underpinning, the Needs Analysis Questionnaire, the inclusion of students in the induction process, and the understanding that the NBI programme is a process, not an event (Ravhuhal & Mboweni-Pataka, 2022).

First (1st) feature: Multi-Focal Theoretical Framework

One key feature of our NBI programme is that it is multifocally theoretically underpinned. This means that our NBI incorporates the theory of change, embedding Bhaskar’s (1975) critical realism (CR) and the seven scalar levels of being, and integrates Social Realism or Realist theory (Margaret Archer, 2000; 2003). Additionally, the socio-cultural theory by Vygotsky (1994) provides elements of social adaptability. While Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory posits that the environment where people live is a source of development for both their personalities and characteristics, Bhaskar’s seven scalar levels of being provide a platform for new academics to be active agents, able to ‘act back on their world’ by reflecting on their own concerns, commitments, and projects in higher education (Behari-Leak, 2017, p. 488).

Second (2nd) feature: Needs analysis questionnaire

All our induction sessions are preceded by a needs analysis questionnaire, which is sent 3 or 4 weeks before the start of the workshop (Ravhuhal & Mboweni-Pataka, 2022). The main aim of the needs analysis questionnaire is to solicit the professional needs of the new academics and to provide key background information, particularly regarding their teaching and learning experiences in higher education institutions. In our pursuit of conceptualising the NBI programme, we aimed to avoid the rhetorical mistake noted by King, Roed, and Wilson (2018, p. 471), who highlight that one of the major issues with academic induction is its persistent failure to consider the needs of individual academics or university teachers.

Third (3rd) feature: Students inclusion in Induction

We have always held the belief that anything purporting to be for students necessitates their inclusion. For us, induction is meant to empower and support new academics (NAs) to amplify and enhance their teaching and learning practices, thereby improving student learning. Thus, it is important that students are also involved in the process. However, the inclusion of students in the broader engagement during our induction has often been viewed sceptically due to a cultural tendency and the belief that students are not key stakeholders and cannot contribute to how NAs are inducted. Scholars such as De Bie et al. (2019), Cook-Sather et al. (2018), O’Shea (2018), Sophia and Stein (2020), Bovill (2014), Matthews (2016), Cameron and Woods (2016), and Behari-Leak (2017), among
many others, have advocated for student partnership and collaboration in teaching and learning spaces. Our argument is that students are key agents and stakeholders in learning and teaching matters and should therefore be part of the NBI programme.

**Fourth (4th) feature: NBI programme: induction as a process not an event**

Our Needs-Based Induction (NBI) programme is designed to engage new academics (NAs) beyond the initial induction period, either through informal follow-up conversations or meet-and-greet sessions. This approach is informed by our own observations since joining the university, where we have consistently noted that inductions for NAs typically occur towards the end of the year or more than six (6) months after their employment. Moreover, as Fullan (2001) cited in Wong (2004) argues, induction should not be limited to a single event, meeting, or activity; rather, its success depends on recognising and sustaining it as a process involving a journey of ongoing decisions and actions.

For this reason, a key aspect of our NBI programme is to engage NAs when they are first employed and have become part of the university teaching staff. This aligns with Wong (2004)’s assertion that the success of teachers or lecturers hired by educational institutions can be ensured if they are provided with a comprehensive and coherent professional development programme.

**Research and Methodology**

This paper employs autoethnography as a research methodology. After participating in various NATHEP workshops from 2018 to 2022, we felt the need to reflect on our journey through the project, how we experienced it, and how it influenced our conceptualisation of the Needs-Based Induction (NBI) programme. We developed an open-ended instrument where the two of us responded and narrated our experiences fully. This was followed by reading our own narratives to derive meaning from them. Our responses to questions provided opportunities to create themes for analysis and interpretation. The analysis primarily focused on the overall emerging meaning of our experiences, a stage referred to by Kensington-Miller et al. (2015, p. 282) as holistic-content.

Our paper adopts evocative and narrative autoethnographic methodological approaches, drawing from scholars such as Warwick and Board (2012), Tedlock (1991), Ellis and Bochner (2000), Butz and Besio (2009), and Chang (2016). The main aim of utilising autoethnography was to interrogate our experiences of the NATHEP journey in conceptualising the NBI programme for our university context. According to Denejkina (2017), evocative narrative and critical autoethnography involve researchers writing or narrating their own experiences in a retrospective manner. This entails turning analytical lenses inward to write, narrate, and interpret our own experiences (Chase, 2005).

Autoethnography is not a new method, although it is rarely used in various fields, especially in the social sciences. As noted by Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experiences (auto) to understand cultural experience (ethno). Ellis (2009) argues that autoethnography is a combination of a research method and a method of writing in which the researcher is both an author and a focus of research writing. This means that in autoethnography, the researcher observes themselves while simultaneously observing others (Ellis, 2009).

Our research, being an evocative, critical, and narrative autoethnography drawing from Ellis et al. (2011), is steeply focused on our introspection on the topic, particularly our journey in the NATHEP project from 2018 to 2021. Our aim is to not only document or narrate our NATHEP journey but also to share how this experience has impacted and now influences our induction practices as AD practitioners. We embed NATHEP’s realist question of ‘what works for who, in what context, and why’ in our analysis. The autoethnography further showcases our critical and reflective reflections on the learning acquired throughout the journey, asking ourselves whether the NATHEP journey was worth it and how it benefited our conceptualised and implemented induction programme.

In this paper, we observed and engaged in reflection through narrating our observations from the time we became part of the NATHEP project. Essentially, we are both the researchers and participants in this paper. As noted by Haynes (2017), adopting an evocative approach enables researchers to focus on emotion and self-expression while delving deep into examining the self and experiences as part of relational and institutional narratives affected by social and cultural structures.

The following questions underpin and serve to interrogate us and our experiences of the NATHEP journey that led critically and reflectively to the conceptualisation and implementation of our NBI programme of induction:

i. How did our experience with staff development shape the way we viewed induction of new academics prior to NATHEP?
ii. How did NATHEP change the way we value induction of new academics?
iii. How did NATHEP enhance our knowledge capabilities in terms of induction of new academics?
iv. In what way has our NBI programme through NATHEP disrupted the status quo within our university?
v. How did the NATHEP journey ensure that our NBI programme is able to dismantle current cultural practices on induction of NAs?
vi. Given our varying past histories, in what way is our induction programme addressing issues of epistemic and social justice?
pii. In what way is our induction programme encompassing the theoretical underpinning of the NATHEP programme?
viii. How does our induction programme legitimise the reality of the context new academics are entering?
ix. Looking at the evaluation by NAs, what are our overall reflections regarding the implementation of the NBI induction programme? How do we think it is experienced by NAs?

The responses to all these questions are captured and analysed thematically in the subsequent section.

Findings and Discussion

Our NATHEP journey and its influence on our perspectives on induction are shared here using our real identities. We are both academic developers who have been with the institution for more than 5 years, and we both hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education. Drawing from Kensington-Miller et al. (2015), our narratives predominantly offer holistic and comparative synthesis of our experiences during the NATHEP journey. In this analysis, we present a selection of narratives related to our experiences, with each narrative presented verbatim.

Metamorphosing towards AD practitioners

As we endeavoured to comprehend our identities and backgrounds, as well as our experiences of induction and our observations thereof, we felt akin to strange creatures, camouflaged or metamorphosed into the same context with similar induction experiences (Kensington-Miller et al., 2015). Our backgrounds reveal that we began our careers elsewhere, with no direct link to the work we currently undertake as AD practitioners. One of us was previously a teacher, whose induction experience involved simply being introduced to colleagues, classes, and grades to teach, without any formal induction process. The same scenario repeated when transitioning to the university, where they had to wait for a full eight months before an induction was held. This indicates a similarity between the experience of induction as a high school teacher and that upon joining the university as an AD practitioner.

Furthermore, another one of us was introduced to staff development upon joining the teaching and learning centre as a teaching assistant in 2015. Since then, she has attended several inductions as an observer, where various presentations were delivered by different stakeholders, and new academics were not actively engaged during the sessions but were given opportunities to ask questions at the end of each presentation - which they rarely did. Our experiences are outlined as follows:

When I was employed as a high school teacher, before joining the university as an AD practitioner, I was just introduced to my colleagues and was shown the classes and grades I was expected to teach. There was no formal induction of whatsoever, either based on theory or anything. It was just a mere show a class to teach and I started teaching. So, when I joined the university as an AD practitioner, I was just taken through a few contract forms by HR personnel, and as for induction, I waited a few months before I was inducted, which confused me as I was not inducted immediately. When I finally received an invite, I just went to where the induction was held and observed several presentations by various directorates within the university (Fhatuwani).

I had the privilege of attending a few staff development and new staff induction workshops as an observer. What I experienced through these sessions was that academic developers and other university stakeholders presented on various topics from the use of library, HR policies, teaching and learning and so on. New academics (NAs) will only be given a chance to ask questions at the end of each presentation - which they rarely did. Our experiences are outlined as follows:

As we review our responses, we find ourselves questioning the authenticity and legitimacy of the previous induction programme. Our narratives reveal that we were not initially AD practitioners but had to adapt and fit into different contexts of academic development. This is why we employed the metaphor of “strange animals” camouflaging into the context, as derived from Handal (2008) cited in Kensington-Miller et al. (2015). Manathunga (2007, p. 25) cited in Quinn and Vorster (2014, p. 256) emphasises that many developers are ‘migrants’ from other disciplines who bring valuable experience and knowledge but are unlikely to have been systematically prepared for AD work. This argument is corroborated by Quinn and Vorster (2014, p. 256), who note that most AD practitioners only acquire the knowledge, practices, and identities associated with AD work “on the job”.

NATHEP: new perspective and way of Induction

Presently, we acknowledge a changed understanding of induction following our participation in the NATHEP programme. We now perceive induction as a process rather than a mere orientation or event and believe it should not be conducted solely for compliance purposes.

Through NATHEP I am able to see how we as AD practitioners should induct our academics not for the sake of saying we are inducting them, but also bearing in mind variety of issues such as their background, contextual issues, social and epistemic justice, embedding or supporting our induction with a theory, as well as applying varying pedagogies. I am now able to understand that induction of NAs is not a once-off thing or process, its more developmental and social-contextual process which involves taking a learning journey with NAs (Fhatuwani).

Through NATHEP I have realised that induction is not just orientating new academics, but it should also be a learning process for both the inductees and the facilitators. Induction should be a knowledge building platform through interactions between new academics and academic developers. It should also be logical in the sense that it must be theorised and that should consider context there should be specific reasons for having specific topics in the programme (Hlayisani).
Our views as AD practitioners here seemingly align with the arguments put forth by Fullan (2001) in Wong (2004), who posits that induction is not merely a single special event, meeting, or activity; rather, its success hinges on understanding and sustaining it as a process involving a journey of iterative decisions and actions. Moreover, we feel that the NATHEP project has provided us with a platform to learn, deliberate, and be empowered to innovate new approaches to understanding induction.

**Doing things differently: introducing theoretically underpinned context-sensitive induction and pedagogies**

Considering how NATHEP has enriched our knowledge and capabilities regarding the induction of new academics, it is noteworthy that we have assimilated numerous aspects into our induction practices. These encompass the incorporation of pedagogies during NA inductions, with due consideration to issues of social and epistemic justice and Bhaskar’s 7 scalar framework, as well as the imperative to ensure that the induction is theoretically underpinned. All the insights gained from the NATHEP project now constitute integral components of our NBI induction programme, which we have conceptualised and implemented since 2019.

In today’s changing world, we will either manage the status quo which will eventually result in failure, or we can lead the disruption which is likely to lead to the reinvention of our business, and potentially the industry as a whole. so you must decide: b

One thing that I realised through NATHEP is that one can never say I know everything. Being part of NATHEP helped me learn theories which where foreign to me (Margaret Archer social realistic Theory and Bhaskar 7 Scalar). These theories made me realise that there is a need to consider contextual aspects such as the culture (values and beliefs) and structure (infrastructure, departments and organisations and so on) which might constrain or enable new academics to exercise their agency in fulfilling the mission and vision of the university they are serving as well as responding to international and global issues. NATHEP also made me conscious of the fact that the NAs in our spaces as AD practitioners come into the university with their own way of knowing and ours is just to assist them navigate their new environment. Furthermore, NATHEP taught me the importance of applying different pedagogical approaches when engaging with academics as a way of programming their practices, which is something I was taking for granted. (Hlayisani).

**Disrupting and disrupted induction programme status quo: From HR-led to ADU-led induction focused on teaching and learning**

We endeavoured to comprehend and make sense of how the induction programme we developed through NATHEP disrupts the status quo within our university. Our observations allude to the numerous changes we implemented to alter the way inductions were traditionally conducted. One particularly notable aspect is the inclusion of students in our induction process, a step that was vigorously questioned and contested by various stakeholders who doubted the legitimacy of their participation.

**In so many ways, firstly induction at our institution was a prerogative task managed and administered by HR, there was no programme of induction in place, secondly, induction had no specific dates and was often held in August or September for 2 Days, thirdly, the induction was merely dominated by just PowerPoints presentation presented in platonic style with no engagements with NAs, Fourthly, students were not involved at all. Now with NATHEP influence, the induction for NAs is administered and organised by academic development unit (ADU) and is done as early as February or latest in March. Our induction is not a one man show kind of as it is more engaging with the NAs and students. Again, our induction has its own programme and is underpinned by theoretical frameworks, pedagogies and students are also part of such induction. Together with the HR, we are currently working on a revised policy which we ensure that induction becomes compulsory and that at the end of six month, NAs will be provided with certificate that would form part of their probation period. (Fhatuwani)**

From 2014, induction was handled by the HR department, that is from logistics arrangements to invitation of guest presenters, academic developers didn’t have much of say on what should form part of the programme for the days allocated for induction. through NATHEP we managed to break away from HR where induction AD practitioners now plan the induction. Furthermore, students now form part of the induction as a way of having our new NAs engage with the students they are going to teach. Our induction programme is no longer about AD practitioners transferring knowledge but it’s now a knowledge sharing platform where students, NAs and AD practitioners engage on issues around context, social justice, epistemic justice, decoloniality, teaching practices and so on (Hlayisani).

Our resolve to disrupt the status quo on induction of the new academics is drawn from Misner (2019: p.4) who argues:

*In today’s changing world, we will either manage the status quo which will eventually result in failure, or we can lead the disruption which is likely to lead to the reinvention of our business, and potentially the industry as a whole. so you must decide: be disrupted or be the disruption. I vote to be the disruption.*
Quoting Prof Paul Green of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Fredericks (2021) noted that breaking or disrupting the status quo requires a different mindset at a very high level. It is not merely about envisioning the future but rather about implementing strategies to achieve set goals as the world continues to evolve. As AD practitioners, we harboured a fear of remaining within our comfort zone, a zone familiar to everyone, accepted by all, and understood as the norm for induction within the university. While such adherence may render us accepted, it would ultimately render us irrelevant in a world characterised by constant change and the emergence of new norms in all spheres of life. Unfortunately, as Misner (2019) observes, the present does not determine the future, as the future entails unforeseen and unexpected changes, which by nature are disruptive.

Hence, we chose to embrace disruption and position ourselves as disruptors of the induction process, which we observed was often regarded as a mere compliance event. Our approach involved conceptually an NBI programme aimed at remaining relevant and responsive to the needs of new academics.

**Sensitivity of NBI programme to the university context**

In our effort to conceptualise an NBI induction programme, we continuously reminded ourselves that such a programme needed to be guided by our own context, as we are integral to it. It was for this reason that we needed to ascertain the predominant aspects of our induction programme. The following are our responses:

**Instinctively so, our induction programme incorporates all the aspects such that it is conceptual, contextual, critical, responsive, reflexive, relational, re-centred and relevant and is theoretically based or underpinned as well as legitimate. This has been the direct impact of NATHEP as we are now ensuring that our induction is not tick-a-box, but one that ensures that mutual learning do take place. To ensure that our NBI is sensitive and embodied our beliefs, views and understanding, our induction is underpinned by the four (4) pillars which are, an induction which is theoretically based, the use of ‘needs analysis questionnaire, students’ inclusion in induction, and understanding induction as a process not as an event. These four pillars fit well into our quest to ensure that it is contextual sensitive to the university and the NAs (Fhatuwani).**

Our induction programme is a needs-based induction programme aims to meet the needs of NAs with regards to being responsive and reflexive to the context new NAs are entering into. Thus, the induction is centred around four (4) pillars; the first pillar is the needs-based questionnaire which forms the basis to understanding NAs needs with regards to the new environment they are entering, new context. Secondly, our induction is also centred around having students representatives engaging with NAs, this is in line with the new strategic direction of the university of placing students at the centre of the university core business, therefore, every initiative in our university which is meant for students success needs to include students. Thirdly, our induction is no longer an event but a process which runs for 6months where NAs are engaged in knowledge co-creation and knowledge building making it re-centred in the sense that it remains committed to discovering and exploring the active and powerful cutting-edge styles of personal development. Lastly, the needs-based induction programme is theoretical underpinned making it legitimate, critical and relational (Hlayisani).

**Fostering NBI programme as a way of dismantling current cultural practices on induction of NAs**

Our NATHEP journey has been interesting as it has been a journey of unlearning and learning ways of doing induction that is both theoretically underpinned. This was and still so while at the same time we needed to dismantle cultural practices that has been engraved in the institutional induction of NAs.

For so long we as AD practitioners have been sitting on our comfort zones in relation to induction until we were exposed to new ways and best practices of inducting NAs adopted by other institutions. It is now 4 years since we have implemented our NBI programme of induction in 2019 and very few people can understand what we are doing and trying to achieve. Cautiously, we have to exert our agency in trying to dismantle the cultural fabric which entails and positions the induction of NAs as merely and event which needs a date for it to be held and inculcating the idea of induction that is a process. I must say that though the NAs(lecturers) are welcoming to the new way of induction, key stakeholders such are not involved in the NBI induction. As for the inclusion of students in our induction, it has always raised eyebrows with lots of questions being raised on why they are included. Surprisingly, such questions are also raised by the NAs who are oblivious of the fact that they are hired or are part of the institutions to help advance and enhance the future of such students academically (Fhatuwani).

Since the inception of new knowledge gained through the NATHEP journey, there has been a lot of changes with regards to practices of different stakeholders, as an AD practitioner, the NBI programme disrupted my understanding of the purpose of induction. I now comprehend that NAs joining our university are knowledgeable and my responsibility as an AD practitioner is to create a platform where NAs are able share their knowledge and co-create new knowledge. New academics also appreciate being given a platform to share their knowledge and they show that they are ready to implement the learning that happened during the induction in their own teaching. There are still a lot of misunderstanding on the reason behind having students representatives in our induction by some university stakeholders, however, NAs appreciate learning from students, one other cultural constrain is the fact that key agents are not attending our induction programme, and this results in resistance on what our NBI seeks to achieve as most NAs indicated that they are unable to implement what they learnt from the induction (Hlayisani).
Remaining awake to historicity and praxis influences in relation to epistemic and social justice

The interplay between historicity and context, and how they intertwine to influence the agency of AD practitioners and academics in higher education, is now well understood. This implies that the institution’s historical embeddedness influences our agency as AD practitioners, shaping our decisions to realign or adapt new induction programmes, and determining the day-to-day activities aimed at transforming past induction practices to address both epistemic and social justice within our institution.

We acknowledge that new academics bring with them to higher education institutions some knowledge of issues pertaining to HE, although such knowledge may not always be based on theoretical foundations. Therefore, the induction programme is tailored to engage more deeply with structural, cultural, and agential matters, aiming to support them in defining their agential positions and enabling them to navigate their roles effectively. These engagements include exploring the driving forces influencing change in HE, as well as addressing issues of social justice through an examination of our country’s history and its impact on HE institutions. This is evident in our responses regarding how our induction programme addresses issues of epistemic and social justice:

*We are fully aware that NAs have knowledge views and beliefs that they bring to any institution of higher learning. This kind of knowledge is either learned, experienced, or envisioned and a such we try to engage them by introducing social realistic framework to enable them to fully comprehend enabling and constraining structural, cultural and agential aspects that are primarily attached to a context, thus the HEIs. Again, the Bhaskar scalar being framework (thanks to the NATHEP project), as well as the Higher Education context (thanks to the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education) and now the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Fhatuwani).*

*As I have indicated earlier, our new NAs come into the university with their own ways of knowing, therefore, we do not teach the during the induction, but we allow them to share knowledge as a way of addressing epistemic justice. Furthermore, we have engagements on driving forces influencing change in HE as a way of addressing issues of social justice through exploring the history of our country (Hlayisani).*

Legitimisation and Authenticity of NBI as part of Critical Framework of NATHEP Project

In conceptualising the NBI, we aimed to develop an induction programme that is both robust and engaging. To authenticate the NBI, we ensured that it is grounded in theory and aligned with authentic purposes and goals relevant to the context in which new academics will find themselves. Moreover, to legitimise the context, each session is preceded by a needs analysis questionnaire, and students are actively involved as key partners and stakeholders who contribute to overall engagements and discussions. Our responses are outlined as follows:

*We embed the Bhaskar Scalar within our induction we always draw from and engage our discussion based on the mission, vision, and values of the institution. Students are now an integral part of our induction as they provide their own varying experiences as well as expectation in relation to our NAs (Fhatuwani).*

*Our engagement with NAs always draws from the mission and vision statements of the university using the social realistic and the Bhaskar 7 scalar as a lens to disrupt our NAs thinking about the context they are entering (Hlayisani).*

Reflecting on reflections from the new academics on the NBI programme of induction

As AD practitioners, reflectivity and reflexivity are central to our work, providing us with numerous opportunities to revisit our actions, assess our successes and failures, and identify areas for improvement in our practices. It was essential for us to examine the experiences of the new academics (NAs) and how we engaged with them for our personal and professional development. While we stressed the importance of their honest evaluation of our engagement, most of their responses were overwhelmingly positive, as demonstrated by the following accounts from two AD practitioners:

*Not only NAs but every member of the university community who attended to our induction find our programme of induction very interesting and totally different from what they were used to. This is captured in our evaluation that we normally have at the end of each induction (Fhatuwani).*

*Judging from the comments from the evaluation questionnaires, NAs are excited about our conceptualised induction programme because they formed part of the knowledge sharing exercise to meet their own professional development needs (Hlayisani).*

Implications

Higher Education and Research

This paper does not merely narrate our NATHEP journey; it offers insights into our backgrounds, experiences during NATHEP, and how this journey led us to engage in reflexivity, prompting us to deeply question our practices as AD practitioners. Our autoethnography takes on a confessional or self-critical tone, primarily aimed at reflexively understanding our experiences of NATHEP. It serves to encourage reflective practices among educational practitioners in our field and academia, delving into our journey within NATHEP as a social context for learning new, theoretically, and context-sensitive induction methods. This we believe, is critical as it involves introspective reflection on both the highlights and challenges of our journey.
Reflecting on our NATHEP journey, it is evident that our practices as AD practitioners have been positively impacted, albeit disrupted, with significant learning, unlearning, and relearning taking place. One key lesson is that induction, as a professional development initiative, should be viewed and conceptualised as a process rather than a one-off event or orientation, and certainly not for mere compliance.

If induction processes are theoretically underpinned, they become platforms for knowledge generation and building. Such processes facilitate learning for both new academics and facilitators, often AD practitioners. Contextual considerations are crucial during discussions within the induction programme. Upon further reflection on NATHEP, we became acutely aware of our discomfort with the traditional approach to induction in our institution. This journey underscored the dangers of comfort zones, which stifle development and render AD practices inert. We, therefore, contend that to transform AD practices, opportunities for reflection, growth, and networking must be maximised, allowing for innovation and adaptation.

Moreover, we recommend that any educational projects similar to NATHEP or induction initiative should serve as opportunities for practitioners to identify their roles and enhance their practices. Furthermore, AD practitioners must be bold and persistent in exercising agency, playing key roles in transforming practices and spaces within their institutions to enhance learning and teaching. It is without a doubt that the NATHEP journey we embarked on since 2018, highlighted the importance of challenging institutional norms by proposing and conceptualising new, potentially disruptive induction methods and programmes that are theoretically and context-sensitive.

Conclusions

This autoethnographic paper presents reflective narratives of our own NATHEP journey and the lessons we derived from it. Although we are a small group consisting of two individuals, our reflections fit within the autoethnographic framework. It is essential to acknowledge that our perspectives and reflections cannot be generalised to all AD practitioners or university contexts. However, they offer insights into the importance of supporting and acknowledging the role of self-reflexivity in knowledge generation and professional development.

Our narratives and reflections shed light on how professional projects or programmes can influence the thinking and practices of individual AD practitioners. These insights serve as foundational knowledge for further reflection and interrogation of AD practices. One notable aspect highlighted in this paper is the background of the two AD practitioners and how their experiences shaped their understanding of induction.

The primary aim of our reflections was not solely to narrate our NATHEP journey but to stimulate critical thinking and reflection among AD practitioners. We aimed to activate our agency and approach induction from a perspective outside our comfort zones. Through this reflective process, we engaged in deep introspection, asking thought-provoking questions about the impact of our journey on our understanding and conceptualisation of induction programmes.

During our NATHEP journey, we critically examined our roles as AD practitioners and the contexts in which we operate. This process empowered us to challenge cultural norms and disrupt the prevailing status quo, particularly the perception of induction as a one-off event rather than an ongoing process.

Acknowledgment

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Authors' Contributions: Both Dr. Phatsuwani Ravhuhali and Mrs. Hlayisani Fredah Mboweni worked on the conceptualisation of the paper, literature review, and data analysis as well as the implications of the paper.

Funding: This research was funded by UCDP through the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP) under Prof. Kasturi Behari-Leak, Dean CHED, University of Cape Town, South Africa. The University of Venda’s Research and Publication Committee (RPC) under the Research and Innovation also provided support in the form of paying for page fees.

Informed Consent Statement: we all agreed to participate freely in the project.

Data Availability Statement: Full raw data in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References


**Publisher’s Note:** SSBFNET stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

© 2024 by the authors. Licensee SSBFNET, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).