EDITORIAL

Reimagining academic induction praxis in the Global South: Towards decolonial futures

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ABSTRACT

This Special Issue critically examines academic induction practices in the Global South, aiming to envision a decolonial staff development praxis that moves beyond Western epistemological models. This collection is framed by the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), which focused on critical professional development and contextualised induction practices. Reading the contributions through and against NATHEP's CRiTicAL framework highlights key patterns, tensions, silences and possibilities across the collection. Together, the articles engage critically with various dimensions of academic induction within South Africa's complex higher education landscape, expanding decolonial critique to account for the specific historical context and redefining the broader role and purpose of academic induction. This collection has implications for higher education praxis, challenging academic developers to re-examine institutional structures, reframe induction beyond mere orientation and foster transformative and socially just environments for new academics.

Keywords: academic induction, decolonial praxis, global south, NATHEP, CRiTicAL framework

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INTRODUCTION

This special issue emerged from a South African national collaborative project, the New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), which focused on critical

professional development and contextualised induction practices (Behari-Leak 2024). NATHEP stands as a significant milestone because it is the first academic development project in South African higher education history to be solely conceptualised and led by Black academics. While the field has been structurally dominated by a Global North gaze since its emergence in the 1980s (Boughey 2024), NATHEP challenged this hegemony. For the first time in the history of South African academic development, the project brought the politics of actors' biographies and geographies to the very center of scholarly debates. This critical stance echoes arguments raised as early as 1985 by Vilakazi and Tema, who contended that the frameworks utilised by white universities failed to comprehend the systemic problems confronting Black students. By reclaiming agency over these narratives, NATHEP successfully transformed these long-standing critiques into an active framework for institutional disruption and transformation. Ultimately, this collection seeks to contribute to the scholarship of academic staff development, challenging academic dependency by paying special attention to the lived realities of people in the Global South.

The project was situated against the backdrop of the crisis in higher education, both in the current context and in its historical context, which leads us to the present moment. Thirty years into democracy, South African Higher Education continues to face a crisis of identity, relevance and legitimacy. Eurocentric and Western knowledge systems, values and worldviews are regarded as "globally renowned" (Leibowitz 2017), with South African universities often remaining local instantiations of the dominant Eurocentric canon (Mbembe 2015). For too long, South African higher education has relied on exogenous, Eurocentric theories to diagnose local institutional realities. However, these external models often obscure the historical wounds, spatial fragmentations, and systemic inequities that define the post-apartheid. Students have been calling for higher education to be more responsive to historical-contextual constraints so that they feel less alienated, marginalised and invisible. Structural reforms have nudged universities to focus on transforming their structures, culture, practices and traditions so that students feel included and become the successful graduates that society needs, that is, informed, responsible and critical citizens who can contribute meaningfully to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge for the public good. While some gains have been made in this regard, the sector has been criticised for not being rigorous enough in its attempt to redress systemic inequality and injustice in higher education associated with the legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

Two years after the conclusion of NATHEP, this special issue, *Reimagining Academic Induction Praxis in the Global South: Towards Decolonial Futures,* looks back at the project

to highlight its potential contributions to relational knowledge building within the field of academic development. It critically examines academic induction practices in the Global South and seeks to envision academic staff development praxis for induction that confronts and challenges coloniality and moves beyond traditional induction models and programmes rooted in Western epistemologies, values and practices. By revisiting the core tenets of the project, the contributions in this volume seek to unpack how the focus of NATHEP on the intersection of biography, geography, and power can offer new conceptual tools for the field. Ultimately, this collection serves not only as a retrospective evaluation but also as a forward-looking provocation for transforming academic development practice in South Africa and beyond.

Our emphasis on decolonial praxis shifts the focus from mere critique to thoughtful, transformative and ethical action required for a socially just higher education and world. This will require actively questioning, resisting and decentering solely Western-centric ways of producing, validating and disseminating knowledge and ways of being, valuing and belonging in higher education. The contributions in this Special Issue begin to show the possibility of expanding the decolonial critique to account for the peculiar encounter of South Africa with colonialism and apartheid. Scholars must remain mindful of the fact that while the early colonial encounter focused primarily on assimilation, apartheid sought to enforce difference. As Suren Pillay (2024) aptly argues, through indirect rule, tribal segregation, and Bantu education, the apartheid state weaponised and institutionalised ethnic and racial fractures. Pillay advocates for a return to an internally generated and historically specific critique that moves beyond the imported lexicon of decolonial scholarship to confront the unique institutional structures, native-settler dynamics, and political subjectivities that continue to fracture the post-apartheid African university.

This special issue was an open call, inviting articles from across higher education institutions in South Africa and beyond. Specifically, this special issue invited research that addressed the challenges of neoliberal universities where performative pressures often reduce complex pedagogical growth to simple metrics that overlook the depth of work required to bring about transformation in Higher Education. While the articles in this issue focus on academic induction within South African public and private higher education, their findings extend across the broader Global South, particularly given that “other systems across the world show patterns of inequality” (Boughey 2022: 992) similar to South Africa. Each of the articles engages critically with various aspects of academic induction practices, extending its role and purposes within the complex higher education landscape in South Africa.

FROM NATHEP TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: TROUBLING INDUCTION, RE-TURNING TO CRITICAL

NATHEP, designed as a South African national collaborative project focused on critical professional development and contextualised induction practices (Behari-Leak 2024), forms an important backdrop to this special issue. NATHEP aimed to provide professional development for academic and staff developers at ten South African universities who were responsible for inducting new academics into higher education. Through this collaboration, the project sought to understand how induction was conceptualised and enacted across differentiated institutional contexts, and how these practices might be strengthened in relation to the transformation imperatives of the sector.

NATHEP was situated against the historical and contemporary crises confronting South African higher education. While some gains have been made in transforming institutional structures and practices, the sector continues to grapple with systemic inequality, coloniality and the enduring effects of apartheid. NATHEP's concern was therefore never simply with improving induction programmes. It sought a national, rather than nationalised, orientation to induction: one capable of responding to institutional specificity while enabling academic developers to work in mindful, reflective, reflexive and critical ways.

This special issue returns to that work from a different historical moment. In doing so, we are interested in what has changed since NATHEP. We are equally concerned about what has remained stubbornly resistant to change. We ask whether the cultural, epistemic and institutional registers within which academic induction takes place have shifted, and what contemporary accounts of induction now enable us to see that NATHEP may only partially have apprehended.

Troubling induction

NATHEP began from a seemingly straightforward concern: how might we better support new academics transitioning into South African higher education? What emerged, however, was something more than an account of induction practices or recommendations for improving institutional programmes. NATHEP began to trouble and problematise the very idea of induction itself.

One of its important insights was that induction is not innocent. Induction is often presented as a benign institutional activity: academics enter the university and are assisted to understand its systems, expectations, cultures and practices so that they can, in the proverbial formulation, “hit the ground running”. Yet this seemingly straightforward process conceals

more fundamental questions. Into *what* are academics being inducted? Whose university are they being invited to inhabit? Which histories, traditions and institutional cultures are normalised through induction? What counts as legitimate academic knowledge and practice? What kinds of academic identities are recognised and rewarded, and which are rendered peripheral, deficient or out of place?

These questions matter profoundly in South Africa. Universities are not neutral spaces awaiting the arrival of new academics. They are historically constituted institutions carrying the sedimented effects of colonialism and apartheid alongside contemporary pressures associated with marketisation, managerialism, performativity, massification and global competition. The continued authority of Eurocentric knowledge traditions and institutional practices means that induction into the contemporary university may, unless critically interrogated, become induction into the very structures and epistemologies that transformation seeks to unsettle.

NATHEP therefore shifted the question from simply how do we induct new academics effectively? towards more difficult questions: What is being reproduced through induction? What assumptions about knowledge, academic work and the university are carried within our induction practices? What kinds of academics and what kinds of universities are these practices helping to produce?

This excavation brought power into a domain often represented as primarily developmental or administrative. Induction practices inevitably contain judgements about legitimacy: legitimate knowledge, legitimate pedagogies, legitimate research practices, legitimate academic behaviour and, ultimately, the legitimate academic subject. The seemingly practical work of helping someone to "become an academic" cannot therefore be separated from questions about who historically defined the terms of that becoming.

Context is constitutive, not decorative

NATHEP also foregrounded context. Contextualisation was not about simply taking generic models of induction and adapting them to make them more locally appropriate. It meant recognising that history, place, institutional type, disciplinary location, language, culture and relations of power are constitutive of academic experience itself. Context is not decorative; it is constitutive.

This matters when theories and models of academic development generated elsewhere travel into Global South universities as though their conceptual categories were universally applicable. NATHEP challenged the assumption that models can travel seamlessly across

geopolitical and institutional locations without bringing with them particular assumptions about knowledge, academic identity, professional development and the university itself.

To take context seriously is therefore also to confront academic dependency. It requires more than conducting research *in* the Global South. It asks what it means to theorise *from* the South: to take seriously the histories, contradictions, intellectual traditions and lived realities of Southern higher education as resources for knowledge production rather than merely as empirical sites to which theories generated elsewhere are applied.

This orientation was central to the development of NATHEP's CRiTicAL framework (Behari-Leak et al 2020). Drawing on Critical and Social Realism (Bhaskar 1979; Archer 2000), critical social theory and decolonial thought (Mignolo 2017), the framework emerged from grounded transformative practice rather than being imported into the project as an a priori model. NATHEP drew particularly on endogeneity to challenge the uncritical reproduction of supposedly universal theoretical resources and to insist upon critical curation and re-centering from an African location (Hountondji 1990; Mafeje 2000).

This distinction becomes even more important in the present special issue. Our concern is with what academic induction looks like in universities geographically located in the Global South. We are also interested in what becomes visible when induction is conceptualised and theorised from these locations, histories and epistemic resources, and what such thinking might contribute to wider scholarship on academic development and higher education.

From newcomer as recipient to newcomer as agent

A further assumption excavated through NATHEP concerned the positioning of the new academic (Behari-Leak and Ganas 2024). Traditional induction frequently constructs the newcomer through an implicit deficit orientation. The institution possesses the knowledge; the newcomer lacks it. The institution knows how academic life works; the newcomer must learn. The institution is stable; the newcomer must transition.

Yet new academics do not arrive as empty vessels awaiting institutional socialisation. They enter with biographies, histories, identities, disciplinary and professional experiences, languages, epistemic resources, aspirations, values and ways of understanding the world. These are not peripheral to academic becoming. They shape how academics encounter the university, how the university encounters them, and what becomes possible through that encounter.

This creates a critical distinction between induction that domesticates difference and induction that creates conditions for agency. An induction process primarily concerned with socialising newcomers into established norms may teach academics how to fit into the

institution while leaving those norms themselves untouched. A critical approach asks something different: how might induction enable academics to understand the structures, cultures, histories and relations of power that condition academic life while recognising their capacity to act within and upon them?

New academics should therefore be understood simultaneously as recipients of institutional knowledge and as epistemic and institutional agents. Their arrival can make the familiar strange. Questions asked by newcomers, experiences of belonging and unbelonging, encounters with disciplinary norms and the different knowledge traditions they carry can expose dimensions of university life that have become normalised to those already embedded within it.

Induction, viewed in this way, becomes a reflexive encounter between person and institution.

This also changes the role of the academic staff developer who can function as critical interlocutors to help new academics read the university rather than merely adjust to it. In this way they make visible the histories, assumptions, cultures and relations of power shaping academic work; create spaces in which institutional norms can be questioned; recognise the epistemic resources academics bring with them; and support their exercise of agency within the constraints and possibilities of their contexts. NATHEP itself argued that professional developers required transformative and critical development beyond a conventional “toolkit” or cookie-cutter metaphor if they were to undertake such work.

This positioning requires academic developers to turn the critical gaze upon their own field. What theories do we use to understand academic becoming? Where do those theories originate? What assumptions about knowledge, development and the university do they carry? Whose intellectual traditions have been privileged within academic development scholarship, and which remain marginal?

RETURNING TO CRITICAL: AN UNFINISHED RESOURCE

The CRiTicAL framework emerged from NATHEP as an attempt to hold together these multiple dimensions of induction (Behari-Leak and Sabata 2024). It was developed as an indicator of different levels of criticality within the project's curriculum, pedagogy and methodology, drawing on critical social theory and decolonial thought alongside the project's Critical and Social Realist foundations. Importantly, each dimension had implications for the ontology, epistemology and methodology of the project.

In returning to CRiTicAL for this special issue, we do not treat it as a completed conceptual product or a heuristic through which articles can simply be sorted and explained. To do so would contradict the critical orientation from which it emerged. Instead, we use CRiTicAL as a generative analytical resource.

Our analytical movement is intentionally recursive. We ask what the framework enables us to see across the contributions: where the articles resonate with, deepen or complicate the dimensions of induction identified through NATHEP, and what patterns become visible when diverse accounts are placed in conversation. Simultaneously, however, we reverse the analytical gaze. What do these articles make visible that NATHEP, and CRiTicAL itself, did not yet adequately apprehend?

In this sense, CRiTicAL becomes not only a tool for learning about the articles but itself an object of learning. Here is how the CRiTicAL framework relates to this SI:

C: Conceptual, Contextual and Critical

The C in CRiTicAL brings together three interconnected orientations: Conceptual, Contextual and Critical. In NATHEP, the conceptual called for considered, creative and thoughtful ideation about induction; the contextual encompassed time, place, space, people, historicity and socio-cultural lived experience; and the critical directed attention to less visible mechanisms of power, race, class, gender and systemic inequality.

Read against the contributions to this special issue, C allows us to ask first how induction itself is being conceptualised. The articles extend induction beyond institutional orientation into postgraduate supervision, student-staff partnership, learning analytics, transformative learning, pedagogical experimentation and identity formation. They potentially alter the object itself: induction emerges less as a bounded event at the beginning of employment and more as an ongoing process of academic becoming across multiple sites of practice.

Context then requires us to resist “the new academic” as a universal category. Rurality, institutional differentiation, disciplinary location, biography, technology, race, gender, language and history produce different conditions for academic becoming. Even “the Global South” requires interrogation lest it become another homogenising category.

Criticality takes us beneath those differences towards their underlying mechanisms. It asks who experiences marginalisation or non-belonging? It also asks what structures, cultures, histories and relations of power make those experiences possible and persistent? It similarly demands that decolonisation identify what is actually being disturbed: which relations of knowledge, power and being are being unsettled, and which remain intact?

R: Responsive, Reflexive, Relational, Re-centering and Relevant

The **R** cluster expands the framework considerably. NATHEP identified responsiveness to contemporary conditions; reflexivity concerning enabling and constraining conditions; relationality between academic developers, new academics and students; re-centering Africa as a locus of enunciation; and relevance to the needs and contexts of those involved.

For the special issue, **Responsive** asks what contemporary induction must now respond to. Higher education has shifted since NATHEP was conceptualised. New technological, pedagogical, epistemic and institutional challenges require agility, but responsiveness should not be confused with reactive adaptation to every new institutional demand.

Reflexivity asks academics to interrogate not only what they do but what they bring to their practice: biography, positionality, disciplinary formation, language, culture and epistemological orientation. Yet our reading suggests that reflexive labour cannot be demanded only of the newcomer. The institution itself must become available for reflexivity. Otherwise, reflexive induction risks becoming merely a more sophisticated means of teaching academics to adapt to an uninterrogated institution that perpetuates the status quo.

Relationality foregrounds academic becoming as something that happens between people. Yet the contributions also encourage us to trouble romantic accounts of relation. Relationships are not inherently emancipatory. Care can become paternalistic; collegiality can conceal exclusion; partnership can reproduce hierarchy; Ubuntu can be mobilised as an uncomplicated language of harmony. A critical relationality therefore asks not simply whether relationships exist, but what kinds of relations are produced, on whose terms, and with what distribution of authority, voice and agency.

Re-centering is particularly significant for this collection. NATHEP explicitly used Africa as a locus of enunciation and resisted theoretical extraversion—not by rejecting Global North theory, but by refusing its uncritical universalisation. The special issue pushes this concern further. While contemporary decolonial higher education scholarship has productively engaged Latin American traditions, thinking academic induction from Africa requires deeper engagement with African intellectual resources and debates in their plurality. The question becomes: where is Africa in African decolonial academic development scholarship?

This also complicates the collection's engagement with Ubuntu. Re-centering requires moving beyond sanitised invocations of Ubuntu as care, harmony and interpersonal goodwill towards its philosophical plurality and its relationship to histories of power, dispossession, struggle and epistemic contestation.

Finally, **Relevant** asks who determines relevance and to what ends. An induction programme may be immediately useful in enabling newcomers to navigate institutional systems yet remain irrelevant to deeper questions of pedagogy, identity, belonging, knowledge and power.

The R cluster therefore asks: To what and to whom is induction responsive? Who is required to be reflexive? What relations does it produce? What does it re-centre? And by whose account is it relevant?

T: Theorised praxis

The **T** stands for **Theorised praxis**. NATHEP explicitly rejected teaching as a commonsense or merely craft activity. Theory was expected to explain, trouble, problematise, confirm, challenge and reposition practice rather than operate as intellectual ornamentation.

The special issue enables us to deepen this concern. It is no longer sufficient to ask simply whether induction is theorised. We must also ask which theories are doing the theorising.

The presence of theoretical terminology does not itself constitute theorised praxis. We need to distinguish between scholarship that cites theory, scholarship that applies theory, and scholarship in which theory genuinely performs analytical work. Does theory expose mechanisms and relationships that might otherwise remain invisible? Does it trouble the taken-for-granted? Does lived context also push back against theory? Or does Southern experience remain the empirical material while theory generated elsewhere retains the authority to explain it?

There is an obvious contradiction in advocating decolonisation while reproducing theoretical dependency. Theorised praxis therefore connects directly with our recursive use of CRiTicAL: the framework theorises the articles, but the articles must also be permitted to re-theorise the framework.

A: Authentic

The **A** stands for **Authentic**, understood within NATHEP as genuine commitment and original thinking directed towards enhanced practice and deep change. Significantly, NATHEP connected authenticity to positionality, cultural background and the proposition that “who teaches matters”, arguing that induction needs to engage academics' orientations towards their curricula and practices.

The special issue makes it possible to deepen this dimension. Identity and positionality were therefore not absent from NATHEP, but they remained less analytically central than the

contributions in this collection now demand. These articles move the who that teaches from the margins towards the conceptual centre of induction.

The question is no longer only what the new academic needs to know. It is also: Who is the academic who arrives? What histories, biographies, identities and epistemic resources do they carry? How are these recognised or misrecognised by the institution? Who is able to bring their full biography into academic life, and who must suppress or translate aspects of themselves to become institutionally recognisable?

Authenticity also provides a means of interrogating institutional claims to decolonisation. Transformation can be symbolically performed while epistemic hierarchies and institutional cultures remain substantially unchanged. Authenticity therefore asks whether there is congruence between decolonial declaration and consequential practice.

L: Legitimate

The **L** in CRiTicAL stands for **Legitimate**. NATHEP understood legitimate practice as carrying authority and gravitas grounded in authentic purpose, context and goals. It linked legitimacy to the *who* of teaching, the *how* of pedagogy and the *what* of curriculum and knowledge production, arguing that being a university teacher in Africa must mean something and positioning Africa as a centre of epistemic diversity. The special issue enables us to turn this concept back upon the university.

NATHEP asked how contextualised induction and African-centred academic practice might acquire legitimacy. The articles now allow us to ask the prior question: who has historically possessed the authority to determine what is legitimate in the first place?

Which knowledges carry authority? Which theorists become canonical? Which languages are recognised as academic? Which biographies are legible as scholarly? What forms of pedagogy count as rigorous? Who belongs without continually having to demonstrate their right to belong?

This is more demanding than simply including African knowledge within existing curricula. Inclusion may leave intact the authority that determines what may be included. A deeper decolonial question concerns the terms upon which knowledge itself becomes legitimate.

Induction participates in this legitimising work because it communicates, explicitly and tacitly, the university's rules of recognition: what counts as scholarship, how academics should behave, what outputs matter, which practices are rewarded and how success is judged. The

question is therefore whether induction simply transmits existing regimes of legitimacy or creates spaces in which those regimes themselves become available for interrogation.

READING CRITICAL RELATIONALLY RATHER THAN AS A CHECKLIST

Separating the components of CRiTicAL is analytically useful, but they should not be understood sequentially. They are mutually constitutive. An induction programme cannot be responsive without being responsive to context. It cannot claim authenticity without reflexivity concerning positionality and power. It cannot be relevant without conceptualising what academic becoming entails. Theorised praxis cannot be separated from lived reality. And legitimacy without critical interrogation can become little more than conformity to established norms.

Indeed, some CRiTicAL concepts contain productive tensions. “Legitimate” can mean authorised by the existing university or ethically and contextually warranted. “Relevant” can mean useful to institutional priorities or answerable to the broader public purposes of higher education. “Relational” can signify genuinely reciprocal encounter or conceal unequal power. “Authentic” can become individualised unless located within structure and culture.

Criticality must therefore run through the entire framework rather than reside only within the C.

This is also why we resist using CRiTicAL to determine whether individual contributions satisfy predetermined criteria. To do so would turn a framework born from emergence, contextuality and critique into precisely the generic instrument NATHEP sought to resist. Instead, we use it to place the articles into conversation and to identify patterns, silences, tensions and possibilities across the collection.

WHAT THE SPECIAL ISSUE MAKES NEWLY VISIBLE

Reading the contributions through and against CRiTicAL makes several dimensions particularly visible. Beyond this special issue, these require further interrogation and theorisation as we think and act anew for transformative and sustainable academic staff development for South Africa, Africa and the Global South.

Identity requires greater conceptual centrality. While NATHEP recognised positionality, the articles compel deeper attention to biography, embodiment, belonging and the relationship between academic subjectivity and institution. Identity is not merely another contextual variable; it mediates how structures and cultures are experienced and whether the academic is recognised as someone who can legitimately belong.

Place also requires deeper attention. Rurality and institutional differentiation remind us that "the university" is not singular. Context has spatial, material and historical depth, while the Global South itself cannot become a homogenising category.

Epistemic location becomes more demanding. Re-centering Africa cannot be accomplished simply through including selected African concepts within an otherwise unchanged intellectual architecture. African intellectual traditions need to be engaged as theory-producing resources, including their internal disagreements and contestations.

The articles also extend induction into postgraduate supervision, learning analytics, game-based learning, student-staff partnership, epistemic justice and transformative learning. Together, they suggest that academic becoming takes place across multiple encounters with teaching, research, supervision, technology, students, disciplines, communities and institutional cultures. The collection therefore expands not only *what* counts as induction but also where and when induction occurs.

These should not be understood simply as omissions or failures of NATHEP, as NATHEP was generative rather than complete. The special issue occupies an intellectual space opened by the earlier project: it inherits questions, troubles some of the answers, makes previously marginal concerns more visible and creates possibilities for further theorisation.

FROM TRANSFORMING INDUCTION TO TRANSFORMING THE UNIVERSITY

Read together through and against CRiTicAL, the articles invite us to reconsider what academic induction might mean for contemporary higher education in South Africa and the Global South. Induction emerges as a critical, contextual, relational and potentially decolonial praxis through which academics learn to read the university and locate themselves within its histories, structures and cultures; recognise the knowledge, biographies and identities they bring into it; exercise agency within and upon it; and participate collectively in imagining what the university might yet become.

Such a conception changes what we expect from institutions and academic development. The responsibility for transition cannot reside exclusively with the newcomer. NATHEP itself resisted placing the burden of repairing challenged systems upon academics, insisting that responsibility be borne across the university. The special issue enables us to take this proposition further: institutions must themselves become capable of being affected by those whom they induct.

This invites a final re-turn to CRiTicAL. What if its orientations were understood not only as qualities of induction, but also as qualities demanded of the university?

A critical university interrogates its inherited structures and relations of power. A contextual university knows its histories, place and differentiated conditions. A responsive university is capable of being affected by those who enter it. A reflexive university examines its own assumptions and exclusions. A relational university recognises academic becoming as co-constituted rather than individually achieved. A re-centred university takes the epistemic resources of its African location seriously while remaining in critical conversation with the world. A relevant university remains answerable to its students, communities and publics.

A university committed to theorised praxis allows theory and lived reality continually to interrogate one another. An authentic university seeks congruence between its transformational claims and practices. And a university concerned with legitimacy asks not only what it recognises as legitimate, but how its own authority to confer legitimacy has historically been constituted.

This represents an important shift in the directionality of induction. Conventionally, transition belongs to the newcomer: they must learn, adapt, become reflexive and acquire institutional legitimacy. A transformative and decolonial conception of induction demands reciprocity. The academic changes through encountering the university, but the university must also become available for change through its encounter with the academic.

Our use of CRiTicAL therefore involves a double movement: the framework interrogates the articles, and the articles interrogate the framework. What survives? What deepens? What becomes unsettled? What needs to be rethought? And what new conceptual possibilities become visible?

NATHEP used CRiTicAL to reimagine induction. This special issue gives us an opportunity to allow contemporary induction scholarship to reimagine CRiTicAL and, through that recursive encounter, to move the conversation beyond adaptation and socialisation towards reciprocity, agency and institutional transformation.

Perhaps, then, the most important question inherited from NATHEP is whether the arrival of new academics, with different biographies, geographies, epistemologies, identities and possibilities, might also help prepare the university to become something it is not yet.

SYNTHESIS OF CONTRIBUTIONS

In synthesising the contributions in this special issue, we draw on Barad's (2007) diffractive methodology, reading insights diffractively through one another and through CriTicAL as an analytical tool. This diffractive process allows us to pay attention to "patterns of difference that make a difference" (Barad 2007: 72). It illuminates how Ubuntu and relational ethics, power,

rurality and epistemic and ontological justice entangle across various institutional contexts in South Africa to offer plausibly new possibilities for academic staff induction. Diffracting the insights of the articles through each other creates new patterns, deeper insights and greater possibilities for re-imagining academic induction toward decolonial futures. The articles in this issue map three distinct, yet diffractive thematic clusters that overlap, intersect and intra-act.

Integrating Relational Care and Ubuntu

In the first set of three articles, academic induction is diffracted through the lens of ubuntu and relational wholeness. Ubuntu is an African philo-praxis for liberation and constitutes an ontological category rather than a mere ethical slogan or cultural value. According to Ramose (1999), ubuntu names the fundamental structure of being. In this formulation, "ubu" denotes the enfolded, continually unfolding, dynamic, and generative dimension of reality, while "ntu" refers to the concrete manifestation of that being in particular entities, which is always oriented toward justice.

In the first article, Anthea Jacobs engages with the Ethics of Care and ubu-ntu philosophy to propose an alternative approach to academic development by recognising interdependence, compassion, and mutual accountability as essential dimensions of human becoming and professional growth. Drawing on these dense theoretical frameworks, the author skilfully argues that universities should be understood not merely as sites of policy, structure, and performance, but as relational communities shaped by human interdependence. Furthermore, the author contends that dominant academic induction models focus too heavily on bureaucratic compliance, administrative auditing, and performance metrics at the expense of genuine professional development. Crucially, the article highlights how an overemphasis on e-portfolio assessments induces anxiety and emotional fatigue among participants. The author makes an unequivocal call to resist forms of care that abstract or decontextualise the other. Instead, she advocates for a caring and relational gaze while grounding induction firmly in co-belonging and shared responsibility. This transformative approach presents alternative possibilities for induction practices, which might enable the enfolded nature of being to unfold through mutual enhancement and affirmation. Overall, the call by Anthea Jacobs for a relational, care-based approach to academic induction aligns with the CRiTicAL framework, which promotes critical, context-sensitive professional development over bureaucratic compliance. By drawing on ubuntu and the Ethics of Care, this perspective transforms induction into a supportive community of practice, addressing institutional anxiety while fostering human growth and accountability.

In the second article, Evelyne Chia and Owence Chabaya in their article, "Re-imagining Academic Induction through Ubuntu and Transformative Learning: A Critical Realist Study of Agency, Epistemic Justice and Contextual Responsiveness in a Rural South African University", engage with induction in the context of a historically Black university in South Africa. It is argued that while rural universities face significant material constraints, they generate distinctive forms of sociality, solidarity, and contextual knowledge. This engagement with the historicity of the university presents possibilities for the articulation of context-specific induction practices rather than abstract ideal or meritocratic induction practices. More importantly, the authors present a decolonial critique of the conception of rurality by showing the possibility of viewing such spaces as rich archives of ubuntu. Similar to Anthea Jacobs, the authors reject the Western, individualist, and meritocratic assumptions underpinning academic socialisation and offer ubuntu philosophy as a counter-narrative. They argue that induction spaces must actively challenge Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies by validating, recognising, and integrating indigenous knowledge systems and the diverse lived experiences that new academics bring to the university. Evelyne Chia and Owence Chabaya call for a paradigm shift away from viewing induction as transmission toward viewing it as a process of becoming, as they view the induction process not as a linear event or a static administrative briefing but rather as an ongoing, iterative, and dialogical journey of becoming. They advocate for communities of practice and mentoring networks where knowledge flows collaboratively in multiple directions.

Overall, these authors propose the Contextually Responsive Induction Model, which integrates the relational ethic of ubuntu with Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Realism. This model signals a direct contribution toward the call of NATHEP for critical, context-sensitive professional development over bureaucratic compliance.

These two articles demonstrate the rich possibilities presented by ubuntu in crafting endogenous academic staff development. This approach possesses the potential to guide sound pedagogical interventions that build on the strengths of African philosophy while critically engaging with other philosophies of the world.

Reimagining Analytics and Postgraduate Supervision

The second set of two articles discusses aspects that have been peripheral to and/ or marginalised in academic induction programmes and processes: learning analytics and postgraduate supervision.

In the article "Conceptualising a decolonial praxis for inducting new academics as postgraduate research supervisors in the Higher Education Institutions of the Global South" (Van der Westhuizen and Chiwarawara), NATHEP's troubling of conventional induction by questioning where induction happens and what counts as induction is extended. By extending the object and temporality of induction, we are provoked to consider supervision as a site of academic becoming. The authors' starting point is that postgraduate supervision has been marginalised within induction, leaving new academics frequently to learn supervision through their own previous experiences and "trial-and-error". More significantly, however, they reconceptualise supervision as much more than the acquisition of supervisory competence. They describe it as a "complex epistemic, ethical and pedagogical praxis" and as a site "where knowledge is contested, produced and legitimised, where power is reinforced or challenged and where identities are forged". This considerably expands the object of induction. Read through CRiTicAL, particularly Conceptual, Contextual and Theorised praxis, the article suggests that induction cannot be contained within a formal programme located at the beginning of an academic career. Academic becoming continues through the new roles and relational spaces academics enter which include becoming supervisors, where they encounter questions of knowledge, authority, identity, ethics and pedagogy anew. The article therefore supports a larger proposition emerging from the special issue: induction may be better conceptualised as an ongoing process of academic becoming across multiple sites of academic practice rather than as an inaugural institutional event.

The authors go on to explore socialisation and reciprocity by troubling who is expected to change. This strongly resonates with our argument that induction should not simply socialise newcomers into established institutional and disciplinary norms. The authors explicitly trouble the deficit construction of the novice and the "master-role" of the supervisor, arguing that such arrangements restrict student agency and reproduce hierarchical relations. Their alternative is relational and dialogical: supervision should move away from "one-directional knowledge transfer from the supervisor to the supervisee, expert to novice" towards collaborative engagement. Particularly important for our editorial argument is their insistence that students themselves bring "perspectives and experiences" capable of "enriching and challenging norms of a discipline", leading them to characterise fit-for-purpose supervision as reciprocal. This offers an interesting, nested form of reciprocity: the new academic is being inducted as a supervisor, but in turn is inducting the postgraduate student into research and disciplinary knowledge. Neither encounter need be unidirectional. Through CRiTicAL's Relational, Reflexive and Authentic dimensions, this article therefore helps us push beyond the idea of

induction as adaptation towards mutual becoming. It also strengthens our larger proposition that the institution itself should not remain untouched by those it inducts: if students can challenge disciplinary norms through supervision, and new supervisors can challenge inherited supervisory practices, induction potentially becomes a site through which established academic cultures themselves are disturbed.

Perhaps the strongest resonance with CRiTicAL lies in the article's four proposed principles: contextualised induction, epistemic plurality, critical reflexivity and collective learning. These map strikingly onto Contextual, Critical, Reflexive, Relational, Re-centering and Legitimate. Context is treated as constitutive rather than decorative. These foreground context, epistemic legitimacy and the unfinished work of re-centering.

The authors reject generic imported supervision models and argue that institutional histories, linguistic diversity, resource inequalities, socio-economic conditions and local research priorities should shape supervisory practice. Equally significant is their question, "who determines what counts as responsive, authentic, and inclusive?" This moves directly into CRiTicAL's concern with Legitimate: supervisors are not neutral facilitators of knowledge but potential gatekeepers who can reproduce or challenge epistemic hierarchies. Yet the article also exposes a productive tension for our editorial. While it calls for "indigenous, local and non-Western epistemologies" and locates itself explicitly within South African historical and socio-cultural realities, its decolonial architecture continues to draw substantially on familiar decolonial and epistemic-justice theorists. This is not a weakness we need to adjudicate in the editorial; rather, as data it crystallises precisely the question our recursive reading of CRiTicAL raises: what would it mean to move from valuing African/local knowledges as objects of inclusion towards engaging African intellectual traditions more fully as resources for theorising induction itself? The article therefore both enacts CRiTicAL's Re-centering impulse and helps reveal why that dimension remains unfinished.

In summary, the above article expands the argument beyond the induction programme. Becoming is seen as relational and reciprocal rather than unidirectional. Decolonisation raises the deeper question of who possesses epistemic authority to define what is legitimate.

In the next article by Mfundo Zwane, namely "Decolonial praxis for induction into Learning Analytics", the author asserts that Induction is not neutral because it produces particular kinds of academic subjects. The article makes especially visible something implicit across NATHEP: induction is not simply about what academics need to know but about who they are being invited to become. The author argues that induction into Learning Analytics (LA) is an "epistemic socialisation" through which academics may become "data interpreters,

compliance agents, and subjects of metrics". Their striking formulation is that induction is about "becoming a particular academic subject who sees, knows, and acts through the logics of data". Read through CRiTicAL, this substantially deepens the Critical, Reflexive and Theorised dimensions: induction cannot merely teach academics to navigate the university; it must make visible the institutional logics into which they are being inducted and create the capacity to interrogate them. This also complicates our language of *becoming*. Becoming is not inherently emancipatory. The university is always attempting to produce particular kinds of academic subjects. The question therefore becomes: becoming what, according to whose norms, and in whose interests? This article allows us to argue that critical induction creates conditions in which new academics can exercise agency over their own becoming rather than simply inhabiting the subjectivities made available by managerial, technological or disciplinary regimes.

The article also offers a particularly powerful expression of the tension between abstraction and lived experience. It invites us to reclaim the relational and contextual from the metric by focusing on what cannot be measured. LA can make the measurable appear to be the real, privileging dashboards and indicators while obscuring "less quantifiable dimensions such as belonging, epistemic access, and relational engagement". Its critical-realist move is useful here: a dashboard records the *actual,* through logins, submissions, assessment attempts but cannot capture all of the generative mechanisms, structural conditions, histories and human capacities constituting the *real*. This resonates strongly with CRiTicAL's Contextual, Relational and Authentic dimensions which raises the question of absences and obscurities. Induction must develop academics capable of asking more than what does the data tell us? But what does the data fail to see? The article argues that academics should learn to read dashboards through the real and unrecorded; and to understand "at risk" not as an attribute inherent in a student but relationally and contextually. As datafication and AI increasingly mediate academic work, this suggests that critical induction has a new responsibility: to protect complexity from reduction. It must cultivate academics who can hold metrics alongside biography, history, context, judgement and relationship rather than allowing measurement to substitute for them.

In diffracting this article through the previous one, Van der Westhuizen and Chiwarawara, we move from decolonial critique towards African resources for theorising induction. For our emerging editorial argument, this article takes further the question raised by the Van der Westhuizen and Chiwarawara article about Re-centering. It calls for inclusion of African epistemologies by using Ubuntu as an ontological, epistemological and axiological resource. Ubuntu becomes an alternative account of personhood in which the individual is relational and

emergent, and ethics becomes an ongoing process of "becoming more humane". This matters because it begins to answer the question we raised previously. What happens when African intellectual traditions do not merely enter induction as content but help us theorise induction itself? The consequences are significant. If personhood is relational, induction cannot fundamentally be an individual process of acquiring competence. If knowledge is collectively constituted, expertise cannot flow only from institution to newcomer. If Ubuntu foregrounds reciprocity and shared responsibility, induction becomes an ethical relationship rather than institutional transmission. The article's idea of "reverse tutelage" pushes this still further by destabilising the assumed direction of knowledge from centre to periphery, while student participation similarly challenges the assumption that academics alone possess the knowledge needed for academic formation. Here CRiTicAL's Re-centering, Relational and Legitimate dimensions begin to converge. Re-centering is about redistributing epistemic authority. It troubles the notion of who teaches whom, whose knowledge counts, and who has the legitimacy to shape the becoming of the academic.

Taken together, and diffracted through each other, these two articles destabilise epistemic and ontological assumptions by taking us into datafication. Yet both arrive at relationality, reflexivity, contextuality, epistemic plurality and collective learning. That convergence is analytically important. Taken as a recursive analytical resource, the CRiTicAL is both affirmed and further developed by what the SI contributions reveal.

Marginality, Partnerships and relational pedagogy

The final set of three articles focuses on co-created and collaborative dimensions of academic becoming and decolonial praxis and games-based pedagogy as a decolonial tool.

In the first article in this cluster, "Reimagining academic staff development through game-based learning as decolonial reflective praxis in the global south" by Subethra Pather and Elizabeth Booi, the authors argue that game-based learning as a decolonial tool can "transcend compliance-oriented training" to facilitate "epistemic disruption, reflexive engagement and ethical reorientation within higher education in the Global South". They call for a reconceptualisation of academic induction as transformative critical spaces that consider students' contextual realities. While the article engages with all dimensions of the CRiTicAL framework, its emphasis on relationality is most evident. Using the Finish Line board game as a mediating artefact, academics are forced out of their comfort zone to confront systemic issues and structural constraints impacting student experiences in higher education and "cultivate relational accountability".

Building on the notion of relationality, the second article in this cluster by Danika Govender, Sayuran Pillay, Imraan Moosa and Jaisubash Jayakumar focused on "Decolonising Higher Education in the Global South: A Student-Staff Partnership Approach to Equitable, Co-Created Pedagogy". This article offers a complementary approach and considers student-staff partnerships as a transformative and decolonial move toward achieving epistemic and ontological justice in higher education. While the previous article by Pather and Booi utilised simulated student trajectories highlighting challenges and inequities, this article drew on the lived realities of students who were also co-researchers in the study. Read through CRiTicAL the authors in this article question who is a legitimate knower and creator of knowledge and focus on making overt the hidden curriculum and unspoken academic norm in a medical programme.

Taking the "who" of academic induction processes further, the third article in this cluster places the "who that teaches" at the centre of induction. Katelyn Johnson, Feroza Morris and Cassandra Creamer explore their academic life histories in their article "We Weren't Meant to Be Here: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Becoming and Belonging for Coloured Women in STEM in the Global South." The authors, three Coloured Women in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), explore how inequities and colonial legacies are often reproduced in academic induction and STEM educational spaces. Using collaborative autoethnography, the authors creatively draw on their lived experiences as counterstories and as they assert, to trace "the emotional, cognitive and relational labour involved in navigating spaces that were not built for us."

Reading this article through the previous article on games-based learning brings to the fore the critical question of the hidden games and rules that first-generation academics from marginalised groups are required to navigate. In these instances, "epistemic silences" meant that first-generation academics from marginalised groups who did not possess the requisite academic capital had to learn academia through "self-navigation". Reading this article through CRiTicAL strongly emphasises the Authenticity and Legitimacy foci of the framework. It brings to the fore the "who" that enters higher education, interrogating their misrecognition and having to mask their identities to be regarded as legitimate and visible within the academic spaces and "prove their right" to belong in academia. This presents a critical juncture for reimagining socially just academic induction in the Global South.

The three articles, like many of the articles in this collection, collectively critique the traditional nature of academic induction that focuses on assimilation and compliance. The

authors conceptualise academic induction in their article "not as a single orientation event, but as an ongoing process of becoming an academic".

Diffracting the insights of these three articles through each other demonstrates that academic induction is not simply about socialising academics into an uninterrogated, existing institution. Rather, academic induction and academic staff development more broadly become a site for collective and productive disruption. Within this space, game simulation, lived counter-stories and student-staff partnerships work to disrupt and dismantle hierarchies and reimagine higher education praxis in the Global South.

CONCLUSION

As the contributions in this special issue illustrate, the primary significance of the project lies in its intention to move beyond decolonial rhetoric toward a transformative praxis. Through this special issue, the authors engaged in exploring deeply the possibility of developing endogenous frameworks capable of unpacking the unique complexities of post-apartheid universities. By advocating for endogenous knowledge production, this special issue highlights the necessity of generating theories from within the Global South and the African continent. These localised frameworks do not merely adapt Northern concepts; instead, they elevate the lived experiences, language practices, and relational struggles of local actors to the status of legitimate theory. Ultimately, developing endogenous perspectives allows scholars to move beyond Eurocentric ideal theory as a response to academic extraversion and alterity, as discussed by Mafeje (2000), by reimagining alternative, contextually responsive paradigms for institutional transformation.

It is clear that the CRITICAL framework of NATHEP, established by Behari-Leak and the NATHEP core team in 2020, ignited the possibility for the emergence of relational knowledge building in the field of academic development. This emergence is analogous to what Tsenay Serequeberhan (1998) conceptualises as the African horizon, which is explicitly recognised as an interpretive act embedded in a specific cultural, historical, and postcolonial reality. In the hermeneutical framework of Serequeberhan (ibid), a horizon is the situated locus from which humans experience and make sense of the world. Integrating this notion means that staff development cannot be treated as a generic, unhomed transfer of skills. Instead, it must be an act of intellectual self-determination that acknowledges the historical traumas, lived experiences, and indigenous knowledge systems of African educators. Consequently, ubuntu provides the ethical and relational substance for pedagogy, while the African horizon serves as the critical vantage point. This foundation allows academics to deconstruct Eurocentric

hegemonies and selectively engage global discourses from a position of rooted authenticity rather than intellectual displacement.

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