A Deep Dive into Curriculum Complexities in the Time of COVID-19

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Abstract

As the steering committee of a national higher education collaborative project called the New Academics' Transitions into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), we have been challenged to re-conceptualise an alternative theorisation and implementation of our residential professional development programme for online migration, given the challenges of COVID-19. Using *Ubuntu* as a theoretical infrastructure, we pause at this juncture to reflect on and re-assess how to achieve NATHEP's goals and aims through the planned curriculum, now in online mode. Drawing on a critical framework developed by the project to guide its curriculum, pedagogy and methodology, we

undertook a critical autoethnography in the form of 'deep dive' reflexive explorations to engage in an in-depth analysis of curriculum complexities in times of change. We assert that while the emergence and interplay of Positionality, Relationality and Reflexivity are important constructs and mechanisms shaping our work, they are significantly more critical now that the project is moving to a different mode of delivery. As academic staff developers, we foresee that more effort and vigilance will be needed now in holding the space and facilitating engagements so that no one is marginalised, alienated, socially excluded, or left behind. Through our deep dive, we offer important insights through the project's critical curriculum, pedagogical and methodological framework that might be beneficial for other academic programmes and projects pivoting to an online mode.

Keywords: professional academic staff development; critical curriculum framework; positionality, relationality, reflexivity, deep dive

Introduction

The world is currently grappling with COVID-19, an unprecedented pandemic that has disrupted life as we know it, challenging us to prepare for an uncertain present and future. In Higher Education (HE), COVID-19 is forcing a radical re-imagination of traditional approaches to learning and teaching to enable remote emergency teaching and online facilitation of curricula. An emergent tension at universities nationally is that while the academy is being challenged to salvage the academic year through whatever means possible, academics' and students' inequities in relation to relevant facilities and capacity for online and remote engagements, persist.

COVID-19 amplifies the already present contestations and systemic challenges in the sector related but not limited to improving student access and success; positioning university education as serving the public good (Singh 2001); responding to the calls for decolonised curricula (CCWG 2018; Wa Bofela 2017); and developing contextually responsive curricula that promote transformative values, attitudes and actions in higher education (CHE 2016). Parallel to a national agenda for transformation, universities are urged to commit to alleviating the scourge of poverty, unemployment and inequality by enabling social mobility, social cohesion and student access and success (DHET 2018) through relevant curriculum offerings.

As academics who serve on the steering committee (SC) of a national HE collaborative project, we have been challenged by COVID-19 in many ways. The social distancing protocols and lockdown mean that we cannot continue with the planned NATHEP curriculum, goals and deliverables; all of which were premised on face-to-face pedagogical and social interactions between facilitators and participants.

The COVID-19 moment has forced us to pause, in order to reflect upon and re-assess the project's goals and aims in light of the national drive to migrate the academic project to an online platform. We are cognisant that our participants, who are academic staff developers across 10 universities, are differently able to respond to their respective institutions' and projects' move to remote teaching. Making a decision to take the project online compounds participants' already challenged workloads. This, in turn, makes the current demands from NATHEP, additional and onerous.

About the NATHEP Project

This study reports on a national collaborative project called New Academics' Transitions into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), funded by the University Capacity Development Plan (DHET 2017). It emerged from recognition that staff development capacity needs to be enhanced in relation to new academic induction programmes. NATHEP was designed as a collaborative project to focus on academic staff developers or practitioners in the field who are responsible for induction at their universities and who could be in a position to influence how new academics transition into HE (Clegg 2008). New academics, often appointed for their disciplinary expertise and research capacity, are not always equipped to teach in HE (Brew 2002). They resort to a 'common sense' or a 'teach-like-I-was-taught' approach (Oleson & Hora 2014). Professional development for new academics has thus become an established feature of HE, nationally and internationally, over the past decade (Gosling 2014; Fanghanel & Trowler 2007). The successful completion of such programmes has become an accepted standard and is often a requirement of probation (Sales 2014; Stefani 2004). The rationale is that new academics, if properly inducted and armed with appropriate pedagogical knowledge about teaching, learning, assessment, quality frameworks, student experiences, research integration, scholarship, and professional activities (Fanghanel & Trowler 2007; Ramsden 2003), will be able to contribute to transformation of

the system by enabling student success.

New academics are expected to create innovative and student-centred spaces so as to address a diverse range of student backgrounds, histories, and needs using a social justice approach. For new academics, transforming the curriculum and their pedagogy is a tall order. They desperately seek out professional guidance and support to face the challenges in their disciplinary and curriculum contexts with confidence. However, academic staff developers have not necessarily had the commensurate experience in these areas either. To transform HE, academics need to adopt a scholarly, critical, contextualised, and professional approach to teaching (Behari-Leak 2017). For new academics, such an approach has to be embedded in a well-theorised and conceptualised approach to how they are inducted into HE teaching. For academic staff developers, they need to re-learn and co-learn how to embed these lenses in their professional development learning and offerings.

NATHEP engages with ten national universities, identified on the basis of where formal induction practices are non-existent or self-identified as needing enhancement. Two academic staff development representatives from each university had to attend all project engagements, share the workload for their university-based project tasks and co-create and implement their customised induction programmes. While the target audience over the period (2018-2020) is the 20 academic staff development practitioners, the next intended beneficiaries of NATHEP are new academics, with the ultimate beneficiary being the student and student success.

NATHEP has a SC made up of five academic staff developers from a diverse range of institutions. These academics were invited because they have considerable experience in convening successful induction programmes for new academics at their own universities. The SC is tasked with the implementation of NATHEP's Project Plan, but are also instrumental in facilitating aspects of the curriculum that engage with epistemic, ontological, pedagogical, and methodological domains.

Theoretical Framing and Research Design

The theoretical framing, guiding both NATHEP's methodology and research outputs, draws on critical realism (Bhaskar 1998) and social realism (Archer 2000). The overarching research goal is to explore how and why structures, culture, and agency shape current induction practices, and whether these serve

to include or exclude new academics and students in HE. The research design is further concerned with agential framing within a social justice context and agenda in South African HE.

To inform and guide the project work, NATHEP uses Bhaskar's (2010) Seven Scalar Being (laminar) as a heuristic. The laminar allows for significant depth of analysis, as well as conceptualisation of social interaction and agency at different levels of context and relationality. The concept of relational agency is crucial to how academic staff developers work with new academics to mediate their contextual conditions. Relational agency is also a form of collective agency that professional development programmes need to embrace, given the interrelated nature of the university, and HE as a structural and cultural social system. The Seven Scalar Being (Bhaskar 2010) guided the design of each of the facilitated engagements with participants in the NATHEP workshops. Through this heuristic, NATHEP was able to explore and analyse the contextual levels that shape our work.

The central question guiding NATHEP is: does the critical professional development (Kohli *et al.* 2017) approach embraced by the project, create the necessary and sufficient conditions for the positive exercise of responsive agency required by academic staff developers from differentiated institutions in the current moment? In the COVID-19 crisis, we add an additional analytical level, namely: how will NATHEP address its own research focus in the mode of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)? The complexity of the HE context currently makes an immediate answer difficult, but we will attempt to answer this by first looking at what NATHEP understands by critical professional development through its own critical framework for curriculum change.

A CRiTicAL Framework for Curriculum Change

To create well-theorised and customised induction programmes for each university that respond well to institutional, regional and national challenges, the SC members adopted a grounded approach and methodology to curriculum design. This took into account what was already in place at each university, and their historical and social context. Emerging from the tenor and texture of the work completed by 2019, NATHEP created a critical framework to guide its curriculum decisions, pedagogy, and methodology. We use the acrostic 'CRiTicAL' to focus on key concepts, discussed below, to ensure that

criticality is uppermost in our project deliberations. We seek to create our own understanding of a curriculum model relevant to a global South context that speaks to the integrity of who we are and our work.

The CRiTicAL framework is used in conjunction with the Seven Scalar Being (Bhaskar 2010) to complement and locate the work in specific domains of practice. The aim is to cumulatively and incrementally build a relevant and legitimate foundation of critical principles and praxis for induction that are embedded in a national vision for a transformed HE in RSA. Each component of the CRiTicAL framework is integral to the curriculum goal, aims and deliverables and is unpacked in relation to NATHEP's curriculum and its epistemic-onto-pedagogical encounters. We comprehend a professional development curriculum to be one that engages critically and reflexively with the 'when, where, why, how, who, and what' of HE. Using these lenses, NATHEP engages the HE field and encourages participants to conceptualise 'curriculum' beyond technical and instrumental definitions (Roxå & Mårtensson 2016). We are guided by the realist question: what works for who, in what context and why?

A CRiTicAL Framework for the NATHEP Curriculum

The 'C' in CRiTicAL stands for the *conceptual,* involving the considered, creative, and thoughtful ideation of concepts. Conceptual frames require significant consideration given the systemic conditions across an inequitable sector such as ours, in South Africa. The much-needed critical agency and social justice lenses are often not readily included in current induction practices or in the repertoire of academic staff development as a field. Critical agency in both disciplinary and departmental programmes is crucial, as structural and cultural contexts can serve as triggers that advance or dampen efforts, in this case, to create robust new academics' induction programmes. The *contextual* aspects relate to time, place, space, people, historicity, and socio-cultural dimensions of lived experiences. Context is understood as time and space that goes beyond geographical boundaries. We have underscored the maxim, 'context matters' in all our engagements thus far. The *critical* aspects consider issues of power, race, class, gender and other systemic underlying mechanisms. Both contexts and concepts are embedded in a critical orientation to practice and knowledge generation. This is informed by critical theory and critical pedagogy associated with social justice, equality, and change.

The 'R' in CRiTicAL stands for *responsive,* which refers to thinking and action that is decisive, swift, and integrative in relation to present challenges. The 'cascading' model of staff development used in NATHEP encourages an approach to curriculum praxis that is responsive. It involves academic staff developers who have identified a need to come together in a bi-directional professional development engagement. Academic staff development is thus a unit of analysis and a sociological practice in NATHEP that has been designed to strengthen and support professional staff development through an inclusive, socially just and transformative curriculum.

The 'R' is also about being *reflexive* in using reflection for forward action. The NATHEP curriculum works reflexively by exploring what it means to engage with enabling and constraining conditions at national, institutional, faculty, departmental, teaching, and learning levels. This is in relation to designing well-considered, theorised, and contextualised models of induction relevant to new academics at differentiated universities. The 'R' is also relational in the sense that academic staff developers have to facilitate sessions and engage with their new academics through induction programmes. The project aims to enable new academics to understand contextual constraints and influences on their teaching in their university settings. They are encouraged to see their own potential as change agents who can adopt effective curricula, pedagogic, and assessment practices so as to respond to challenges across a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and institutional contexts. New academics in turn, influence the quality of teaching and learning conditions for their students. The intended and ultimate beneficiaries of NATHEP are students.

We also have *re-centred* induction programmes to respond to the call for a decolonial pedagogy (Mignolo 2013; Walsh 2003) by foregrounding Africa as our locus of enunciation. This is important in order to address the experiences of mainly black students, who still feel alienated, marginalised, and invisible within the university. It is hoped that through effective induction programmes, new academics who are better equipped will be in an informed position to engage effectively with their students who will then be better able to complete their studies and succeed.

Curriculum content needs to be *relevant* to the needs of all and to the context. We acknowledge that the HE context can be a complex space for new academics and staff developers alike and one-size-fits-all, generic models and approaches may be inadequate.

Professional development practitioners need ongoing development too, as they are equally challenged by the complexity and contested nature of the changing HE landscape.

Many find themselves between a rock and a hard place, having to occupy a third space between university management and academics in the various faculties (Behari-Leak & Le Roux 2018). In 'commissioning' this project, the DHET has understood and appreciated the need to develop and support professional staff providing professional support for teaching (DHET 2018). NATHEP was therefore conceptualised as a 'cascading model' of staff development with the various beneficiaries in mind.

The 'T' in CRiTicAL stands for theorised praxis, which refers to using theory as a functional mechanism to explain, trouble, problematise, confirm, affirm, and position thoughts and ideas that relate directly to praxis. Studies show that the way in which academics teach proves extremely important because teaching is neither a neutral endeavour nor a common-sense or craft activity. Disciplinary knowledge alone or holding a PhD in a disciplinary area is not a licence to teach or the basis for experience in pedagogical engagement. In fact, 'disciplined' knowledges have historically constrained pedagogical approaches, and have failed to engage with how students' backgrounds, history, and context affect the teaching and learning process.

The 'A' in CRiTicAL stands for authentic, and is concerned with genuine commitment and original thinking towards enhanced practices and deep change. Since 2015, universities have been trying to respond to calls for decolonisation of the curriculum by student activists insisting that *who teaches* matters (Kessi 2015). They claim that the lack of diversity in teaching staff, amongst other things, results in a dearth of a representative teaching body and role models to attend to the needs of diverse student groups who struggle with issues of identity, cultural displacement, and language. Academics who are not reflexive about how their positionality, background, and cultural values shape students in particular ways for success or failure, unwittingly reproduce socially unjust pedagogies, perpetuate high attrition and low participation and success rates. Induction programmes have to focus on the positionality of new academics, their orientations within their curricula, and their response to possible tensions.

The 'L' in CRiTicAL stands for legitimate, and refers to practice that is done with authority and gravitas, founded on authentic purpose and goals. Practice is based on context and towards the realisation of goals of all

concerned. The who (teachers) and the how (teaching methods) are important markers of change in NATHEP and play an important role in mediating the *what (content)* of teaching through knowledge production and the design of learning experiences. Historically, we have taught in an alienating and marginalising curriculum environment, where content represents examples that South African students struggle to identify with. Being a university teacher in Africa must mean something, least of all that the content used to teach concepts and frameworks draws richly on what it means to be an African in relation to the world. Situating Africa as the centre of epistemic diversity is an important positioning, one which teachers need to understand, and deploy in their teaching practices.

Can NATHEP Cascade in the Time of COVID-19?

NATHEP now faces a crossroads in the form of COVID-19. The current HE instability now has also presented us with a reflexive opportunity to be flexible and agile with the NATHEP curriculum for our part as the steering committee, but also for participants and their preparedness to fully participate in NATHEP going forward. We believe that this re-focus is needed to make the existing curriculum responsive and relevant to the challenges of our time.

In this chapter, we re-conceptualise and re-imagine an alternative theorisation and creation of induction programmes that are contextualised, legitimate, relevant, and responsive, in the time of COVID-19 and beyond. To do this, we engaged in rigorous discussion and debate about the central tenets of NATHEP; its aims and deliverables; and its espoused theory in reaction to the change forced upon us now and what this means for a desired ideal for the future. We agree that the current NATHEP model might need to change in order to cater to the future induction of new academics, online. The consequences of the COVID-19 moment therefore has far-reaching consequences for how we work with the project, curriculum, pedagogy, deliverables, and participants, but also for how participants will work with their new academics in induction programmes, emerging in online or remote mode.

Methodology

The methodological framing for this study is informed by critical autoethno-

graphy (CAE), which is 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness connecting the personal to the cultural' (Ellis & Bochner 2000: 739). It locates social life within larger systems of power, privilege, and social justice to enable one to deconstruct the impact of the dominant social order (Boylorn & Orbe 2016) on experience. It is the relational methodology of telling stories of experience (Jones *et al.* 2013), which suited our research well as we, the Steering Committee (SC) of the project chose to collaboratively explore our personal AD journeys into HE and the project.

Institutional Ethnography (IE), which is equally relevant to our study, is a method focusing on the social organisation of knowledge manifested through texts and discourses in a 'textually-mediated social organisation' (Smith, 1984, p. 59). IE uses particular experiences (and associated work processes) to analyse how social relations exist (Smith 2005) and how people align their activities with relevance produced elsewhere. Both AE and IE are critical theories in the sense that they explore taken for granted assumptions such as how minority groups, such as women, are rendered invisible. While IE is important, we selected CAE as a methodology to explore the 'politics of positionality' (Madison 2012 as cited in Boylorn & Orbe 2016), which each SC member did in the form of a 'deep dive'[1] reflexive exploration to engage in an in-depth analysis of the project's existing curriculum complexities in times of change and crisis.

Each SC member used the concepts offered by NATHEP's CRiTicAL framework to reflect on who we are, our journeys into the AD field, and our role in NATHEP in light of COVID-19. A reading and discussion of the five deep dives led to the use of a layered analysis. This resulted in the identification of three layers, namely Positionality, Relationality, and Reflexivity, which we used to code the deep dive, and conduct further analysis. A meta-analysis across each layer was conducted so as to offer multiple perspectives for re-envisioning curricula during disruptive times of structural, cultural, and social change in COVID-19.

Analysis/ Discussion

Positionality, relationality and reflexivity emerged as key conceptual and

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[1] Deep dive – this approach emerged through our brainstorming of methods for data generation.

discursive frames from our deep dive reflections into the project. Positionality plays a critical role in how we see ourselves as raced, classed, gendered, language-wielding, sentient beings. This frame has deep implications for how we do our work and how we locate ourselves in the work. The overarching aim is to reflect on how positionality can be accessed as a mechanism for social justice practices. Linked to positionality, we see relationality as the glue that binds us, and as a way of enacting the principles of *Ubuntu*. This reminds us of the need to live and work in awareness of both others and Others, and how each of us is influenced to engender a communitarian and humanitarian mode in this collaborative project. Reflexivity is a frame to ensure that we can critically reflect on who we are, where we are located, and how this relates to broader structures of power and influence. By being reflexive, we are able to be grounded in NATHEP and challenge ourselves to engage in theorised praxis.

Positionality

As encouraged by the theories of NATHEP, namely, Bhaskar's 7 Scalar Being (2010) and Archer's morphogenetic framework (2000), we should aim to understand and appreciate our positionality, which speaks to the nature of our being in the world in relation to others and the socio-cultural, historical, and structural conditions in which we find ourselves. We are thrown into a world which is not of our own making, which conditions our life chances, while also shaping our choices, orientations, and decision making.

> *As a woman of colour, who grew up on the 'wrong side' of the tracks, but now in a more privileged location, I know that, as we face this crisis, some will be worse hit than others and the lockdown measures will affect us differently, depending on who we are, where we are located and the extent to which we can exercise agency in our lives (SC4).*

Positionality speaks to the reality that who we are is inextricably linked to how we think, what we do and how we see the world. This message was echoed through all 5 deep dives.

In the next quotation, we have someone speaking as Black African male.

> *I am a Black[2] african[3] male, working as a curriculum developer based at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), in the Centre for Higher Education and Development (CHED). While I studied at various racial historical differentiated South African universities, my curriculum gaze has been influenced mostly by the sociology of education, in particular the Anglo-Saxon tradition[4]* (SC1).

What became very clear through the deep dive was that introspection of the self is a complex process that requires brave, rigorous, dialogic engagement with the inner being to shift beyond the description of the position we occupy in society and its affordances or limitations. Difficulty with this process can initially result in a focus on position rather than positionality.

> *I am an educational developer and HE lecturer in the Centre for Learning Teaching and Development (CLTD) at Wits, a research-intensive university, where I develop, coordinate and facilitate academic professional learning programmes* (SC5).

Our positionality can be traced to imposed life structures of race, class, gender, as well as the constructs of power which place us in situations of privilege and/or struggle. Acknowledging, knowing and understanding the nature of these privileges or struggles, despite our social, structural, cultural, and historical impositions, creates the potential to connect with those beings who are similar in nature. This solidarity could result in corporate agentic action that strives collectively towards emancipation, freedom and upliftment while building a transformed and a just society for all.

> *Many of our participants on NATHEP will be affected adversely in this regard. As we face the biggest crisis yet, how do we as the SC on*

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[2] Black here not used in accordance with the colonial-apartheid essentialised race categories but in reference to the structured nature of race as a social reality which continues to condition our lives even after the formal demise of the colonial-apartheid juridical framework in 1994.

[3] I am writing african in small letters as a symbol of protest against notion of racial groups which continue to be used in the post-apartheid South Africa.

[4] This is a Bernsteinian tradition also known as social realism.

> *NATHEP reach out and hold our participants through this crisis; but do so in ways that make NATHEP responsive and able to continue but without leaving anyone behind. This moment is one of reckoning: do we pause and wait and see; or do we move ahead and support as best we can?* (SC4).

Many of us, who came into the field of AD as a colonial project, have noted that our educational systems value an immersion in best practice, with an emphasis on job descriptions and titles to define who we are.

> *I experienced challenges in this new AD field as this clashed with my Science identity. Through immersion in the field and engagement with other AD 'disciplinary migrants', I began developing the AD identity and gaze. This was enhanced when I joined a Master's programme, an experience that dramatically and permanently altered my knowing, acting, being and becoming in AD* (SC2).

As such, we have become conditioned to reflect on who we are and how we think at a surface level of comfort. This often describes our positioning within society without the relevant guidance and time to reflexively ponder on our positionality and its influence on our continuous being and becoming.

> *The decolonial turn exposed how complicit I have been with neo-colonialism and revealed 'whiteness' of curriculum studies in South Africa. It exposed blind spots in dominant ways of thinking, seeing and being (my white colonial curriculum gaze) and affected my wellbeing dearly. I experienced cognitive dissonance first-hand with discomfort, tension, shame, and anxiety as I was realising that there was a lot to unlearn in order re-learn* (SC1).

Having the confidence and comfort to delve into the embodiment of who we are and how we come to know, do, and be has the potential to build critical thinking practitioners who are consciously aware of their emerging being and becoming in varied situations so that they are able to authentically respond with contextually relevant practices. It is our positionality with its powerful influence on our philosophical, theoretical and conceptual views of the world that shapes us as authentic practitioners and inherently drives our practices.

> *I realised that my knowing, doing, being and becoming was steeped in being a good follower of AD best practices designed by a particular being for a particular context* (SC5).

There is a danger, however, that practitioners especially newcomers to a field (as in NATHEP's beneficiaries) could be seduced into conflating their positionality with the positioning of the field, in terms of the so-called giants of the field, along with the field's historically valued and celebrated ways of knowing, doing, and being.

> *After initially lapping up the literature, theory and AD best practices from the 'AD giants', a sense of questioning discomfort began through my own growth in critical reflexivity* (SC5).

Curriculum practitioners then, who lack the scrutiny of their positionality and its implications could resort to compliance and mimicry of what is determined as best practice, rather than taking into consideration who they, their institutions, disciplines, curricula, and learners really are. During the COVID-19 flurry of teaching and learning delivery decisions, suggestions and hype, the positioning and positionality of knowledges and pedagogical interactions should not be silenced, but foregrounded in relation to the positionality of knowers within a curriculum.

> *We need to guard against being uncritical about what this means for the maxim 'leave no one behind'! Social inequalities have become more visible now as we witness who has access, who can exercise their agency and who still has control of their own lives. The fact that access to education is still contingent on who has the ability (financial and otherwise) to make gains of a university education, in whatever mode and both locally and globally, is telling* (SC4).

NATHEP's collaborative, communal and collegial environment serves as a fertile ground to nurture the principles of *Ubuntu* and understand who we are while being within a collective.

> *I had to allow myself to learn from and with my fellow SC members and participants* (SC3).

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 Deliberative engagements and explicit communication among all stakeholders are important elements of finding alternative ways of thinking about the philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual influences behind the design and pedagogic approaches of institutionally responsive induction programmes. The process opens up the opportunity for the NATHEP community to engage critically and use the influences they value to construct meaning that is contextually relevant for their institutional programmes while co-creating collective meaning for induction programmes within the HE sector. NATHEP's critical framework can enable an explicit and valued positioning of a curriculum's espoused philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual worldviews with the potential to influence equitable and fair pedagogical decision-making and teaching and learning interactions based on the positionality of all involved.

> *In attempting to apply aspects of responsiveness, reflexivity, relational, re-centredness and relevance, I see all of us as leaders… it allows everyone to think of creative ways of bringing our visions to fruition… this process is informed by considerations of equity of opportunity without allowing ourselves to be paralysed by the status quo but avoid potential blind spots* (SC3).

Relationality

Relationality is the very essence of being human. Influenced by *Ubuntu*, an African philosophy, our approach as NATHEP SC members is relational, warm, caring, and always with empathy. This is evident in ways in which we relate to each as SC members, with NATHEP participants and also in acknowledging the changing context and curricula with which we are faced. The principles of social justice and placing value on humanity inform our engagements. Acknowledging the different contexts in terms of histories and types of institutions can serve as foundations of fairness and conditions for equity. Who we are (self) and our views of reality (positionality) inform our engagements with others and the nature of our engagements with the curricula. The deliberate collaborative approaches and sense of community that prevails in NATHEP are key to advancing our collective vision in light of the current struggles that are presented by COVID-19.

Being part of the NATHEP community of practice (CoP) regardless of

positions and ranks outside the CoP allows members to learn from and with others.

> *Our collective leadership has thus far allowed us to slow down to reflect on what NATHEP has achieved, revise the delivery approach and ultimately reconstruct a continuation plan that will still benefit everyone* (SC3).

These encounters are dialogical spaces for co-learning and fosters co-creation of knowledge (Bovill 2019) rather than the traditional master-apprenticeship model.

> *My participation revitalised my scholarship through robust theoretical debates and it continues to sharpen my decolonial gaze. Decolonial pedagogies are very central to NATHEP, because we work towards realising a set of conditions enabling the dialectic processes of personal and social transformation with academics across ten participating universities* (SC1).

Within this dialogic safe space, mutual vulnerabilities allow for growth, thus propelling our agency to act. If we believe that knowledge of the world is socially constructed, it is important at all times to be sensitive to our own blind spots, which are conditioned by our positioning in the world.

> *My thinking about Transformative Education was further disrupted and extended when I joined in 2018, and my many turns in the Spiral of Learning and Becoming. Discussions and debates on the sociocultural and historical aspects of RSA were integral and influenced my practices. Engaging in critical reflexivity has revealed that while I've espoused a social justice orientation, I have acknowledged my limitation that much of my practice was empty (a term used by my fellow NATHEP SC) devoid of a deeper contextualisation for our RSA context* (SC2).

An examination of relationality within the curriculum and stakeholders of any project requires not only a deep, but honest, dialogic interaction that delves into a context of self within time, place, others, and existing historical, socio-

cultural, and structural conditions. A relational exploration of what is and what is not enables decisive choices around what can be possible given the contextual realities of limitations and possibilities.

> *The theoretical exploration related to agency made me realise that despite our being and becoming intentions, we are constrained or enabled by the historical, cultural and structural conditions we find ourselves in* (SC5).

Drawing on Maxwell's theory of astute leadership, NATHEP provided opportunities for engagements that go beyond sharing of ideas, but also visionary thinking that affirms the self and others with commitment to continue in light of the struggles with conviction, confidence and compassion (Maxwell 2016).

> *As someone who tries hard to enact leadership-as-practice, I know that we have to work together as the SC to bring ourselves to the task of resurrecting NATHEP in COVID-19, but to take it over the threshold into something that is collaborative and responsive. We have to be aware that shutting down for some people has meant shutting out. It has opened up a space for us to consider what it means to show up and stand up together, when the odds are against us* (SC4).

Relationality is evident in the interplay between Identity (who we are), Belonging (our sense of community) and Becoming-with (our co-existence). Through these entangled (Barad 2007) encounters SC members and participants 'become with' (Haraway 2008) and through their intra-action (Barad 2010). According to Barad (2010: ix) 'to be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence'. The notion of intra-action, a key concept of Barad's entanglement theory is, a 'mutual constitution of entangled entities' (Barad 2007: 33), rather than inter-action, which assumes separateness and individuality. This aligns with the African philosophical approach of *Ubuntu*, which we have adopted as the underpinning philosophy for NATHEP. African ontological being, or *Ubuntu*, presupposes that being of oneself is always dependent on one's doing in relation to the other and as such becomes foundation for the establishment of humane relationships (Ramose 1999).

Reflexivity

Mafeje (1994) builds on Fanon's work in order to explain what can be expected of an engaged African intellectual. It became clear for him that material conditions (oppression) dictate that African scholars are to come up with alternative discourse. Mafeje viewed the role of an engaged African scholar to be that of a revolutionary scholar, what he called transcendent intellectual. Transcendent intellectuals are not only critical of, but also are opposed to the status quo. They are transcendent because they are revolutionary. This means that they do not take their existence for granted. Nor do they isolate themselves from the broader struggles of the society they wish to transform (Mafeje 1994: 10).

The process of reflexivity goes beyond the normal reflection process to disrupt the status quo for a socially just society. This entails purposive reflection or reflecting with the intention to take action through challenging existing norms, values, thoughts, and assumptions about reality for a trans-formed future.

> *The current moment offers an opportunity to think anew about my role and identity at the traditional university. To respond to the current demands, can we re-conceptualise and re-purpose traditions, conventions, canonical features and its place in our knowledge society in light of crises and to serve the greater public good?* (SC4).

COVID-19 provides NATHEP with opportunities to slow down, listen, and be responsive instead of taking a crisis management approach and rushing to adopt convenient approaches in the quest to mitigate the current dilemma and delays that could jeopardise gains made. This is a moment to challenge pre-determined approaches and reconstruct fair and equitable ways and terms of engagement that are inclusive. This approach entails reviewing, taken for granted privileges, available resources, and alternative methodologies.

> *As we move from face-to-face to online mode, I have to urge others to pause to engage in critical reflexive practice on what this means for our students, ourselves, university community, and the HE sector to see how we can infuse the online approach with the necessary levels of criticality in online teaching in socially just ways* (SC4).

Engaging in critical reflexivity ought to enable the interrogation of planned curricula with clear goals and deliverables for a targeted audience, while acknowledging uncertainty, unpredictability and that which we have taken for granted.

> *Our framework was developed when we had understood the world as it was, although the future remained uncertain. What assumptions did we have about ourselves as facilitators, our participants, our contexts and the curricula, goals and plans, purposes of HE in general?* (SC2).

Reflexivity provides the opportunity to design well-considered, theorised and contextualised curricula through an exploration of enabling and constraining conditions at the global, national, institutional, faculty, departmental, and classroom levels.

> *The project in turn got me to challenge my AD induction, assimilation and following while strengthening my curriculum practices* (SC5).

The sustainability of an evolving field should not be dependent on best practice that time could render obsolete. There is a need for the agentic confidence and creativity of a collaboration of practitioners who are able to draw on their own and the collective's inner dispositions of criticality, resilience and change to tackle the complex and unknown from a multitude of perspectives.

> *Theorisation and analysis of our scholarly practices led me to believe that sustainability of the changing AD field will depend on growing best practitioners and not best AD practices. Best practitioners have the ability to question and create contextually relevant and responsive practices* (SC5).

Drawing on the critical framework, the current COVID-19-moment and future unknown moments require resilient, dynamic, critically reflexive and reflective, conceptually and contextually responsive practitioners, who are able to disrupt their taken for granted assumptions in their continuous moments of being and becoming. Relational, authentic and legitimate practitioners who are adept as agents of change and critical thinkers, are required in order to navigate contextual realities with ease and confidence in who they and their curricula

currently are, while being open to the possibilities of who they and their curriculum can become.

Online Migration in the Time of COVID-19

As we prepare for migration of the project in its next phase, COVID-19 has prompted us to rethink our modalities for implementation and also to imagine anew our curricula for NATHEP. This requires disrupting our assumptions regarding facilitation, participation, curricula, and praxis, among other aspects, that will influence the design of the NATHEP going forward. We are aware now, for example, that who we are, as facilitators and participants in the contact mode, will be different in an online mode. As facilitators, we will need to spend time re-establishing relationships with the awareness that people do feel 'strange' on camera, where this mode might hyper-visibilise aspects that are less important in contact mode, such as appearance, voice, accents, and so on. In the same way, the online mode has the ability to mask and silence people as it is difficult to engage everyone, all the time, especially when cameras are off, and people are distant. Facilitation of workshops and engagements in the online mode will require a different facilitation style, and an emotional vigilance regarding how people feel about engaging and whether they feel comfortable enough to participate fully.

Who our participants are, their knowledge, dispositions, lived experiences (and their expertise), how these are being legitimated or not, and the extent to which they are able to engage relationally with their stakeholders during this current global crisis, will have to be considered and integrated meaningfully.

The knowledge, curriculum and conceptual frames of NATHEP will have to be tempered in the new phase to keep them relevant and responsive and to foster reflexivity through robust theoretical tools to deal with the crises facing HE within a re-centred (South) African focus. Our next workshop therefore has to be carefully conceptualised and implemented so that positionality, relationality and reflexivity, and their interplay, which are key tenets of the project, are amplified rather than muted, as we engage on the topic of the induction of new academics into the university.

We will need to keep contact before and after the workshop to ensure that participants feel 'held' and know that the workshop is not a once-off, ad hoc event but part of a larger narrative of the project. This will have to be

recapped more frequently. Another way of ensuring that these three constructs are upheld is by investing time in a 'check-in' session, where each participant and as a university pair, can share their challenges and insights with the whole group. This will go a long way to maintaining the community that was built in the face-to-face mode. It will also ensure that relationality is uppermost in our interactions. We will also invest time in exploring strategies for online teaching and facilitation so as not to assume that everyone is equally prepared for this new mode of engagement in their own contexts. Case studies, which each university will be compiling on their contextually relevant induction programmes, will also include the pivot to online teaching in order to reflect on the gains and losses of the different modes, both in their own practices, but also for new academics who have to be inducted to HE in an online mode. All of these aspects are crucial for criticality and authentic HE practices that embody and value deep change and the sustainability of ourselves, others, and our social and environmental systems.

Conclusion

Given the disruption caused by COVID-19, this chapter explored how academic staff/professional developers on the steering committee of NATHEP re-conceptualised and re-imagined an alternative theorisation and purpose of induction programmes for a possible online migration in the time of COVID-19. We found that our national and collaborative project has had to be robust, flexible and agile in this crisis, and in possible moments of change. We note that it is important to consider how a project's theory of change prepares its participants to be reflexive in terms of methodology, outcomes, and the planned curriculum, when the 'business-as-usual' mode is disrupted.

Using a CRiTicAL framework developed by NATHEP to guide its curriculum, pedagogy, and methodology, the authors undertook 'deep dive' reflections to create a renewed understanding of who they are, their roles on the project, and how they could reshape the project to be reflective of a curriculum model relevant and responsive to a Global South context, and one that speaks to the integrity of who they are and their work. Through these collective reflections, we assert that the emergence and interplay of Positionality, Relationality, Reflexivity are important constructs that shape our work and these need to be re-imagined and refocused in times of crisis, so that no one is left behind or socially excluded. These new understandings have

serious implications, not only for how NATHEP works with its own participants, but also for how participants will work with their new academics in induction programmes emerging in online or remote mode in the future. The consequences of COVID-19 now will therefore have far-reaching consequences for how we work with NATHEP, its curriculum, pedagogy and deliverables in the post-COVID-19 phase in the future.

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