

Developing New Academics: So What Difference Does It Make?

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Abstract—Given the dynamic nature of the higher education landscape, induction programmes for new academics has become the norm nowadays to support academics negotiate these rough terrain. This study investigates an induction programme for new academics in a higher education institution to establish what difference it has made to participants. The findings revealed that the benefits ranged from creating safe spaces for collaboration and networking to fostering reflective practice and contributing to the scholarship of teaching and learning. The study also revealed that some of the intentions of the programme may not have been achieved, for example transformative learning. This led to questioning whether this intention is an appropriate one given the short duration of the programme and the long, drawn out process of transformation. It may be concluded that the academic induction programme in this study serves to sow the seeds for transformative learning through fostering critically reflective practice. Recommendations for further study could include long term impact of the programme on student learning and success, these being the core business of higher education. It is also recommended that in addition to an induction programme, the university invests in a mentoring programme for new staff and extend the support for academics in order to sustain critical reflection and which may contribute to transformative educational practice .

Keywords—Induction programme, reflective practice, scholarship of teaching, transformative learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE dynamic and constantly evolving higher education landscape marked by "massification, globalisation and the discourse of high skills have brought a changed workplace for academics in which they have to negotiate new expectations and identities" [1]. This is further exacerbated for new academics entering higher education, many of whom are disciplinary experts and may not have the necessary pedagogical knowledge or have developed their professional identities as academics in higher education.

In this 'supercomplex' world, [2] purports, we are preparing students for a future that cannot yet be predicted, an uncertain future. What capabilities do students need to be successful in this rapidly globalised world? What capabilities does academic staff need to deal with the new expectations? Reference [3] asserts that "the teachers hired today are the teachers for the next generation [and] will determine the success of an entire generation of students. Their success can be ensured by providing them with a comprehensive professional development programme."

In recent times induction programmes have become the

norm in higher education institutions in many countries [4]-[8] and serve to support new academics in their various roles. Higher education institutions in South Africa are engaged in various forms of staff (professional) development [9], [10]. Each institution has a programme for new academics which range from a few days orientation or induction to semester-long programmes. These induction programmes are usually facilitated by Teaching and Learning Centres or Academic Development units. Reference [11] asserts that effective induction programmes are comprehensive, structured and monitored; focus on professional learning and growth; emphasize collaboration and group identity formation.

This current study investigates the Academic Induction Programme at a University of Technology in South Africa focussing specifically on what difference does it make to the participants enrolled in the programme. This study will contribute to improving the current provision and contribute to the field of staff development in higher education.

II. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The 2013 Academic Induction Programme provides the context for this study.

A. Programme Overview

The programme introduces new staff to learning, teaching and assessment policies, approaches and practices in higher education and in the institution. The programme is underpinned by a transformative intention that promotes critical reflection and participants' researching their own practices. New staff refers to all newly appointed staff to the institution and not necessarily new to higher education. Each cohort has varied levels of experience of teaching in higher education. Some are from industry with no teaching experience, some seconded from technical or administrative posts to an academic post, some with a few years of experience and others with many years in higher education.

The programme seeks to provide participants with a safe critical space for dialogue, critique, collaboration and re-envisioning new possibilities for learning and teaching. According to [12] "through dialogue, spaces of development can be opened up and realms of possibility can be re-imagined...re-imagining is not necessarily suggestive of new thinking, but of thinking again and thinking about". Reference [1] refers to academic staff development as 'spaces for disruption'. Rather than causing chaos, confusion or creating a disturbance as is usually associated with notions of 'disruption', these spaces for disruption provide opportunities for "questioning, challenging and critiquing taken-for-granted

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ways of doing things in higher education” [1].

B. Programme Aims

The programme was designed to create opportunities for ‘questioning, challenging and critiquing’ practice. With this in mind the programme aims included the following:

1. Providing a Safe Space

It is intended that a safe space will provide opportunities for participants to share their experiences and reflect on their practice. Reference [13] says that “perhaps telling our stories may encourage others to speak their silences as well”. This space also provides opportunities for participants to learn from each other and engage in possible collaborative inquiry into their educational practices.

2. Promoting Reflective Practice

According to [14] engaging in reflective practice involves “thoughtfully considering and critically analysing our actions and own experiences with the goal of improving our professional practice” A key question posed in the programme is “How do I improve my practice” [15]. A research approach to improving their practice is promoted. Researching their practice involves participants asking questions of the kind, ‘how do I improve what I do?’ This is further facilitated by adopting the notion of “Best Practice: refusal to be satisfied with what I did last semester” (Unknown). The focus is on continuous improvement. Through considering improving practice and striving toward best practice participants are encouraged to be constantly reflecting on their educational practices.

3. Fostering Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is a concept developed by Jack Mezirow in the 1970s [16]. This approach requires that participants think and reflect more deeply and critically on the educational practices. Rather than merely reforming their practices, which involves minor changes to fix problems in learning and teaching, a transformative approach involves re-examining our preconceptions, values, beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching and how we are educating our students.

“Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations, our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy” [17] as cited in [18]

Critical reflection is a necessary condition for transformative learning [19]. However reflection in itself does not imply that it is critical [19]. Reflection may be viewed as a “continual interweaving of thinking and doing” [20]. According to [13] “reflection is an activity in which we

‘recapture’ our experiences, think about it mull it over and evaluate it”. Critical reflection thus refers to “questioning the integrity of assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience...[and] occurs in response to an awareness of a contradiction among one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions” [21].

C. Programme Structure

To contribute to developing critically reflective practitioners a short induction programme of a few days is not sufficient. The programme in this study is run over a 6 month period and has been offered twice a year, in semesters 1 & 2. In each semester, the programme is comprised of:

- A 3-day block workshop held at the beginning of the semester
- 12 Weekly workshops for the rest of the semester

The block workshop focuses on national and institutional imperatives for example a critical overview of policies and procedures; institutional mandates for example student centredness, e-learning, curriculum renewal and general education and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Weekly workshops focus on learning, teaching and assessment strategies, quality promotion and assurance and a considerable amount of time is spent on conversations on participants’ researching their own practice. As part of the Induction Programme participants engage in a mini action research project which requires that they critically reflect on their practice and identify strategies for improvement. Participants present their projects to their peers at an Induction Sharing Day at the end of the six month programme. The final activity for the programme is the submission of a Reflective Paper that requires participants to reflect on and discuss their learning and evaluate the programme. Following Richardson’s [22] notion of writing as a method of inquiry (in research), an autobiographical approach to writing is suggested and participants are encouraged to be creative and tell their own stories of their experiences at Induction.

To facilitate reflective practice a number of strategies are proposed. These include Kolb’s reflective cycle [23] and the action research approach [24]. To guide participants in their action research projects the Framework and Rationale for Research by Whitehead [25] which provide some useful probing questions has been useful. These questions are as follows:

- What really matters to me? What do I care passionately about? What kind of difference do I want to make in the world?
- What are my values and why?
- What is my concern?
- Why am I concerned?
- What kinds of experiences can I describe to show the reasons for my concerns?
- What can I do about it?
- What will I do about it?
- How do I evaluate the educational influences of my actions?

- How do I demonstrate the validity of the account of my educational influence in learning?
- How do I modify my concerns, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluation?

III. METHODOLOGY

This research attempted to understand and evaluate the lived experiences of the participants of the induction programme as reflected in their stories or narratives in various forms. The purpose was to identify the impact of the programme on participants. The research thus adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology and involved narrative analysis. Qualitative methodologies involve researchers studying “things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to it” [26]. In essence this research attempted to make sense of the stories that participants were saying about their experiences on the Academic Induction Programme.

A. Sample and Data Sources

The sample for this study was the forty three participants in the programme that attended the programme in two cohorts. The data sources included reflective papers that participants had written at the end of the programme, their presentation of their mini projects at an Induction Sharing Day, evaluation responses that were completed at the end of every workshop and my personal observations during workshops.

B. Analysis

Reference [27] identified four models for narrative analysis, thematic, structural, interactional and performative analysis. Thematic narrative analysis which analyses what is said, the content, rather than how, was applied to the data and common themes that emerged are presented.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following common themes emerged from the data. They are presented below with extracts from data sources to add richness to the themes.

- Initial skepticism followed by empowerment
- Developing personal self-knowledge
- Creating safe spaces and support
- Adapting to the university and making connections
- Integrating new strategies into classroom practice
- Developing reflective practice
- Contributing to the scholarship of teaching

However, prior to discussion of these themes it is worth noting that of the forty three participants on the programme in two cohorts, one participant indicated little benefit from the programme. This participant has many years of experience as an academic in higher education; she has a formal education qualification in her discipline, has completed a course in assessment and is registered with her professional body.

I am in academic lecturing since 1992. From my perspective, I could do much more with the time by searching for tools and methods to better my teaching and learning methods than to learn again about Bloom.

The new/ other strategies that I will and have implemented I would have done also without attending the induction sessions. If you asked me did I learn something I will say yes, I did but most probably not as much as the others.

A. Initial Skepticism Followed by Empowerment

It was interesting to note that some participants on reflecting on their induction journey initially displayed skepticism about attending the programme. But this later changed as they engaged further in the programme and learned more about themselves and reflected on their educational practices. For example as illustrated in Tim and Anne's reflections in the extracts below.

Tim: Is this really necessary? I asked myself these questions; “Why six months period instead of a full intense workshop sessions in two weeks or so?

... I appreciate how these sessions were presented as I had gained an insight through contact with my students and implemented some lessons learned. I feel more confident after participating and attending all Academic Induction Workshops than when I arrived here in November 2012.

Anne: If you had asked me in January, prior to the Academic Induction Programme commencing, what are my expectations? The answer, quite frankly, would have been WHAT EVER! It was merely an item on my annual calendar which I was expected to attend. Period!

... During the course of the programme I was provided with an opportunity to reflect on myself and my ideas on education. It was the platform from which I was able to identify a need for change. The programme conveyed to me that revolution, particularly of my teaching philosophies, is not a reflection of how badly these practices have or are being done but rather an opportunity to identify areas that could be done more efficiently and with greater benefit in the future.

B. Developing Personal Self-Knowledge

Through fostering critical self-reflection the programme provided participants an opportunity to engage on a journey self-awareness and self-discovery. As Parker Palmer [28] notes we teach who we are. The programme emphasises personal self-knowledge as necessary for development as an academic in higher education. This development is reflected in Siphos reflections.

Siphos: My expectations of the induction was a long boring process where one has to sit there inconveniently every Thursday and talk about themselves. I entered into this class with my back up waiting to resist anything that was going to be thrown at me. What I found however is that the sessions were informative and interactive. Yes, I spent a lot of time talking about myself but that's what helped me discover more about myself and the potential I have to develop those around me which impacted my teaching in a positive way.

Then I had to look at myself to discover this teaching philosophy I was being asked about; as a teacher, a provider of knowledge I looked to be a source of encouragement and inspiration to aid learners in discovering their potential and who they are, not by forcing an identity on them but by providing the tools for self-discovery and an environment for self-exploration. Induction was exciting because of the journey of self-discovery, many issues on assessment and strategies were discussed but it was the realisation that it all depends on me and what can I do, how hard am I willing to work to achieve the result that have been set for me and ones that I have set for myself, which are much higher.

C. Creating Safe Spaces and Support

The programme provided a multidisciplinary safe space for participants to interact from across the six faculties in the university. Comments received suggested that it was a welcome break after almost a whole week of been busy with lectures, administrative duties and research and little or no time to think. It provided an opportunity to focus on matters related to learning, teaching and assessment in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. The idea of a 'safe' space suggests that participants could express their thoughts, ideas and challenges without being judged or made to feel uncomfortable. A sense of trust and community developed. For example, Jane a first time lecturer had the following to say.

Jane: Being a first time lecturer I have so much to learn. Induction has helped me discover new possibilities that I never would have known. The other members at induction have shared so many of their experiences that really helped me in the last 5 months. Listening to their experiences has given me a chance to learn different ways of dealing with various situations. It was also very interesting to see that even though we were from different departments we all shared such similar problems. Students are students across the board. Induction was a safe place where we could take about our challenges and difficulties and be not afraid to be judged. The environment that was created was one of comfort and freedom to speak. I do admit that I was initially scared to say much because I am so new but the people at induction helped me overcome this.

D. Adapting to the University and Making Connections

The new environment may prove daunting especially for new academics who have not taught in higher education before. The programme afforded participants the opportunity to network with colleagues they probably would not have met had they not left their faculties and offices. In most instances, solutions to challenges experienced by participants were provided by their peers in their group. A sense of community of practice [29] developed within the group. Linda was excited to meet colleagues on the programme with similar values and goals as her.

Linda: The first semester was a whirlwind and... in all honesty I was not sufficiently prepared to deal with the large numbers of students and felt I was simply lecturing and not actually developing a relationship with my students... I needed to change things but was not sure exactly how to get to where I wanted to be.

And so we began a journey. What a great bunch of people. I enjoyed meeting lecturers from different departments and realizing we had common goals and similar problems. I started to feel like I was becoming part of a DUT family and it gave me a great sense of belonging. Induction for me was becoming a member of the DUT family and adopting the same values and goals. It was about being made aware of my practice and introduced to the tools I need to use to bring about meaningful change. It connected me to the right people that have the skills I need to develop. It is now up to me to make a difference!

E. Integrating New Strategies into Classroom Practice

Like most professional development programmes, the induction programme explores innovative and creative strategies for student centred learning, teaching and assessment that empower students to become active, responsible and critical students and citizens. Given the massification of higher education, especially in the South African context this has resulted in a large number of students that are differently prepared for higher education. This coupled with the integration of digital technologies into education in recent times mean that academics need to be constantly renewing, reviewing and revising their curricular and facilitation strategies. Jane and Linda found induction useful for learning new strategies to implement in their practice.

Jane: My teaching has changed even though it has only been 5 months. Initially I used to stand in the front and just lecture. Now I incorporate activities, games and group discussions in my classroom. I believe that students learn a lot from each other. Case scenarios are another technique that I use a lot. I feel this helps with integration and provides meaning to my classroom. Students get a chance to engage with each other and me on a one on one basis. This makes asking and answering questions much easier. I have realized that students are visual learners, so I used pictures and videos where possible.

Linda: To highlight what has been most beneficial to me from this course is only sharing a little of what I actually gained. Already having realized that to impart my knowledge through chalk and talk was ineffectual I was excited by the introduction to online facilities the Blackboard Learning Management System...So excited was I that I pulled our whole department on board. I will still be doing the graveyard shift (afternoon lecture from 1 – 5pm) but in the computer lab and not in the lecture room. It will be dynamic! There will be no time for them to sleep. I will be there to guide, encourage and motivate.

My revised study guide which took me a fair amount of time to change is there too. I can't believe what I have managed to achieve in a short time with the introduction to what is out there.

No induction = same study guide = same lecturing style and little improvement.

F. Developing Reflective Practice

Rather than providing just tips for teachers, a very technicist approach, the programme foregrounds critical reflection on practice. For new academics reflection may appear foreign and they require guidance and support to develop this capacity. Kolb's reflective cycle [23] and the action research cycle [24] were useful tools to facilitate this process. It is interesting to note how John an engineer, used his engineering knowledge to make sense of the process of reflection. This is illustrated in his extract and in Figs. 1 and 2.

John: When I first attended the induction program, I did not fully understand the process of been reflective in one's practice. As the Induction Program progressed I started to understand the process of been reflective. I started been reflective of my practices in the classroom and found this process very interesting. I then decided to implement new ideas, and engage in class discussions with my students. I noticed that the students responded positively to these discussions and it provided me with vital feedback on student understanding of work. I have realised as a facilitator I need to constantly be reflective of my practices and be willing to adapt for closed loop learning to be effective.

A typical control system

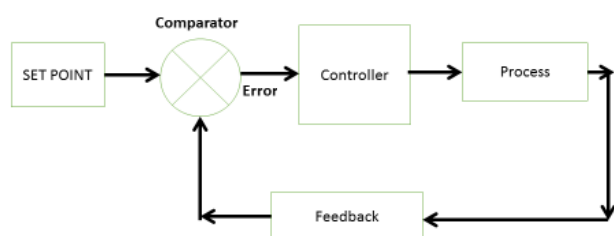


Fig. 1 A typical control system in engineering

Closed Loop Learning

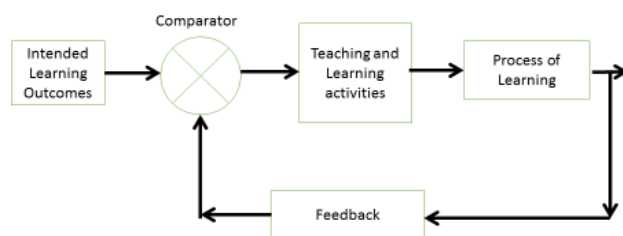


Fig. 2 Closed loop learning – relating reflection to an engineering system

G. Contributing to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

As alluded to elsewhere in this paper reflective practice was foregrounded in the programme. The intention was to develop scholarly teaching and contribute to the scholarship of teaching and learning. According to [30] we “develop a scholarship of teaching when our work as teachers becomes public, peer reviewed and critiqued, and exchanged with other members of our professional communities, so they, in turn, can build on our work”. As part of the programme, participants engage in a mini action research project which focuses on improvements to their practice and these were presented at a Sharing day at the end of the programme. This was one way of contributing to the scholarship of teaching and learning by fostering reflection on practice and making them public through sharing with their peers on the programme.

Five participants also participated in the Learning and Teaching Symposium of the university and presented their research that emanated from the Induction mini projects. One participant Brij, in addition to presenting his research at the Induction Sharing Day and Symposium has also submitted his paper for publication in a journal, further contributing to scholarship in the area of his discipline.

When Brij joined the university he already had a number of years of prior experience as an academic in other higher education institutions. He had also engaged extensively in research initiatives, both individually and collaboratively. During the induction workshops a number of strategies for student centred learning were explored. One of these was a collaborative learning strategy called the Knowledge Café. In addition to discussing this strategy, participants got to learn first-hand how it works through participating in activities that used the strategy. It worked quite effectively to foster collaboration and encourage creativity among participants during an induction workshop. Brij subsequently utilised this teaching and learning strategy in his classroom to teach mathematics and engaged in researching this strategy. Brij had the following to say.

Brij: In keeping with the institution's vision to become a student-centred university, the academic induction programme explores student-centred learning, teaching and assessment strategies. As part of this programme the newly appointed staff member is required to demonstrate how he/she has engaged in practice that has led to a degree of transformation in his/her classroom practice. With this in mind I, as a newly appointed staff member at this institution, decided to incorporate one of the didactical approaches discussed in one of the induction sessions to encourage collaborative learning in one of my Mathematics classes. This was done in order to determine the outcomes of such an intervention. With this in mind, I framed the following research question:

How may a modified version of the Gurteen Knowledge Café approach benefit first-year Engineering students' learning of hyperbolic functions in preparation for Calculus?[31]

Also, emanating from the data, though not a common theme was the suggestion that similar professional development programmes be extended to other faculty staff, not necessarily those new to the university.

The induction programme has a very important function, not just only for newly appointed lecturers but also for those who have been around the block. A refresher course should be conducted on existing academic staff every four to five years to ensure that lecturers keep abreast with new ideas and use it as forum to evolve their teaching and assessment methods.

V. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has revealed that in the main the academic induction programme has served as an enabler for enhancing learning, teaching and assessment practices. The analysis of the data in this small scale research has highlighted that participants have benefited from the programme in various ways and this seemed to have depended to some extent on participants' prior experiences or what they valued. For example those new to higher education found induction useful and a safe space to network with colleagues and learn new strategies, whereas more experienced participants engaged in more scholarly inquiries into the educational practices.

The participant who derived little benefit from the programme is also useful data and suggests that we need to rethink the induction programme in terms of offering different streams for more experienced staff joining the institution. It may also be useful to offer professional development programmes of a similar nature to the general academic community at the university.

As the author reflects on the initial aims and intentions of the programme, creating safe critical spaces, developing reflective practice and engaging participants in transformative learning, it is clear from the data and analysis that there is no evidence of transformative learning taking place in this process for this cohort of participants. Participants did reflect on their practices and adopted alternative strategies to improve learning and teaching. However, transformation is a long and drawn out process and requires deeper engagement with practice and one's own assumptions, values and beliefs. This study questions whether this aim for a six month induction programme is too ambitious. This will require further exploration by the designers and developers of the programme. This point to further research that is needed to evaluate the programme itself in terms of alignment of its aims and intentions to the opportunities provided in terms of programme content and processes to facilitate achievement of the aims. It may be concluded that the induction programme in this study serves to sow the seeds for transformative educational practice [32] through fostering critically reflective practice.

It is recommended that to foster more critical reflection leading to transformed practices there need to be sustained processes in place, for example follow up mentoring programmes. Studies of induction programmes conducted in other South African higher education institutions [9], [10]

have also revealed the need for mentoring programmes to supplement an academic induction programme.

Reference [8] argues that induction should go "beyond transmission of information through centralised generic programmes, to take seriously the role of academics in constructing their understanding of themselves in their new environments". A similar view is shared by [33] who suggests that "rather than being the training of academics to perform their roles better, staff development should primarily be about providing a theorised space for interrogating what it means to be an academic". References [8] and [33] offer further opportunities for researching induction programmes and academic staff development in general.

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