An ethics of care and Ubuntu reimagination in academic development

A. H. M. Jacobs
University of the Western Cape
Bellville, South Africa
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5792-6347

ABSTRACT

Academic induction programmes are often designed to professionalise new academics within the normative expectations of the university. Yet, in many Global South contexts, these programmes remain tethered to Eurocentric frameworks that privilege compliance, productivity, and individual achievement over relational and ethical forms of becoming. This article explores how an Ethics of Care and Ubuntu reimagination can offer decolonial alternatives for academic development praxis, re-centring human connection, reciprocity, and collective flourishing as foundational to professional learning.

Decolonisation, understood as more than a metaphor, is a political, ethical, and epistemic project aimed at dismantling the colonial matrix of power that continues to define whose knowledge counts and whose humanity is recognised (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Coloniality persists as a system of domination that positions the Global North as the arbiter of knowledge and truth, while rendering African epistemologies peripheral. Within higher education, these hierarchies manifest in institutional cultures, pedagogical practices, and induction programmes that implicitly reproduce colonial logics of being and knowing. A decolonial turn in academic development therefore demands a shift from technocratic notions of induction to relational, dialogical, and care-centred engagement where professional learning becomes a shared, humanising process rather than an administrative requirement.

This article draws on my reflective praxis as a facilitator on an academic induction course at a South African university. A critical incident forms the anchor: a participant's remark, "Noooo… I don't want to see you. Every time I see you, my stress levels go up because I know I owe you something!", expressed in reference to the e-portfolio submission required for course completion. Using Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper's (2001) reflective framework – "What?" "So what?" "Now what?" – this moment becomes a lens through which to interrogate how institutionalised expectations of compliance can erode trust, induce emotional fatigue, and reproduce hierarchical power relations within academic induction.

The article's theoretical framing draws on Ethics of Care (Tronto 1993; Noddings 2012) and Ubuntu philosophy (Waghid and Smeyers 2012; Hlatshwayo, Shawa and Nxumalo 2020) to propose an alternative approach to academic development: one that recognises interdependence, compassion, and mutual accountability as essential dimensions of scholarly growth. Ethics of Care foregrounds attentiveness and responsiveness to others' needs, while Ubuntu articulates a relational ontology encapsulated in the phrase "I am because we are." When interwoven, these frameworks invite a re-humanisation of academic induction, transforming it into a praxis of care, humility, and shared responsibility.

By positioning this reflection within the broader decolonial discourse, the article argues that Ethics of Care and Ubuntu provide generative pathways to disrupt deficit narratives of 'development' and to re-imagine induction as a collaborative and affirming process. The study offers a situated, practice-based contribution to ongoing conversations about decolonising higher education in the Global South. It envisions academic induction as a site of ethical relation and collective becoming where care is not peripheral, but central to the pursuit of decolonial futures.
Keywords: Decoloniality; academic development; ethics of care; Ubuntu; reflective praxis; academic induction

INTRODUCTION

Academic induction programmes play a significant role in shaping how newly appointed academics come to understand learning and teaching, and their place within the university. These programmes often function as key sites of professional socialisation, introducing academics to institutional contexts and expectations, pedagogical norms, and accountability mechanisms. In many Global South contexts, however, academic induction remains closely aligned with Eurocentric and technocratic frameworks that emphasise compliance, productivity, and individual performance, frequently at the expense of relational, ethical, and humanising dimensions of professional learning.

Against this backdrop, this article explores how academic induction might be reimagined as a decolonial praxis within academic development. Drawing on an Ethics of Care and Ubuntu philosophy, the article foregrounds relationality, interdependence, and shared responsibility as central to professional becoming in higher education. Through a reflective analysis of a critical incident arising from an academic induction course at a South African university, the article examines how moments of disruption can surface the affective and ethical tensions embedded in induction practices, and how these moments may open possibilities for more caring, dialogical, and humane approaches to academic development in the Global South.

The article starts by situating the study within debates on decolonisation in higher education, followed by a discussion of academic development as a key site of professional socialisation. The institutional context and reflective methodology are then outlined before presenting the critical incident that anchors the inquiry. The incident is subsequently analysed through the complementary lenses of Ethics of Care and Ubuntu to explore possibilities for reimagining academic induction as a relational, humanising, and decolonial praxis. The article concludes by reflecting on the implications of this reimagining for academic development in Global South higher education contexts.

DECOLONISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Contemporary calls to reimagine academic induction praxis in the Global South are linked to broader debates about decolonisation and decoloniality in higher education. Decolonisation, in this context, cannot be reduced to curricular reform or symbolic inclusion. Rather, it is a political, ethical, and epistemic project that seeks to confront the enduring legacies of colonialism that continue to shape universities long after the formal end of colonial rule. These legacies persist through what decolonial scholars describe as coloniality, which refers to a system of power relations that survives colonialism and continues to organise knowledge, subjectivity, and institutional life along Eurocentric lines (Martinez-Vargas 2022).

Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of domination that privilege Western epistemologies, values, and ways of being as universal and superior, while rendering other knowledge systems marginal, inferior, or invisible (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Maldonado-Torres 2007). As Maldonado-Torres argues, coloniality "survives colonialism" and is reproduced in academic criteria, institutional cultures, and everyday practices within universities, shaping how knowledge is produced, validated, and transmitted (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243). In South African higher education, coloniality continues to manifest through epistemic hierarchies that position the Global North as the primary source of legitimate knowledge, while African epistemologies remain peripheral or selectively incorporated (Maldonado-Torres 2016). Decolonisation, therefore, demands more than institutional "transformation" understood as gradual reform or inclusion within existing structures. While transformation has been central to post-apartheid higher education discourse, it has been criticised for its tendency to remain cosmetic, slow, and assimilative, absorbing marginalised subjects into Eurocentric academic cultures on Western terms. In contrast, decolonial scholars argue that decoloniality requires a more radical rupture: a re-centering of knowledge, power, and being from the perspective of those historically subjected to colonial domination (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016). From this vantage point, Western knowledge systems are not necessarily discarded, but are re-positioned and engaged on terms defined by those previously excluded.

Importantly, rather than constituting a single, unified theoretical framework, decoloniality comprises multiple perspectives that converge around a common understanding of coloniality as the foundational condition of the modern world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). This plurality suggests that decolonisation cannot be imposed through technocratic or top-down processes. Attempts by universities to define or implement decolonisation unilaterally risk reproducing epistemic violence by appropriating decolonial discourse while leaving underlying power relations intact. As scholars such as Maldonado-Torres (2016) caution, institutional responses

to decolonial demands often amount to symbolic gestures that mute dissent rather than engage it meaningfully.

Central to decolonial thought is the distinction between colonisation as a historical event and coloniality as an ongoing condition (Maldonado-Torres 2007). He further argues that, while political independence marked the end of formal colonial rule in many African contexts, coloniality continues to shape global economic relations, cultural hierarchies, and knowledge production. Fanon's (1963) work remains foundational in illuminating how colonial domination dehumanised colonised subjects and how decolonisation entails a struggle to reclaim humanity itself. Although Fanon (1963) famously framed decolonisation as a violent rupture, subsequent scholars such as Ndayisenga (2022) have extended his insights to contemporary struggles over epistemic justice, dignity, and futurity within institutions such as universities.

Within South African higher education, student movements such as #RhodesMustFall (Chaudhuri 2016) and #FeesMustFall (Mlaba 2021) brought renewed attention to the persistence of coloniality, highlighting not only curricular exclusions but also the symbolic and spatial dimensions of university life. These movements foregrounded the ways in which colonial architecture, iconography, institutional cultures, and pedagogical practices function as a hidden curriculum (Le Grange 2016) that normalises exclusion and re-emphasises racialised hierarchies. Decolonisation, from this perspective, is inseparable from questions of epistemic justice or the recognition of multiple ways of knowing and the dismantling of hierarchies that privilege Eurocentric knowledge as universal.

Decoloniality thus calls for a reimagining of the university itself: not merely as a site of knowledge transmission, but as a relational space where dialogue, mutual recognition, and shared meaning-making are possible. In this sense, academic induction emerges as a particularly significant site of decolonial praxis, as it is often the first institutional space in which new academics are socialised into dominant norms, values, and ways of knowing. This reimagining, challenges neoliberal logics that commodify education, prioritise measurement and compliance, and reduce academic development to technical skill acquisition (Mbembe 2015). Instead, decolonial approaches emphasise relationality, co-learning, and the ethical dimensions of academic practice. As Freire (1970) reminds us, education that denies dialogue and participation ultimately reproduces domination rather than liberation.

Against this backdrop, decolonisation emerges as an ongoing, collective process instead of a finite goal. It requires attentiveness to lived experiences, historical injustices, and the affective dimensions of academic life. It is within this broader decolonial horizon that this

article situates its exploration of academic induction praxis. By foregrounding relational ethics and re-humanising pedagogical encounters, the article seeks to contribute to emerging conversations about how academic development in the Global South might be re-envisioned in ways that resist colonial logics and open up more just and humane futures. Within this broader decolonial framing, attention now turns to academic development as a key institutional mechanism through which academics are inducted, shaped, and socialised into the norms, values, and epistemic cultures of the university. This makes academic development an important site for examining whether colonial logics are reproduced or resisted in practice.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

According to the International Journal for Academic Development (IJAD, n.d.) academic development (also known as educational, faculty, or staff development) aims to enhance the practice, theory, creativity and/or quality of learning and teaching in higher education. Golding (2014) reminds us that professional development lies at the heart of academic development work, while Fraser (2001) emphasises the role of academic developers in enabling academics to enhance their practice and grow as university teachers. Macdonald (2009) adds a critical layer by emphasising the importance of context, noting that the term academic development can carry different meanings across institutional and national settings. Broadly, academic development refers to a range of activities that support the professional learning of academics within higher education.

Importantly for this article, academic development is not only concerned with ongoing professional learning, but also plays a central role in academic induction. Induction programmes are often the first structured spaces through which new academics are introduced to the pedagogical, epistemic, and normative expectations of the university. As such, academic development functions as a key mechanism through which academics are socialised into institutional cultures. This process shapes how they come to understand learning, teaching, assessment, and their own academic identities. From a decolonial perspective, these induction spaces are therefore not neutral, but they are sites where colonial logics may be reproduced, negotiated, or disrupted in practice.

Academic development in South Africa has a distinct trajectory shaped by the country's apartheid history and its ongoing pursuit of equity in higher education, positioning it within broader Global South struggles over access, epistemic justice, and institutional transformation. Leibowitz et al (2017) provide a historical overview showing that academic development initially emerged in the 1980s as a response to the admission of black students into historically

white institutions. These students were often labelled as underprepared, and as a result, universities established specialised Academic Support Programmes to provide additional assistance. Pavlich and Orkin (1993) refer to this phase as the era of academic support, characterised by interventions that were often remedial in nature. However, as access expanded and the student body diversified, attention gradually shifted. Instead of focusing solely on students' perceived deficits, institutions began interrogating their own capacity to provide inclusive and effective learning and teaching. Boughey (2007) highlights this as a key moment in the evolution of academic development: a move toward transforming curricula and pedagogical practices to respond to systemic inequities.

Scott (2015) further notes that, unlike in many Global North contexts where academic development is often narrowly equated with staff development, the South African conception expanded to encompass student development, curriculum development, and institutional transformation, with equity and redress at its core. While this broad framing has at times been criticised as diluting the focus of academic development, it remains significant in a higher education system still shaped by historical exclusion and epistemic injustice. Academic development in South Africa can thus be understood not simply as a set of practices, but as a critical orientation that grapples with enduring tensions between equity, excellence, and institutional accountability (Menon 2024). Boughey (2022) argues that educational development has yet to establish a sufficiently robust and contextually grounded knowledge base to address the complex challenges facing higher education. She contends that much of the field remains characterised by context-specific descriptions of practice rather than theoretically generative scholarship, while continuing to rely heavily on conceptual frameworks developed in the Global North. Boughey therefore calls for the development of indigenous theoretical perspectives, including Ubuntu-informed approaches, that are better able to respond to the historical, social, and epistemic realities of South African higher education. This perspective reinforces the argument advanced in this article that academic development, and, by extension, academic induction, requires a decolonial reimagining grounded in relational, contextually responsive understandings of professional learning.

When viewed through the lens of academic induction, this broader understanding of academic development becomes particularly salient. Induction programmes are often positioned as technical or procedural processes focused on compliance, assessment requirements, and other performance metrics. However, situated within South Africa's decolonial context, induction also functions as a formative pedagogical space where new academics learn what is valued, whose knowledge counts, and how care, authority, and

responsibility are enacted in the university. Recognising academic induction as an extension of academic development foregrounds its potential as a site for relational, dialogical, and humanising praxis.

This understanding of academic development provides the conceptual grounding for the article's subsequent focus on lived practice. By reflecting on how induction is experienced within an academic development programme, the article explores how decolonial commitments may be surfaced, constrained, or reimagined in everyday professional learning spaces.

CONTEXT

In my role as an academic developer, a central responsibility is to support teaching academics in their learning, teaching, and assessment practices across different stages of their academic careers. This support includes working with experienced academics as well as newly appointed lecturers as they navigate the expectations, demands, and cultures of the university. Academic development, in this sense, is not only concerned with enhancing pedagogical competence, but also with accompanying academics as they make sense of their professional identities within the institution.

A significant aspect of my work involves engagement with a formal academic induction course offered within a higher education institution. The course is designed to support newly appointed lecturers in developing their learning, teaching and assessment practice while simultaneously inducting them into the pedagogical, institutional, and regulatory frameworks of the university context. Positioned at the intersection of professional learning and institutional accountability, the course functions as a key space of academic induction, where expectations and responsibilities related to teaching and learning are made visible and assessed.

The induction course is a compulsory component of the probation process for all newly appointed lecturers. Participants are expected to attend the programme and, on completion, compile a professional learning and teaching portfolio that demonstrates their developing pedagogical knowledge and practice. The portfolio is evaluated against certain criteria, and the resulting evaluation report forms part of the documentation required for successful completion of probation. For many participants, this represents their first sustained engagement with higher education pedagogy and reflective academic writing, making the portfolio both a significant learning opportunity and a high-stakes assessment that is frequently experienced as demanding and emotionally challenging.

As a facilitator, my role extends beyond technical guidance or compliance monitoring. I work alongside participants as they reflect on their teaching philosophies, interrogate their learning, teaching, and assessment practices, and document their learning through reflective activities and the development of a reflective e-portfolio. These processes are intended to support academics' growth as reflective practitioners. However, they also reveal the tensions inherent in induction processes, particularly the pressures associated with performativity, evaluation, and institutional monitoring processes. For many participants, the course represents their first engagement with formalised pedagogical discourse in the university, making it a formative and, at times, emotionally charged experience.

Situated within the broader decolonial context outlined earlier, the course can be understood as more than a neutral professional development intervention. It is a space in which dominant pedagogical norms are reinforced, negotiated, or contested, and where newly appointed academics encounter implicit messages about what it means to be a good university teacher, whose knowledge is valued, and how care and responsibility are enacted within academic practice. Supporting academics through this induction process therefore requires attentiveness not only to pedagogical skill development, but also to the relational, affective, and ethical dimensions of professional learning.

It is within this context that I reflect on a critical incident arising from a facilitation session on the course. By examining this moment through a decolonial lens, and later through the frameworks of Ethics of Care and Ubuntu, this article illuminates how academic induction can either reproduce colonial logics of compliance and deficit, or be reimagined as a humanising, relational praxis that supports academics' becoming within the university.

METHODOLOGY

This reflection is informed by a reflective inquiry approach, drawing on Rolfe et al (2001) "What?" "So what?" "Now what?" framework. This model offers a structured yet flexible way of engaging with practice-based experiences, enabling critical reflection on events as they are lived, interpreted, and reimagined. The framework is particularly well suited to academic development contexts, where moments arising from everyday practice often carry deeper ethical, relational, and pedagogical significance.

In this article, the reflective framework is used to examine a critical incident that occurred during the facilitation of an academic induction course. The "What?" phase attends to the incident as it unfolded in practice; the "So what?" phase interrogates why the moment matters, situating it within decolonial debates, institutional expectations, and relational dynamics; and

the "Now what?" phase considers how such moments might inform more caring, dialogical, and humanising approaches to academic induction praxis. This reflective structure enables a systematic engagement with disruption not as an isolated event, but as a catalyst for insight and potential transformation.

A Moment of disruption: A critical incident in academic induction *("*what" and "so what")

Higgitt (2014) describes moments of disruption as instances that unsettle taken-for-granted practices, routines, or assumptions within academic life, creating a temporary rupture in the normal flow of activity. While disruption is often framed negatively as an interruption, or disorder, Higgitt emphasises its productive potential. Disruptive moments are simultaneously destabilising and generative: they can be uncomfortable and disorienting, yet they also open up possibilities for reflection, learning, and renewal.

Rather than locating disruption in large-scale change, Higgitt (2014) draws attention to everyday happenings that arise from lived academic practice. These include encounters that challenge expectations, and experiences that interrupt familiar repertoires of professional identity. Such moments disrupt not only structures and routines, but also the emotional and relational dimensions of academic work. Importantly, Higgitt suggests that it is precisely within this disruption or this sense of discomfort or uncertainty that opportunities for deeper insight and transformation emerge. This insight is confirmed by Hall and Townsend (2017), who refer to such moments as critical incidents.

For the purposes of this article, Higgitt's (2014) conceptualisation of a moment of disruption is particularly useful. The disruptive moment or critical incident that anchors this reflective inquiry emerged during a routine interaction in the induction course in which I support academics. Walking towards the refreshments station, the participant remarked, half-jokingly yet in an emotional tone, "Noooo… I don't want to see you. Every time I see you, my stress levels go up because I know I owe you something!", expressed in reference to the e-portfolio submission required for course completion. At face value, the remark appeared casual and humorous. Yet, as an academic developer facilitating the course, I experienced it as a moment of pause, one that disrupted the assumed narrative of induction as a linear process of professional growth and compliance. The comment surfaced an undercurrent of anxiety, obligation, and emotional labour associated with the induction process, prompting reflection on how institutional expectations are experienced by newly appointed academics.

This moment is treated here as a disruptive moment or critical incident not because it was dramatic or exceptional, but because it revealed something ordinarily hidden: the affective weight of professionalisation and the relational tensions embedded in academic induction spaces, an issue highlighted in the work of Mathieson et al (2024). As Higgitt's (2014) notion of disruption suggests, such moments are simultaneously unsettling and generative. They interrupt routine practice while opening a space for reflection, ethical attentiveness, and reconsideration of how induction is enacted. Situated within the broader decolonial context outlined earlier, this disruption highlights the tensions between institutional imperatives and the lived realities of academics navigating their early professional trajectories. Viewed through a decolonial lens, the disruptive moment signals a call for dialogical engagement and reflexivity. It opens up the possibility of reimagining academic induction praxis in more relational, caring, and humanising ways, particularly within the complex and historically situated context of higher education in the Global South.

In what follows, this disruptive moment is examined through the theoretical lenses of Ethics of Care and Ubuntu. This reflection seeks to illuminate how moments of disruption in academic induction can function as entry points for reimagining professional learning in ways that resist deficit framings and foreground care, relationality, and shared responsibility.

THEORETICAL LENSES

Ethics of care

This article draws on Tronto's (1993) political Ethics of Care as a lens for reimagining academic development and, more specifically, academic induction praxis. An Ethics of Care offers an alternative to technocratic and compliance-driven approaches to professional learning by foregrounding interdependence, relationality, and mutual accountability as central to scholarly growth. Rather than functioning as a prescriptive set of rules, Tronto conceptualises care as both a practice and a disposition. She describes it as a "habit of mind" that is enacted through situated, relational engagements over time (Tronto 1993, 2017).

Central to Tronto's framework are four interrelated phases of care, namely caring about, caring for, caregiving, and care-receiving. Each phase is associated with a corresponding moral element: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. These phases provide a useful analytic framework for examining how care is enacted, constrained, or absent within institutional practices such as academic induction.

The first phase, "caring about", involves recognising that care is needed and is underpinned by attentiveness. Attentiveness requires suspending one's own priorities in order

to notice and take seriously the needs of others (Tronto 1993). In academic induction contexts, this calls for sensitivity to how institutional demands are experienced by newly appointed academics, particularly within environments shaped by performance pressures and unequal power relations.

Applied to the disruptive moment, "caring about" can be understood as a call for attentiveness or an invitation to recognise that care was required in that moment. The participant's remark, although delivered in a half-joking tone, signalled an effective response of anxiety linked to the e-portfolio requirement. Rather than interpreting the comment as resistance or disengagement, attentiveness required suspending institutional priorities related to assessment, progress, and compliance in order to notice how the induction process was being experienced by the participant. In this moment, attentiveness involved listening beyond the surface humour to the emotions embedded in the remark. The participant's words revealed how institutional expectations, intended to support professional development, were being internalised as stress. From an Ethics of Care perspective, recognising this affective dimension is important, particularly within academic induction spaces where power relations are uneven and newly appointed academics may feel vulnerable. Attentiveness thus functions as an ethical stance that resists normalising stress as an inevitable feature of professionalisation and instead foregrounds the lived experience of those being inducted.

"Caring about" required acknowledging that the need for care was not merely technical, but relational and emotional. It pointed to a misalignment between the intended purpose of the e-portfolio as a reflective learning tool and its experienced function as a source of pressure and surveillance. By attending carefully to this disruption, the moment became analytically significant, opening up space to question how induction practices may unintentionally reproduce performative and colonial logics, even when framed as developmental.

The second phase, "caring for", relates to assuming responsibility for addressing identified needs. Tronto emphasises that responsibility within an ethic of care is not reducible to formal obligation or compliance, but is embedded within social and institutional relationships. This distinction is particularly salient in academic development contexts, where support may be framed as requirement-driven rather than relationally chosen.

Applying Tronto's "caring for" phase shifts the analysis from recognition to response by foregrounding the matter of responsibility. Having recognised, through attentiveness, that the participant's remark signalled distress linked to the induction process, the ethical demand became one of deciding how to respond. Importantly, Tronto conceptualises responsibility not as obligation imposed by formal role or institutional mandate, but as a relational commitment

embedded within social and professional contexts (Tronto 1993). In this sense, responsibility in academic induction extends beyond ensuring procedural compliance to considering what kind of response would meaningfully address the expressed need. In the context of the disruptive moment, assuming responsibility required resisting the temptation to default to institutional scripts such as reiterating deadlines or expectations of accountability. Instead, responsibility entailed engaging with the participant's experience on their terms, acknowledging the emotional weight of the e-portfolio requirement. As a facilitator positioned within the institutional structure, my responsibility was shaped both by my role and by the vulnerability of the newly appointed academic navigating professional expectations.

This phase highlights the tension between institutional responsibility and ethical responsibility. While the institution frames responsibility in terms of progress, assessment, and quality assurance, Tronto's ethic of care calls for a more flexible and situated understanding that allows responsibility to be negotiated rather than imposed. In this moment, *caring for* involved making a deliberate choice to respond relationally rather than procedurally, and to consider how support might be enacted in ways that reduced anxiety rather than intensifying it.

Viewed through a decolonial lens, this articulation of responsibility challenges colonial and neoliberal logics that individualise accountability and normalise stress as a marker of professional legitimacy. Instead, "caring for" repositions responsibility as a shared ethical practice that acknowledges structural pressures while remaining attentive to individual experience. This reframing opens up possibilities for academic induction to function as a space of accompaniment and support, rather than surveillance and performance.

The third phase, "caregiving", concerns the actual work of care and is linked to competence. Tronto cautions that care cannot be assumed simply because responsibility has been acknowledged. Care has to be enacted effectively and supported by adequate resources, time, and institutional conditions. In bureaucratic settings such as universities, there is a risk of taking care of processes in ways that prioritise procedural completion over meaningful outcomes (Tronto 1993).

The "caregiving" phase shifts attention to the actual enactment of care and the moral element of competence. While attentiveness and responsibility signal ethical intent, Tronto cautions that care is only realised when it is enacted in ways that address the identified need (Tronto 1993). In the context of academic induction, this phase foregrounds the practical question of whether institutional care practices such as induction courses and assessment requirements are capable of meeting academics' developmental and relational needs. Applied

to the disruptive moment, "caregiving" raises questions about how the e-portfolio requirement functions in practice. Although designed as a reflective tool to support professional learning, the participant's response suggests that the requirement was experienced as a source of pressure rather than care. From a competence perspective, this signals a potential misalignment between the intended purpose of the induction activity and its experienced effect. Care, in this instance, was not failing due to a lack of goodwill, but because the conditions under which care was enacted may not have been adequate to support its ethical aims. Tronto emphasises that *caregiving* depends on sufficient resources, including time, skills, and institutional support. In academic induction contexts shaped by neoliberal performance regimes, these resources are often constrained. As a result, academic developers may find themselves enacting care within tightly regulated structures that prioritise efficiency, documentation, and compliance. The risk, as Tronto warns, is that institutions may claim to have taken care of professional development through the provision of formal programmes, while overlooking whether such interventions genuinely meet the needs of those involved.

Here, "caregiving" required more than empathetic listening or relational intention. It demanded critical reflection on the design and enactment of the induction process itself. Competence, therefore, involved questioning whether existing practices adequately supported reflective learning, or whether they inadvertently reproduced stress and emotional labour for newly appointed academics. Viewed through a decolonial lens, this phase exposes how ostensibly supportive institutional practices may continue to reproduce colonial and neoliberal logics of performativity, even when framed as developmental. Engaging Tronto's third phase thus shifts the analysis from individual interaction to systemic practice. It highlights the ethical responsibility of academic development to continually evaluate whether its interventions are not only well-intentioned, but also capable of delivering care in ways that are humane, responsive, and contextually grounded. This insight sets the stage for considering how care is ultimately received and responded to, which is the focus of Tronto's fourth phase.

Care-receiving

The final phase, care-receiving, foregrounds responsiveness to how care is experienced by those receiving it. Responsiveness draws attention to conditions of vulnerability and inequality, challenging assumptions of autonomy and sameness within institutional spaces. This phase emphasises the importance of listening to participants' responses to care practices and recognising asymmetrical relations shaped by history, positionality, and power.

The phase of "care-receiving" shifts the ethical focus to how care is received and responded to by those for whom it is intended. The associated moral element, "responsiveness", foregrounds the inherently asymmetrical nature of care relations and challenges assumptions of autonomy, equality, and neutrality within institutional contexts (Tronto 1993). In academic induction spaces, this phase is particularly significant, as newly appointed academics often occupy positions of vulnerability shaped by performance expectations and unequal power relations.

Applied to the disruptive moment, responsiveness requires taking seriously the participant's affective response to the induction process as a form of feedback on how care was being experienced. The participant's remark did not merely express individual anxiety. It revealed how an ostensibly supportive academic development practice was received as stressful and burdensome. From an Ethics of Care perspective, such responses are central to evaluating the adequacy of care. Responsiveness thus demands that care practices be open to revision in light of how they are experienced, rather than assuming that care has been successfully delivered once institutional requirements are met. This phase also exposes the moral problem at the heart of academic induction: the tension between institutional claims of support and the lived realities of those being inducted. While the induction programme may formally position the e-portfolio as a developmental tool, the participant's response suggests that it functioned, in practice, as a mechanism of obligation. Responsiveness, therefore, calls for a willingness to listen to discomfort and disruption without defensiveness, recognising these reactions as ethically significant rather than as resistance or non-compliance.

Taken together, Tronto's four phases of care highlight what she terms the "integrity of care": an understanding of care as relational, iterative, and ethically situated rather than linear or complete (Tronto 1993). Applied to academic induction, this framing reveals how attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness must be held together if induction is to function as a genuinely caring and humanising space. Viewed in this way, the disruptive moment does not signal failure, but operates as an indicator that exposes how professionalisation practices may unintentionally reproduce stress, surveillance, and compliance. At the same time, it opens up possibilities for more humane, dialogical, and responsive forms of academic development, aligning closely with the article's decolonial orientation and reimagining induction as a shared, relational praxis rather than an administrative endpoint.

While Tronto's Ethics of Care provides a valuable framework for understanding the moral dimensions of academic induction, it remains largely grounded in Euro-American

philosophical traditions. Within the broader decolonial project, it is therefore important to engage African philosophies that address not only ethics but also the coloniality of being. Ramose (1999) argues that Ubuntu is not merely a moral ideal but the foundation of African philosophy, in which personhood is understood as a continual process of becoming through relationships with others. Similarly, Seroto (2023) argues that Ubuntu offers such a relational ontology by positioning personhood as emerging through relationships with others. In doing so, Ubuntu shifts attention away from autonomous individuals towards communities characterised by solidarity, compassion, dignity, and collective responsibility. Viewed in this way, Ubuntu does more than encourage caring relationships. It challenges the individualistic and hierarchical assumptions embedded within many institutional practices, creating space for the deconstruction of colonial ways of knowing, being, and relating before more humane forms of academic induction can be reconstructed. Read alongside Tronto, Ubuntu extends care beyond ethical practice to an ontological commitment to being-with-others, providing a particularly appropriate lens for reimagining academic induction within Global South contexts.

Ubuntu as a relational ethics of care in academic induction

Ubuntu is an African philosophical framework that articulates a relational Ethics of Care grounded in interdependence, dialogue, and collective responsibility. Importantly, Ubuntu is not essentialist or culturally exclusive. Rather, it is understood as an ethical orientation that anyone can enact through relational practice (Waghid and Smeyers 2012). More than an epistemic concept, Ubuntu offers an ontological framing of care as something lived and experienced by real people in concrete institutional contexts.

Applied to academic development, an Ubuntu Ethics of Care shifts attention away from individualised compliance towards professional learning as a shared, relational process. In the context of academic induction, this involves creating spaces that prioritise dialogue, relational accountability, and collective meaning-making. Academics are engaged not as isolated individuals required to meet institutional benchmarks, but as interdependent participants whose learning, wellbeing, and professional becoming matter. Induction, from this perspective, is repositioned as an ethical practice rather than a procedural checkpoint. It is a practice that attends to how expectations are communicated, how support is enacted, and how care is experienced by those being inducted.

Ubuntu is often captured in the Nguni expression *umntu ngumntu ngabantu*, commonly translated as “a person is a person through other persons.” As Hlatshwayo et al (2020, 123) explain, this formulation affirms humanity through the recognition of others’ humanity and the

establishment of humane relationships. While Ubuntu encompasses a range of cultural and philosophical meanings, this article draws on it specifically as a relational Ethics of Care, one that focuses on togetherness, reciprocity, and shared responsibility within educational practice.

Reading Ubuntu alongside Tronto's (1993) Ethics of Care enables a decolonial reimagining of how care might be institutionalised in higher education. Ubuntu-oriented pedagogists argue that universities should be understood not merely as sites of policy, structure, and performance, but as relational communities shaped by human interdependence (Hlatshwayo et al 2020; Suffla et al 2023). This framing resists forms of care that abstract or decontextualise the "other". Such a tendency has been critiqued in South African higher education for reproducing epistemic insensitivity to local histories, inequalities, and lived realities (Council on Higher Education 2008; Boughey and McKenna 2021).

While Tronto's four phases of care offer a valuable analytic framework, Ubuntu complicates any linear or procedural understanding of care. When care is reduced to a sequence of actions to be efficiently implemented, it risks becoming instrumentalised and aligned with neoliberal logics of performance and hierarchy (Suffla et al 2023). Such practices may appear caring on the surface, yet remain impersonal, impatient, and uncaring. According to Waghid and Smeyers (2012), ubuntu resists this by insisting that care is continuous, iterative, and co-constituted through deliberation with those involved.

Within an Ubuntu Ethics of Care, care practices are not pre-determined or imposed, but are collectively negotiated in response to context, relationships, and lived experience. This deliberative process does not follow a fixed path or predetermined outcome. It is oriented towards social justice and collective flourishing beyond the immediate participants. In academic induction, this means taking seriously how newly appointed academics experience professionalisation, particularly paying attention to moments of discomfort, anxiety, or disruption. These experiences should be engaged with as entry points for dialogue and ethical response.

Ubuntu ethics thus foreground co-belonging and shared humanity, recognising that academic becoming is always relational and historically situated. As Waghid (2020) suggests, Ubuntu deliberation involves both decision-making and intentional engagement with others and otherness. Deciding together requires time, openness, and sustained dialogue, yet it also cultivates a sense of shared interdependence that is essential for transformative practice. Read alongside the critical incident discussed in this article, Ubuntu offers a lens for understanding how moments of disruption in academic induction can be reimagined as opportunities for care, responsiveness, and the co-creation of more humane academic futures.

CONCLUSION ("NOW WHAT") – REIMAGINING ACADEMIC INDUCTION PRAXIS

This article has shown that academic induction cannot be understood as a neutral or purely procedural process, but rather as an ethical and relational praxis shaped by institutional power, affect, and lived experience. The disruptive moment examined here illustrates how induction practices, even when framed as developmental, can unintentionally reproduce stress and compliance-driven logics. These compliance-driven logics are not merely institutional artefacts but are sustained by the ongoing coloniality of higher education, where Eurocentric notions of accountability, performance, and professional legitimacy continue to shape how academics are inducted into the university. The question, therefore, is not how such moments can be avoided, but how they can be engaged as ethically significant entry points for reflection and change.

Drawing on an Ethics of Care, the "now what" lies in holding together attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness as interdependent commitments in academic development practice. For academic developers, this involves sustained attentiveness to how induction is experienced by newly appointed academics, a relational approach to responsibility that goes beyond procedural obligation, and ongoing critical reflection on whether induction practices genuinely support professional learning. Responsiveness further requires openness to revising practices in light of participants' experiences rather than assuming that care has been successfully delivered.

Ubuntu deepens this orientation by framing care as a collective, deliberative practice rooted in co-belonging and shared responsibility. Reimagining academic induction through Ubuntu entails privileging dialogue, mutual recognition, and collective meaning-making over individualised performance and compliance. Within Global South contexts, this reorientation challenges neoliberal assumptions that normalise stress as a marker of academic legitimacy and instead foregrounds care, dignity, and interdependence.

In conclusion, this article argues that Ethics of Care and Ubuntu offer generative, decolonial resources for reimagining academic induction praxis in the Global South. By engaging moments of disruption as sites of ethical insight, academic development can move beyond technocratic induction models towards more humane, relational, and contextually responsive practices that support collective flourishing in higher education. In practice, this requires induction models that position academic developers as companions who journey alongside new academics, create opportunities for authentic dialogue, acknowledge the emotional labour associated with academic work, co-create learning experiences, foster communities of practice, and treat moments of disruption as valuable indicators for continual reflection and redesign. Such a reimagining involves more than adding relational practices to

existing induction models. It requires critically deconstructing the colonial and neoliberal assumptions that underpin academic induction so that more humane, relational, and contextually grounded forms of professional becoming can emerge.

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