



**Keynote:** Making learning, agency and praxis dangerous:  
escaping dualisms to unleash contribution and daring in the  
workplace

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How might we reinvigorate activist approaches to workplace learning research? How can we take a stand with workers and the people they work for, critically questioning the status quo, and committing to taking and making possible actions that move us closer to what ought to be? Stetsenko refers to this as dangerous use of theory: theory put to work in the struggle over the future. This depends on taking up notions of learning, agency and praxis in ways that avoid the stifling entrapments of binary dualisms and reductionist thinking. How might ideas from Western scholarship might be made more dangerous when taken up alongside ideas from the Global South, specifically Latin American and Vedic traditions? In ‘neti-neti’ (neither this nor that) dialectics antagonisms dissipate, inviting transcendent thinking not tied to particular logics or reason(ing). I explore contribution and daring as metaphors for learning, and take up the (unfashionable) concept of agency in regard to actions which have direction and reach towards the viable but as yet unheard of. Praxis can be conceptualised in critical moral (Aristotelian), history-making (Hegelian-Marxist) and other ways. From Latin American critical scholarship and its links with feminist pedagogies, I highlight ideas of conscious, thinking-feeling political action in deciding to join struggle (Freire, Fals Borda). From Vedic traditions, I explore non-opposed notions of One and Many, chaos and struggle, and liberation from conditions. In workplace research, these ideas might be taken up, dangerously, by dialectics, poetics, narratives and metaphor as cultural tools of agency that foster learning, unleash contribution and daring, and enable radical transformations through praxis.

**Biography:**

Nick Hopwood is Professor of Professional Learning at the University of Technology Sydney, School of International Studies and Education. He is also Extraordinary Professor at the University of Stellenbosch, Department of Curriculum Studies. Nick gained his PhD from the University of Oxford, and was later awarded an Honorary Doctor of Medicine from the University of Linköping, reflecting his contribution to work on education and learning in healthcare. Nick’s research encompasses diverse workplaces, including schools, hospitals, community centres, parent education, and universities. Nick’s interest in the relationship between learning and practices (see

Professional Practice and Learning, Springer 2016) has recently been reinvigorated by confronting difficult questions of learning in its connection with radical change (see *Agency and Transformation*, CUP 2023). Developments in Nick's thinking and empirical analyses have been nourished and nurtured by dialogue with many other scholars including Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren, Aydin Bal, Anne Edwards, Stephen Kemmis, Bal Chandra Luitel, Ann Reich, Annalisa Sannino, Anna Stetsenko, and Jane Wilkinson.