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Conceptualising praxis, agency and learning: A postabyssal exploration to strengthen the struggle over alternative futures

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ABSTRACT

Educational researchers are increasingly striving on the edge of possibility to re-imagine and realise the future. Activist scholarship requires appropriate philosophical and theoretical bases, what Stetsenko refers to as 'dangerous' – useful in the struggle for a better world. How might praxis, agency and learning be charged with transgressive spirit? This paper considers the Theory of Practice Architectures and Transformative Activist Stance, established frameworks that dangerously address praxis, agency and learning. Adopting a postabyssal approach, contributions from the Global South and East are drawn on to develop an epistemologically plural basis for thinking differently about praxis, agency and learning. Recent Latin American scholarship reinvigorates Freirean ideas through connections with Fals Borda and contemporary feminist pedagogues, centred on a notion of feeling-thinking. Luitel's interpretations of Vedic philosophy provide radically different ideas of negative dialectics, chaos, responsibility and liberation. An open-minded, open-hearted, open-ended approach is crucial to making these ideas more useful in the struggle over alternative, more equitable and just futures.

Introduction

Stetsenko uses the term *dangerous* to describe theorising that is 'useful in the struggle for a better world' (2020c, p. 7). Praxis, agency and learning urgently require fresh attention to be used more dangerously, buttressing against them banality. Their inter-relations also matter in the work we do as scholars committed to joining others in striving to overturn unjust and inequitable features of the status quo. What follows is an open-ended exploration of how praxis, agency and learning might be conceptualised in ways that strengthen their potential as tools of activism.

In reference to global knowledges, lines can be drawn between North and South, West and East (Connell 2007; Kester, 2022; Luitel, 2022 ['South' and 'East' being terms used by the scholars cited]). Santos (2014, 2020) refers to these as abyssal lines that impoverish new thinking because what is on the other side of the line vanishes. Postabyssal thinking is open to non-Western ideas. It is epistemologically plural, enrolling heterogeneous knowledges without compromising their autonomy, seeking new sets of meanings. This resonates with what Luitel (2013, 2019)

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labels postformal: an approach that rejects exclusionary logics in favour of montage, where seemingly incompatible ideas can be entertained together, opening up the possibility of East-West nexus, (Luitel, 2019, 2022). This is part of a broader project to disrupt epistemic hegemony of knowledge from the Global North (Connell, 2007), and use conversations across North and South to reclaim education and the moral-political thinking that underpins it (Biesta et al., 2022).

In the next section, I outline approaches to research that are politically committed and seek to change what is possible. I then focus on praxis, agency and learning in turn, engaging ideas from both sides of abyssal lines. Postabyssal research involves destabilising ways of understanding so that people learn to act with a special energy that 'swerves' from routine, reproductive action to rebellious, experimental action (Santos, 2014). This requires a 'constellation of emancipatory knowledges' (p. 161). From the North/West, the Theory of Practice Architectures (TPA; Kemmis, 2019; Kemmis & Smith, 2008; Mahon et al., 2017). A strand of cultural-historical theory called the Transformative Activist Stance (TAS; Stetsenko, 2017) might be regarded as Northern, but increasingly demonstrates strong postabyssal features and draws on knowledge from the Global South. Directly from the South, novel scholarship from Colombia bringing Freirean ideas into critical connection with feminist notions around feeling, care and love (Santos & Soler, 2021). And from the East, relevant yet overlooked ideas around negative dialectics, chaos and order, responsibility and liberation put forward by Luitel (2019, 2022), a Nepali scholar. This extends abyssal crossings offered by Ho and Tseng (2022) who bring Chinese philosophical thought into dialogue with Freirean theory, and Kester (2022) who explores new pedagogic imaginaries for global citizenship and peace education that open up when epistemological pluralism is embraced.

Theory for committed research on the edge of possibility

There are widespread views that research can, and must, do more than passively observe and describe the world, it should intervene, not as neutral, but committed.

> As educators, writers and public intellectuals, many of us share a sense of responsibility for reflecting on the worlds in which we live, with a view to transforming them for the common good, toward a world free of inequalities founded on wealth, race/ethnicity, ability, gender or other forms of identity, and a world in ecological balance. (Davidson-Harden, 2020, p. 1311)

This spirit manifests under diverse guises, including (critical) participatory action research (Fals Borda, 1979; Kemmis et al., 2013; Krueger-Henney & Ruglis, 2020), and 'post-normal science', which champions critical resistance, reform and the making of futures (Peters & Besley, 2022). Such a position precariously challenges the 'death of disinterestedness'—one of many ways in which neoliberalism has taken hold of ethical standards in the academy (Macfarlane, 2021), and the erosion of orientation to the common good in favour of individual self-interest (see Biesta et al., 2022). What follows takes up an ethics of engagement, exploring a living philosophy that orients towards intended liberatory consequences of a political, moral and ethical nature (see Tesar et al., 2021). Marx's well-known test of philosophy—not to interpret reality but to transform it—is not obsolete, and there have been calls to steer educational theory and research 'back to praxis', altering the material conditions of life (Tsabar, 2018, p. 1527).

Activist educational scholarship is not simply a matter of changing from one already-possible course to another. It is about undoing the boundary between the real and the possible. In this spirit, Liberali (2019) calls to reinvigorate Freire's (1970/1987, 2000) quest for the viable unheard of (inédito viável): doable (as yet unknown) solutions that transcend the constraints of immediate reality. Similarly, Kress and Lake (2020) find inspiration in Greene's (1995) idea of the

ever-present opportunity to imagine and act towards different, never pre-ordained, futures. Utopia is contested but this does not prevent researchers from seeking to 'piece together and combine social imaginations of worlds not yet actualized, possible, and urgently needed' (Krueger-Henney & Ruglis, 2020, p. 963).

Praxis

Praxis in the Theory of Practice Architectures

The Theory of Practice Architectures (TPA) sits on Northern and Western side of abyssal lines. Kemmis and Smith (2008) conceptualise praxis in an Aristotelian way: doing involving reasoning about what is wise or right. Drawing on Habermas, they add an emancipatory form: collective critical reflection and action to overcome injustice, harm, and suffering. This gestures to a dangerous notion of praxis as it involves political struggle.

Praxis has been interpreted differently by scholars using TPA. Some foreground the neo-Aristotelian view of morally informed and committed action, while others adopt Hegelian-Marxian views of history-making action with moral and political consequences (Kemmis, 2019). Thus in TPA we find Marx's notion that people change the world, but not under circumstances of their own choosing (Kemmis, 2019). Praxis becomes a way of thinking about how we change the circumstances in which we act. In a neoliberal climate that encourages adaptation to the status quo (Chandler & Reid, 2016) and accountability to established ideas (Macfarlane, 2021) this is a dangerous notion. It poses questions about how we might act differently to overturn the very structures that frame what appears as possible.

Praxis in the Transformative Activist Stance

The Transformative Activist Stance (TAS; Stetsenko, 2017) adopts Marxist and Vygotksian projects of world-changing scholarship committed to social goals of emancipation and equality (Stetsenko, 2020b). TAS resists an easy location on any one side of abyssal lines. TAS increasingly draws on diverse anti-hegemonic scholarship from scholars of colour, including Chicana epistemologies and other ideas from the Global South (e.g. Stetsenko, 2024).

TAS reinvigorates a Marxist notion of praxis as world-historical activity, grounded in an ideological vision of a possible better world based on social justice and equity (Stetsenko, 2017). Stetsenko (2017) connects TAS to the Freirean ideas of eternal striving and actions aimed at overcoming situational limits, the direction for which comes from the positing of desirable ends for social struggle. The link between TAS and Freire in thinking dangerously through praxis is significant, and captured in the following passage:

> The transformative ontology of human praxis, just like Freire's pedagogy of hope, builds on the premise that human existence ontologically depends on, and even begins with, the right and ability, as well as the duty and responsibility "to opt, to decide, to struggle, to be political" (Freire, 1998, p. 53).' (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 232)

Thus, TAS elevates praxis to a central condition of existence, a matter of struggling over the future. This swerves against neoliberal regimes of subjectivity and political economy that frame our responsibility as one to adapt, individually, and make good choices as (self-interested) individuals from those the (unjust) world presents us with (Dafermos, 2022; Fieldman, 2011; Macfarlane, 2021; Stetsenko, 2017). Thinking about praxis through TAS frames our responsibility as the opposite: to refuse the givenness of the options in front of us, to reject hyper-individualism, and to rebel against the demand to acquiesce

Praxis across abyssal lines

Crossing abyssal lines more fully now, I explore how Freirean ideas have been reinvigorated through connections with Fals Borda and contemporary feminist thinking, then turning to Eastern philosophy, specifically Vedic traditions.

In Freire's critical pedagogy, praxis involves awareness raising (concientização) transformed into action (Freire, 1970/1987, 2000). Colombian scholars Santos and Soler highlight Fals Borda alongside Freire as a 'beacon for Latin American critical pedagogues' (2021, p. 3). Fals Borda (1979) draws on Hegel and Marx, framing praxis as political action aimed at structurally changing society. Like Freire, Fals Borda (1979) argues that political action involves producing knowledge relevant to social and political practice. In their interpretation, Santos and Soler (2021) focus on Fals Borda's attention to empathy and the importance of human beings becoming feeling-thinkers (*sentipensantes*), but a quality of how we relate to others. They take these ideas up alongside feminist pedagogies that promote a politics of caring, regarded as crucial in 'knowledges about education and pedagogies of inclusion/exclusion, justice/injustice' (Motta & Bennett, 2018, p. 634).

These ideas, speaking from the Global South, present several 'dangerous' features allied with the struggle over alternative futures and which pose a threat to the status quo. Their relational notion undermines the individualist core of neoliberalism, echoing what Biesta et al. (2022) argue about the value of Southern thinking around care, hope and love as a way to challenge individualistic thinking. Praxis as 'thinking-feeling' political action based on radical love goes beyond rational choice and technical competence, countering engrained notions that pit thinking and feeling against each other. Feeling mindfully and thinking from the heart offer opportunities to 'reconnect with hopes and dreams, and to critically interrogate and transform logics that dehumanise societies' (2021, p. 4). The spur to act politically swerves away from the hegemonic demand to comply, made even more dangerous by usurping individualism and rationalism in a single stroke. This approach addresses criticisms of Freirean ideas as overly rational and male-dominated (see Kester, 2022). Motifs of the heart are evident in parallels between Freirean philosophy and Mohism identified by Ho and Tseng (2022), where love is key to the praxis of striving for a less inequitable world and emancipation from oppression. Santos and Soler (2021) scholars make the idea of praxis more dangerous by mobilising concepts of feeling, the heart, and love. This is praxis that is not just open-minded to the viability of transgressing what is possible, but open-hearted in its responsibility toward others.

To further explore how concepts of praxis might be made more useful in the struggle over alternative futures, I now cross the East/West abyssal line and turn to Vedic[1] traditions as interpreted by Luitel. His multi-paradigmatic 'postformal' approach intends to be empowering and create new opportunities (Luitel, 2022). Eastern ideas of negative dialectics, chaos and order, responsibility and liberation are explored as bases to re-imagine praxis in dangerous ways. Vedic ideas have traditionally vanished on the far side of the abyssal line from Western scholarship. Being open to them, enrolling them as part of an epistemologically plural approach, opens new potential ways to swerve, rebel and experiment (Santos, 2014).

Dialectics of co-contingency are prominent in Marxist notions of praxis discussed above. Luitel (2013, 2019) offers an alternative, negative dialectics or neti-neti (नेति नेति in Sanskrit). Neti-neti this refers to neither this nor that, used by Shankara[2] and his followers to generate wisdom about what lies beyond our understanding (Luitel, 2013). This can help to create a hybrid space where antagonisms between seemingly opposed ideas evaporate, at least metaphorically, and where neither is precluded (Luitel, 2013, 2019). Crossing the East/West abyssal line invites us into the empty space of understanding that lies beyond what given labels might capture. This might make praxis more dangerous because it escapes the constraints on our thinking and imagining that come from given, neoliberal choices of either/or, and depart from a mutual notion of both/and. They swerve us into transgressing the edges of current

understanding, edges defined by the descriptors that falsely frame the boundaries of thought as between one thing, another, or a matter of how they inter-relate.

Luitel (2019, 2022) mobilises a second dialectic: lilaa-ritaa[3] (लीला-रीता). Again from Vedic philosophy, these provide overlooked but powerful ways to swerve from more familiar concepts of praxis. Lilaa connotes play, chaos, unpredictability and empowerment. Ritaa represents the order developed out of a series of lilaas (Luitel, 2019). There are postabyssal connections to be explored between these ideas and those of Maxine Greene (1995), who highlights the power of imagination in creating order out of chaos (see Kress & Lake, 2020). Lilaa, etymologically rooted in transience, adhering, clinging, embracing, melting and dissolving, leads him to ask:

> Should mathematics education not be adhering to changing context? Does it not need a new place to cling? Can it not embrace the world? Can it not melt if we put it in the context of worldly problems? Can it not be dissolved into a more appropriate framework or design approach? (Luitel, 2022, p. 5).

Ritaa, etymologically linked to what is permanent, true, auspicious, useful, and beneficial, leads him to ask:

> Taking the notion of Ritaa, the permanent is that which is right, true and beneficial to many. Can we not think of a design system that makes mathematics (and STEAM) beneficial to many? (Luitel, 2022, p. 5)

These are dangerous ways of thinking. Lilaa and ritaa as non-opposed, neti-neti, aspects of praxis, offer new ways of joining the struggle over the future. The orientation to benefit for many dangerously counters the neoliberal erosion of the idea of the common good (Biesta et al., 2022). Embracing chaos as generative opposes an established idea that chaos is something to be eliminated. To cross the abyssal line would entail seeking new meanings and ways of acting based on a view of chaos as productive, in which we would need to be open to what might need to dissolve to further particular communal ends, and seeking stability not as a counter to instability, but with a view to what is beneficial to many.

This leads to another notion from Shankara: One and Many. We can cross the abyssal line again to swerve from routine notions of individual and collective, responsibility and liberation. This rebels against neoliberal views that put common good in tension with the desires of individuals or particular groups (Biesta et al., 2022). One and Many can be used as a metaphor for inclusion, structural dissipation and creative openness, reminding us of our natural state of no-separation (Luitel, 2013). Our purpose becomes to understand ourselves better so we can live and act in more meaningful, justifiable and inclusive ways. This is based on an ethics of responsibility toward others through examining one's own beliefs, actions and conditionings with a view oriented towards one's role in liberating others (Luitel, 2019).

Praxis might be conceived as One and Many action where understanding one's own position(ing) is part of the struggle to emancipate others from that which is harmful, inequitable or unjust. There are clear resonances between Luitel's ideas and those mentioned previously that relate to striving and emancipation from oppression. These ideas are dangerous in their opposition to a hegemonic framing that encourages self-interest, undermines social cohesion and limits the potential of collective action (Fieldman, 2011). Our personal responsibility cannot be dissolved into the social—there can be no reductionism upwards (Stetsenko, 2020b). Neither can we act as if we act alone with consequences only for ourselves. Praxis, as an ethically committed form of action, becomes a responsibility to understand ourselves as contributors to others' emancipation.

These ideas can form part of a constellation of emancipatory knowledges (Santos, 2014). They form a plural and experimental picture that might help us create new sets of meanings that might be put to work in the struggle over alternative futures. These do not relate only to praxis, however. Thus, I now shift my focus to agency, and from there to learning, while maintaining this postabyssal spirit.

Agency

The concept of agency has an important but not yet fully realised contribution to make to scholarship that embraces a sociopolitical ethos and enables transformative action (Engeström et al., 2022; Hopwood, 2022; Sannino, 2020; Stetsenko, 2020c). Making concepts of praxis more dangerous depends on dangerous notions of agency—how people act in ways that matter in their lives and the lives of others. A key challenge is to conceptualise agency without slipping into pitfalls of notions of autonomous, isolated individuals (Stetsenko, 2020a). We can make headway in this regard by seeking new sets of meanings that draw from both sides of abyssal lines.

Just because agency has often been wrapped up with problematic notions of individualism, does not mean it has to be so. Within TPA, agency is not a matter of untrammelled will, but an effect of people's encounters with one another, making choices and acting freely, enabled and constrained by the conditions in which they find themselves (Kemmis, 2019). Consider how often the response to a perceived problem in educational practices is to diagnose a deficit in educators' understanding or skill, fixed through more training. Individualism pervades when the problem is flipped to parents as consumers in a marketized education system, presented with a 'choice' of where to school their children (Lee & Stacey, 2023). Such framings narrow our possible courses of action, failing to upend the logics that focus on individuals and their failings. The TPA helps us think differently about agency because it helps us see that each saying, doing and relating is part of, shaped by, upholds and potentially reshapes a wider cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangement. When educational (or other) practices are found wanting, we look not to deficits in individuals as the cause, but rather to the arrangements that prefigure what people do. The ideas of arrangements multiply our levers for change. Struggles over the future cannot leave current arrangements intact, and thus the TPA offers us a view of agency that is dangerous.

In TAS, traditional notions of individualism are rejected, while seeking…

> To do justice to every person's ability to make one's own decisions and determinations, chart one's own path in life and, generally, make a difference and thus *matter* in the world in one's own unique, inimitable way and from one's unique, irreplaceable position (Stetsenko, 2020a, p. 5)

Agency in TAS is a process in which people co-create their world and themselves, with each individual making a difference and mattering in social practices (Stetsenko, 2020a). These actions are socially contingent (reliant on cultural tools), and socially consequential (they make reality for all of us). We perform individually unique, authentically authorial and answerable deeds that are also profoundly social in their effects (Stetsenko, 2020a). Agency involves what people strive for and a commitment to bringing that future into reality (Stetsenko, 2020a). This brings agency very close to praxis as 'agency is accorded no less than a world-forming and history-making role' (Stetsenko, 2020a, p. 7). The dangerous emphasis is on striving and overcoming circumstances and conditions. This imbues the world with struggle, rupture, disputability, contestation, commitment, and imagination (Stetsenko, 2020a). Stetsenko (2020a) refers to en-*countering* and con-*fronting* the world, splitting these words to highlight the resistance and rebellion involved.

The future is not given. We all have a stake in what becomes of it, and us (Stetsenko, 2017). In a world where we are conditioned to think and act within the bounds of the possible, adapting to what is presented to us as given, this is a dangerous idea. Just as TPA offers us a window onto possibilities for change that go beyond rectifying individual deficits, TAS draws our attention to the cultural tools of agency that people might take up in struggles over the future. There is no reduction upwards (Stetsenko, 2020b) here: individual contributions remain in focus, but the question becomes one of the tools that would be needed in those struggles. Are they available to those who need them? What new tools might be needed?

Agency is not something we have, but rather is accomplished through what we do: a concern with realm of actions not people themselves. Stetsenko (2019) clarifies that agency is not merely a matter of *responding* to problems posed by events or changing situations, *under* prevailing conditions, as Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggest, but a matter of transcending circumstances. This critique might also be extended to TPA, where agency is a matter of addressing life situations that are encountered (Kemmis, 2019). To make concepts of agency more dangerous, we must go beyond agency as response and instead seek to promote agency as a future-oriented process that usurps the status quo and redefines the possible.

We should cross abyssal lines to create new, dangerous, constellations of meanings of agency. Santos and Soler (2021) idea of praxis as radical love would prompt us to find new ways to direct our actions towards others, but still also towards a personally and collectively meaningful endpoint. We might determine actions that have greater mattering in the world by feeling mindfully and thinking heartfully. We might seek those actions that connect with others' hopes and dreams, undermining logics that dehumanise use (Santos & Soler, 2021).

What of crossing the East/West line? While Luitel (2013, 2019, 2022) does not write explicitly about agency, his interpretation of Vedic ideas contributes to a constellation of knowledges that we might use to strengthen agency in contexts of struggle. For example, the ideas of lilaa and ritaa help us go beyond agency as a response to challenges in the world. They leads us to explore how we might produce generative, creative forms of chaos and undo order so that a new dance between the two might be initiated. This would be agentic. It would mean not to be threatened by what is unruly, unplanned, unknowable in its outcome. It would constitute precisely the swerving and special energy that postabyssal thinking is supposed to cultivate (Santos, 2014). The notion of One and Many might give us swerving ways to prompt actions that support the liberation of others by seriously considering our own positioning and responsibilities. There are echoes across abyssal lines here in the way Santos and Soler (2021) suggest we orient to others, and TAS incorporates unique individual positioning in relation to shared endpoints (Stetsenko, 2017).

If we conceive agency as a quality of what we do, then it becomes more amenable to promotion by pedagogical means (Engeström et al., 2022)—something that can be intentionally cultivated. This is significant in creating a basis from which to join and support others in struggles over the future that ought to be. And it brings us to questions of learning.

Learning

The transformative potential of praxis and agency risks being undermined by conservative notions of learning. Neither praxis nor agency invoke doing more of the same. A dangerous notion of learning is essential: adaptive and reproductive notions will not suffice. Hager (2011) distinguishes metaphors of learning as acquisition (transfer of knowledge), participation (situated learning in social practices), and becoming (emergent, unpredictable). This provides a useful reference for exploring how concepts of learning might become more useful in the struggle over the future.

Starting with the TPA, there has been a shift in conceptions of learning within this framework. Earlier notions of being stirred into practices or coming to know how to go on in practices have been revised to learning as 'coming to practise differently' (2021, p. 3). Kemmis' (2021) revision is more dangerous and a better reflection of the emancipatory intent that has been central to TPA since its inception (Hopwood, 2021). Coming to practise differently is not just an individual changing how they do something, but changing how something is done. The TPA promotes not just the *possibility* of practice change, but a *responsibility* to address what produces untoward effects (Kemmis, 2019; Kemmis & Smith, 2008).

Dominant discourses perpetuate a view of learning as adjustment to changes in the environment, infused with a sense of adaptation to inevitable changes (Biesta, 2022b). However, as

Stetsenko (2017, 2020a) argues, there is nothing inevitable about the future. Anaesthetised education that induces a state of slumber might (must!) be countered by emancipation, awakening students for the world and themselves (Biesta, 2022a). Interruption is important—aligned with the swerving, rebellious intent of postabyssal thinking, and is a metaphor that can operate dangerously, i.e. against hegemonic notions of acquiescence, compliance and adaptation:

> Totalitarian educational regimes precisely aim to keep individuals in a state of resonance with regard to particular ideologies, rather than that they encourage them to take a critical stance towards such ideologies. It could be argued, therefore, that interruption rather than resonance should be the crucial educational key-word. (Biesta, 2022c, p. 338)

A metaphor of emergence (Hager, 2011) can help to make learning open-ended and enable learners to address challenges in their everyday lives (Hager & Beckett, 2019; Luitel, 2022). However, this may not be dangerous enough for activist purposes, lacking a bearing on the status quo other than emerging from it. Emergent learning could remain confined to figuring out how to respond to what arises, rather than reclaiming the future what falsely appears as given.

TAS conceptualises learning in a dangerous spirit of refusing quietism and adaptation. Learning as contribution or daring stresses dialectics of continuity and transformation, towards the ideal of co-creation of an equal and just world (Stetsenko, 2017). This overcomes what Stetsenko describes as a relative disregard for agency in participation or situated learning accounts, and the mechanistic trappings of behavioural underpinnings of learning as acquisition (Stetsenko, 2017, 2019, 2020a).

How might crossing abyssal lines advance dangerous thinking about learning? Freire's (2000) ideas are centrally around developing critically conscious learns who can act to liberate themselves and others. He critiqued the banking model of education of dominant education systems in which students are containers into which educators' knowledge is transferred. Santos and Soler (2021) notion of a pedagogy of accompaniment challenges the asymmetrical premises of a banking model, and instead imagines caring intersubjective spaces bursting with mutual listening and learning. This is not just learning about something, or someone, but a collective process of thinking together from hearts and feeling from minds with the intent of acting to transform a given situation. These ideas are full of danger in their transgressions of dominant educational models, of binaries between self and other, thought and emotion. The insertion of caring as a central foundation is dangerous in its disruption to cold notions where learning is implicitly engineered as a competitive process through which individual learners are differentiated from one another in their accomplishments.

Crossing the East/West abyssal line, neti-neti logics tell us that learning defies capture within any label or pair of opposed choices (acquisition, participation, emergence, contribution, daring, accompaniment etc.) (Luitel, 2019). Other Vedic notions might dangerously invert common intentions with learning. Instead of learning to vanquish chaos and replace it with order, we might learn to be chaotic, to embrace the empowerment might come from unpredictable play. We might learn to cling to non-hegemonic notions and values, to melt pedagogies into the context of worldly struggles rather than structures that uphold what already is (Luitel, 2022). It would be dangerous to foster learning under a notion of ritaa—towards what is right, true and beneficial to One and Many at the same time?

Conclusion

I have explored ways in which we might follow Santos (2014) call to develop a special energy, to swerve from what is routine and reproductive, and instead be rebellious and experimental. My focus has been on how we can think about and potentially promote praxis, agency and learning. Productive danger lies in how we conceptualise each of these, and the relationships

between them. Adopting a postabyssal approach that draws on scholarship from the Global North and South, East and West, I have posited praxis as wrong-righting and history-making, feeling-thinking, loving, committed political action that embraces chaos and disorder, One and Many, self-understanding and collectively responsible, transformative action. This view strengthens the idea of praxis as a tool in the struggle for a better world. Agency can be brought dangerously alongside praxis through robust concepts of individual mattering, superseding responsive notions with transgressive ones. Learning can be made more dangerous (a threat to hegemony, to the injustices of the status quo) by recognising it is not exclusively one and simultaneously more than the suite of labels we might apply to it. Metaphors of contribution, daring, interruption, accompaniment, lilaa and ritaa help to theorise and promote learning in ways that enhance its role in striving for what ought to be but does not presently appear possible. The future is not given, and if educational thinking is to be of value in struggles over the future, we must make praxis, agency and learning more dangerous.

Notes

1. Vedic refers to a body of Sanskrit texts (Vedas), the oldest scriptures in Hinduism.
2. Shankara was a Vedic scholar and teacher, often regarded as being alive in the eighth century.
3. In Luitel (2019) this is romanised from Sanskrit as lila-rita. In Luitel (2022) it is lilaa-ritaa. The latter better captures the extended 'a' sound at the end of each word.

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Disclosure statement

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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Nick Hopwood is Professor of Professional Learning at the University of Technology Sydney, School of International Studies and Education. 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: Times, Spaces, Bodies, Things*, Springer 2016) has recently been reinvigorated by confronting difficult questions of learning in its connection with radical change (see *Agency and Transformation: Motives, Mediation and Motion*, Cambridge University Press 2023).

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