

Editorial

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RESEARCH IN WORKPLACES IN AN AGE OF DISRUPTION

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Auroras, specifically the aurora borealis (northern lights) and aurora australis (southern lights), are not only awe-inspiring natural phenomena but also hold cultural, scientific, and historical significance. In Norse mythology, the aurora borealis was believed to be the reflection of the armour of the Valkyries – the female warriors who escorted fallen soldiers, chosen by Odin, to Valhalla.

In the South Pacific, especially Aotearoa, the aurora australis is less commonly seen but holds deep cultural meaning. In southern Te Wai Pounamu (the South Island of New Zealand), the Māori name the phenomenon Tahunui-a-rangi or “burning sky.” This imagery evokes the campfires of ancestors who journeyed south, hinting that they will one day return, creating a bridge between those who have gone before and the living.

The works in this 2024 issue of *Scope (Work-based Learning)* similarly seek to make sense of the shifting patterns of social disruption, technological advancements, and workforce dynamics in the workplace. Authors explore their work journeys, telling stories from their experiences as pracademic researchers, and reflecting on the unfolding dynamics of modern workplaces, now in the eye of the mesmerising storm of the technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence and Robotics, associated with the fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0).

“Packed and ready to venture forth,” writes Leigh Quadling-Miernik in the opening article, capturing the moment of setting out on a research journey. This is the hero’s journey, often chaotic, as information is gathered, patterns emerge, stories are woven, and understanding is forged. Mentors become guiding stars, offering direction and encouragement, especially in the professional practice doctoral space. Martin Andrew, in the following article, delves into the art of mentoring itself, articulating key features that make a difference in work-based doctoral programmes. Through heutagogical methods, Andrew highlights that mentoring success depends on trust, empathy, and critical reflection, shaping candidates into both scholars and professionals. This theme of human-centred learning permeates the issue, underscoring the collaborative nature of work-based learning.

Steve Henry, Nola Tipa, and Peter Apulu, in “Coming Ready or Not: The Potential of Learner-Centricity to Transform the Education System,” argue that modern education must centre around learners, whose evolving needs are reshaping educational frameworks. They advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems, woven into a rich tapestry that informs Education 4.0 (educational approaches required for work in Industry 4.0). They acknowledge the role of AI-powered platforms, which amplify the shift towards self-determined learning, or heutagogy.

Exploring this further, Rachel van Gorp and Glenys Ker examine the impact of AI, especially for neurodiverse learners, in “Artificial Intelligence in Vocational Education: Learning Revolution or Room for Improvement?” While AI promotes autonomy, there is concern about overreliance, which may compromise critical thinking and interpersonal skills. AI, they conclude, has a dual role: offering flexibility for diverse learners but also underscoring the need for human guidance to preserve critical and creative skills.

Successful journeys, like those navigating the night sky, require a map. The first four contributions map the learner's journey, showing how skills develop through mentorship and cultural insight, guided by modern tools. Steve Henry's "A Visual Map of Learner Transformation" presents a transformative tool for adult learners to chart personal and professional growth. This transformation map empowers learners to identify key "aha" moments, lending structure to experiences that are difficult to verbalise, and underscoring learner agency.

Similarly, Rachael Burke's "'I Don't Know if I'm Working Well or Not': How Beginner ECE Teachers from Migrant Backgrounds Negotiate Professional Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand" identifies the unique challenges early childhood educators face, particularly those from migrant backgrounds. Cultural perspectives, autonomy, and professional expectations highlight the need for culturally responsive mentoring, which Burke argues can enrich both educator and learner experiences.

Culture and language, like celestial coordinates, anchor identity. But culture and language are often barriers to expression and understanding. Anthea Fester and Sujani Thrikawala examine these issues for migrant women with small businesses in Aotearoa, especially those with English as an additional language. They discuss barriers, from language comprehension to cultural nuances, that impact business operations. Their findings support policy changes for a more inclusive, supportive environment for migrant entrepreneurs.

These cross-cultural insights find resonance beyond New Zealand. "Adapting to Change: Pedagogical Insights from Chinese Transnational Programmes in Chengdu and Dalian" examines the challenges Chinese Transnational Education programmes face in adapting to online learning. Jeremy Taylor, Martin Andrew, and David Woodward conclude that the use of social media platforms may be leveraged to create collaborative learning environments, especially using the flipped classroom model to engage learners in pre-class preparation. Digital tools and flexible teaching models seem to be the enduring legacy of the pandemic era, necessitating ongoing training for both educators and learners.

Phillip Meek, Woodward, and Taylor bring us back to vocational education's foundational importance in "Assessing the Significance of the Metal Trades Brand as a Viable Career Path for Work-Ready Students." They address an ongoing concern in vocational education: the declining interest among young people in pursuing careers within the metal trades, despite the industry's urgent need for skilled workers. Through surveys and interviews, they reveal a disconnect between students' perceptions of trade careers and the actual opportunities within the field. They argue that contemporary education must not only inform students about vocational pathways but also reshape perceptions to make trade professions appealing and accessible.

In "Transforming Strategic Sustainable Practice on Campus," Marianne Cherrington's work links workplace education with sustainability, advocating for educational institutions to embed these values systematically. Paired with Antonio Seiuli's "E Lutia i Puava ae Mapu i Fagalele," which emphasises cultural and operational cohesion, the two studies demonstrate the resilience inclusive practices can bring to organisations. Seiuli's work, based on Samoan conflict resolution, highlights the role of talanoa (dialogue) and Soālaupule (collective decision-making) in fostering harmony within corporate governance.

In the final contribution, "Riding Waves of Practice," Samuel Mann, Ruth Myers, and Dave Guruge depict practice-based research through eight photographic images within a staged cardboard scene. This visual metaphor explores principles such as reflexivity, transdisciplinarity, and multidimensionality, embodying the research journey's iterative and evolving path of practice based research about wicked social issues. Through the playful visuals, the authors demonstrate how research, learning, and practice become inseparable, showing the adaptability needed to guide researchers through the complexities of real-world professional practice.

Just as aurora patterns illuminate the night sky, the works in this issue offer reflections on the blending of tradition and innovation in professional practice. The cover art, with ancient constellations and auroral swirls alongside satellite trails, symbolises this duality. In glimpsing both past wisdom and future potential, we find ourselves positioned at the nexus of continuity and transformation, primed to adapt within a constantly shifting landscape.

Looking forward to 2025, we invite contributions that capture the ongoing evolution of professional practice identity. We seek research by individuals and teams navigating and evolving their professional selves, seeing these changes as pathways to growth and “becoming.”

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