

Phil Moffitt, the Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, United Kingdom

Email: p.moffitt1@lancaster.ac.uk

Twitter X: [@PhilMoffitt](https://twitter.com/PhilMoffitt)

Bluesky: [philmoftt.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/philmoftt.bsky.social)

LinkedIn: [Phil Moffitt](https://www.linkedin.com/in/PhilMoffitt)

ORCID: [0000-0001-9469-8216](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9469-8216)



A summary of my interests and plans researching with Cultural and Historical Activity Theory

At the time of writing, in early 2024, I'm enjoying a third career, lecturing in the Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, where I specialise in interventionist research of technology enhanced learning. Related to previous careers, I'm also a chartered engineer, facilities manager, and UX ergonomist. My research interests lie at the juncture: in developing technology mediated practice, helping people in work and learning to confront, reject, and change failures in their social circumstances, notably where technologies (digital and analogue) are implicated in modes of failure, recovery, and optimisation of material practice.

My initial experiences of activity theoretical research were facilitated by my PhD supervisor, Brett Bligh, an ardent activity theorist. In 2015 Brett encouraged me to foresee the potential of CHAT in changing sub-optimal workplace learning with military engineers, in their tasks of post-conflict reconstruction and disaster relief, where requirements and opportunities for learning were often only identified at the time and place of need. CHAT and double stimulation helped their discovery and expansive change of less visible, historically embedded, social and cultural mediators of activity (this led to a project described in Moffitt & Bligh, 2021a).

Since then, I've been using activity theoretical research with different groups of people who face significant—yet difficult to determine—challenges in their technology-mediated work and learning, more recently with people in work and learning for sustainable built environments. These projects involve mediation by visual and technological artefacts in engendering and sustaining change, with people for whom workplaces are sites of learning, and sites of learning are workplaces (e.g. Moffitt, 2022). The Change Laboratory methodology has enabled their exposure and aggravation of contradictions, identifying the developmental potential of genuine social engagement with problems, contrasting with their pretence of consensus (Moffitt & Bligh, 2021b).

My future research plans involve exploring—in greater depth—how technologies mediate rapidly changing work and learning for engineers and technicians. I'm currently designing a research intervention with stakeholders in vocational education and training, located in areas of social deprivation, who are faced with tensions between increasing the availability of material resources, in the name digital equity, and decreasing the impact of material resources, in the name of sustainability. Unsurprisingly, this looks to be a long-term and expansive project, and my design for it calls upon CHAT and the Change Laboratory methodology.

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Moffitt, P., & Bligh, B. (2021b). Online tasks and students' transformative agency: double-stimulation as a design principle for synchronous online workshops. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2021.1998792>

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