EDITORIAL

Changing Perceptions of 'Learning for Development' in the New Normal

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In the '*Editorial*' to the first foundation issue of this journal, then Chief Editor Professor Alan Tait had underlined: "While in most cases education is seen as an essential contributor to the human capital that countries need to grow economically and socially, there is a counter view that education, especially at the tertiary level, provides legitimacy for a filter for the labour market and legitimation of elites, and for under and unemployment, as much as it provides real skill and knowledge essential for employment for the majority. Development is in other words a contested concept, and this journal will welcome contributions to the necessary debates about how development is conceived by those who contribute to it through the organisation of learning opportunities in all their range, informal as well as formal".

Further, he had noted "the *Journal* will provide a place where researchers and practitioners provide studies of the impact of innovation in learning on development", and "The journal critically engages with the questions as to what development is and how it should be supported, of relevance also in developed country contexts where development discourse is, regrettably, less familiar" (Tait, 2014). Professor Tait had comprehensively deliberated on the concept and field of 'learning for development', and invited contributions which could engage with this field and also take the field forward.

In the same foundation issue of our journal, Sir John Daniel took the discourse on 'learning for development' forward, and comprehensively articulated the present and future possibilities. While quoting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms", he stated the initial formulation of the World Bank on 'human capital development' and the linkage between learning and economic development, which gradually moved to lay stress on the quality of education rather than the level of schooling provided. It then required development and quality to be addressed through integrated and multifaceted approaches. Sir John emphasised Amartya Sen's concept of 'development as freedom' (Sen, 1999), and that the purposes of development as expansion of freedom are more important than the means through which development is ensured, and that the achievement of development is dependent on the agency of people. He writes: "We conclude that educating people is a vital component of development. It should not be seen primarily as the creation of human capital for the purpose of economic production, but as the nurturing of human capability that gives people the freedoms to lead worthwhile lives. This suggests that education for the 21st century should develop people's capacity to become self-directed learners" (Daniel, 2014).

For the MDGs and SDGs, the role of individuals, communities and institutions (as free agency of people) assumes critical importance. While partnership and collaboration are essential, the development agenda today needs to focus on lifelong learning, and skilling and re-skilling even more than before.

Also, for development agendas to succeed, a bottom-up approach (rather than a top-down approach) is essential. Daniel (2014) underlined the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programmes of the Commonwealth of Learning as an excellent example of a bottom-up approach, which was based on partnership, sustainable learning, capacity building, and use of grass-roots technology applications.

The achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and especially the SDG-4 on quality learning for all (i.e., inclusive and equitable quality education, and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all), requires massive investment in 'learning for sustainable development'.

In a recently published book on digital learning for sustainable development, Sheila Jagannathan (2021) from the World Bank provides a comprehensive work on the contribution of digital learning (i.e., disruptive digital technologies influencing every aspect of human activity and absorption and application of learning) to skilling and employability, and sustainable development.

In the context of adult and lifelong learning, Akkerman and Bakker (2011b) argue that there are boundaries in the communities and learning spaces, and that boundaries, like socio-cultural differences determining action and interaction in the community, can also facilitate adult learning by compelling us to reconsider assumptions and look beyond the boundary familiarity. In the context of learning for development (L4D), boundary crossing by negotiating and selecting the best and the appropriate from other boundaries or contexts should be facilitated by educational provisions and discourses. This has also been reiterated by Wenger (2000), while describing situated learning in the community of practice, that there is a need for cross-boundary encounters to learn the mystery of the otherness and expand one's horizon. Four types of learning were needed to be nourished in this context — identification, coordination, reflection, and transformation (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011a). Today, social technologies and networks in the context of globalisation facilitate this cross-boundary learning much more than before.

From a psychological perspective, and in the context of schooling and early childhood care and education (ECCE), teachers face the dilemma of linking learning to development, especially as the backdrop to the Piagetian theory of development driving learning (i.e., object performance) and the Vygotskian theory of learning driving development (i.e., cultural tools) (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, Fowler (2017) suggests that teachers need to make instructional judgements based on students' emerging capabilities and teacher-adult guidance and support.

One major consideration for the contribution of learning to identity, community, and development is 'learning to learn', and harnessing the skills of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. While these could be considered in school curricula, further brushing up is possible through post-schooling work experience, and also more of student engagement at further and higher education (Cornford, 2002).

An established, but often contested, concern for development relates to 'human resource development', which unfortunately is interpreted as 'objects' of target groups instead of subjects of

development (Rogers, 1990). This strand focuses on enhancing competencies of human resources rather than focusing on 'development', including working with multi-stakeholders, with Indigenous and disadvantaged people. Education is for social justice and one primary concern is redistribution of wealth in favour of the deprived. However, Sen (1999) postulates individual freedom of choice of capabilities of becoming and doing. Further explaining Sen's approach to the pedagogy of capabilities, Panda (2022) writes, "As against human capital approach, the capability approach fosters individual informed and reflective choices in ways of living, and self-determination for ends and values of life, dominated by considerations of justice and equality. The central idea behind 'pedagogy of capabilities' is that education must develop individual capabilities to value freedom and dignity, and ensure rights – right to enhancement of new possibilities, right to inclusion, and right to participation – as also questioning and reflecting on educational development for 'whom' and for 'what'. Capability and freedom to pursue development through capacitation are crucial, and justice is central to teaching-learning and assessment" (p. 48).

In reference to the above discussions, while emphasising 'learning for development', we may have already undermined the role and context of 'education' for development, since education assumes a wider encompassing concept than 'learning'. Whereas, in our case, we construe the broader power of 'education' for individual, community, regional and global development (and 'development', which presupposes also leading to individual freedom and growing competencies to be able to traverse the path toward self-realisation and self-exhilaration), and which subsumes 'learning, within that construction.

Over the past decade since the foundation of *JL4D* (2014-2023), the papers published in the *Journal* have covered the following seven major themes (and also some micro-themes relating to the major focus of the *Journal*):

- Learning for Development – Discourse and Practice.
- Lessons from Diverse Contexts and Perspectives.
- Technology and Pedagogy for Learning and Capacity Building.
- Capacity Building for New Modes of Learning and Teaching.
- Research on Technology-Enabled Learning.
- Researching Technology-Enabled Teaching, Learning and Training.
- Technology-Enabled Learning: OER, MOOCs, and other TEL Designs.

Most of the papers published in the *Journal* more recently have focused on Covid-19 and 'learning for development' during the pandemic. We also devoted a special issue to this theme. While the trend continues in the contemporary issues, most papers and researchers have gone beyond the pandemic to refocus on the seven and related themes as noted above.

The revised journal focus statement for *JL4D*, as agreed upon, includes the following:

> The *Journal of Learning for Development,* a Scopus-indexed journal, provides a forum for the publication of research with a focus on innovation in learning, in particular but not exclusively, open and distance learning (ODL), and its contribution to development. If the research is not directly about ODL, then we encourage authors to consider submitting research on equity, access

and success using technology-enabled learning. Content includes interventions that change social and/or economic relations, especially in terms of improving equity.

The focus of the *Journal* and its papers shall continue to be within the conceptual and thematic boundaries set as above.

The first peer-reviewed *invited paper* by Mark Nichols underlines relooking at what is meant by and included in 'online education', especially in the context of Covid-19 and the emergency remote teaching-learning, which sustained teaching-learning during the pandemic, but has undermined what is meant by online education. Unfortunately, uses of online search of literature, emailing, online networking, networked computer transfer of data, and simple use of online support to students in ODFL programmes and courses have been construed as online education. The author argues that merely using educational technology as a vehicle to distribute courses and data may not be online education; it must involve educational pedagogies and educational processes of teaching-learning. To consider this further as legitimate, we need to reflect upon: i) How is online education different from other forms of education? ii) What are its strategies and operations? iii) What is the common understanding about online education across the board, and iv) What teaching-learning strategies and learning experiences does it involve? The author provokes the ODFL practitioners further to consider the multiplicity of terms like 'hybrid', 'blended', and 'hyflex', and also the processes involved while loosely describing what is online education. The distinctiveness of open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) needs to be maintained and reflected upon especially at the onslaught of "online" education. We need to seriously consider teacher involvement and voice, instructional location, learner engagement and conversation, besides other pedagogic factors. [We invite our readers to engage with this paper and also with the author to take the commentary and the debate further vis-a-vis ODFL and online education.]

We have included eight *research papers* in this issue of the *Journal*. In the first research paper, Rabajalee, Jugurnath and Santally report the findings of a research study, at the back of the Mauritius National Policy on OER, on the factors influencing teacher adoption of OER in Mauritian secondary schools. While half of the sampled teachers wanted to use OER, factors like productivity, interactivity, infrastructure, and some constraining factors were associated with teacher attitude and adoption of OER in the curriculum design and teaching-learning. In the second research paper, Drushlyak, Semenikhina and Kharchenko present the effectiveness of digital technologies for inclusive teacher training through a specially-designed model in two universities in Ukraine, and suggest that their pedagogic experiment and analysis by using the sign test was found effective. The authors suggest that for using the pedagogic model for inclusive teacher preparation, specialised subject domain-specific software for use of digital technologies needs to be created and used by both the teachers and the students.

A similar but interesting work on digital pedagogy by using university students' construction/creation of digital visual arts in the Philippines during the pandemic is reported on by Richard Bañez. The author suggests that while the students' experience, family, and choice of artists influenced their construction, the choice of artists influenced their expression, representation, impression, and abstraction. The author underlines that digital pedagogy (by integrating digital artmaking tools in teaching-learning) should be considered by educators and teachers, and further research studies are

needed on its application in-context across domains/disciplines for learning activities, assignments, and creative experimentation of ideas, and across-cultural and socio-economic factors.

A new area of work under 'learning for development' has been reported by Gulden Akin who investigated the impact of adult literacy and vocational education for prison inmates on their post-prison life and livelihood in Turkey. Through interviews and thematic analysis, the author found that an increase in the level of education significantly contributed to the group dynamics and transformation in their lives, including developing the competency of self-directed learning. Those with open schooling or distance higher education experienced more confidence in becoming active and productive citizens, and those with vocational education could locate better jobs. However, religious education imparted in the correctional settings did not have much effect on the prisoners in their post-prison life. The author suggests considering more digital and technology-enhanced learning in correctional settings to educate and empower those who are behind the bars and who learn behind the bars.

The next research paper deals with student perception of online examination during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. Like elsewhere in the globe, venue-based examinations moved online during the pandemic. Though an open-ended survey, Biccard, Mudau, and van den Berg found that system interface, digital access, and the duration of examination significantly affected student success in online examinations. There were also issues relating to student anxiety, devices and connectivity, digital skills, and student acquaintance with the novel form of online examinations; and, therefore, continuous learner support and learner empowerment is needed for online examinations to be sustained in the future.

Work-based learning for undergraduate engineering and technology programmes in Tanzania is the theme of the next research paper. Mwajuma Lingwanda reports on a flexible work-based learning model for engineering diploma holders intending to upgrade to a bachelor's degree. The sampled final year diploma students significantly favoured the flexible work-based learning model, as against the inflexible campus-based learning. The author suggests, however, piloting of the model with more research evidence before mainstreaming it for undergraduate engineering and technology programmes.

The research paper by Joseph Lobo deals with factors affecting student resilience and engagement in higher education during the pandemic. The author found that academic resilience was positively related to student engagement and teacher emotional support; and, therefore, there is a need to provide for more personal and contextual resources to support online students. In the last research paper, Yanti Sulistyana reports the effectiveness of a guided inquiry-based e-module in learning integrated science process skills among senior secondary school students.

We present two *case studies* in the next two papers — one on an offline LMS, and the other on collaborative research writing during the pandemic. Maro and colleagues report findings of practical experiments on low-cost digital devices to implement an offline LMS. Further, factors like hardware capability, software stacks, and platform optimisation need to be considered for the selection of a micro-server for an offline LMS. In the next case study, Mark Roxas reports on online collaborative research writing during the pandemic through analysis of reflective essays written by senior high school students. While students faced problems in research technicalities and collaboration strategies,

there is a need to consider various identified coping strategies like self-determination, positive attitude, peer-help, and spiritual guidance.

The book review on 'becoming an effective teacher' included in the *book review* section should interest our readers and be useful, too.

This issue of the *Journal* has added further to the expanding and diversified field of 'learning for development'; and includes major themes of: online learning, digital technologies and pedagogies, online examinations, inquiry-based e-modules, learning behind bars, work-based learning, and collaborative research writing.

I take this opportunity to thank Associate Editors Dr Tony Mays and Dr Jako Olivier, Book Review Editor Dr Mairette Newman, Technical Editor Alan Doree, and editorial assistant Carol Walker for facilitating this issue being published on time. We hope our readers enjoy reading and benefitting from the papers and book reviews of this issue. We will invite reader reflections and commentaries, especially on the first article by Mark Nichols, and readers may like to engage further with Mark on his views and commentaries (nichthus@outlook.com).

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