

EDITORIAL

Meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4: Some Key Contributions

Anne Gaskell

The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (SDG4ⁱ) sets an ambitious agenda that requires considerable efforts in all sectors and forms of education, and much remains to be done. For example, in 2017, although more children than ever were enrolled in school:

... many do not acquire basic skills in reading and mathematics. Recent learning assessment studies show that in 9 of 24 sub-Saharan African countries and 6 of 15 Latin American countries with data, fewer than half of the students at the end of primary education had attained minimum proficiency levels in mathematics. In 6 of 24 sub-Saharan African countries with data, fewer than half of the students who finished their primary schooling had attained minimum proficiency levels in reading. (United Nations, n.d.)

The lack of trained teachers in some areas is also an issue.

However, it is clear that enrolment in schools, or even some attendance, is not going to provide the only, or sometimes the best route to meeting SDG4. The challenges of travel, family requirements, assisting with domestic or other work, and infrastructure as well as cultural expectations, can often interrupt formal schooling. To achieve the SDGs, wider provision is required, which may include the use of Open Educational Resources (OER).

The articles in this issue all provide important contributions towards meeting SDG4. They highlight the role of informal learning (Kidu), community development (Pascevicus & Hodgkins-Williams), Open Educational Resources (OER) and teacher professional development (Haßler, Hennessy & Hofmann). The importance of appropriate policies and governance are highlighted (Mukama); and, as always, all efforts will need strong leadership to guide developments (Torres & Rama).

In this context, we are very pleased to include the final article in our current series of "World Leaders in Distance Education", which covers Latin America. The series so far has included Europe, The Pacific, Africa, Asia, North America and the Commonwealth Caribbean and can be found in the three previous issues of JL4D published in 2017. Our current authors are themselves distinguished distance educators, as were previous contributors.

Professor Patricia Lupion Torres is currently Coordinator of the Postgraduate Programme of Education at the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná (PUCPR), where she studied for her



first Masters Degree, and where she is also Professor of the Masters' and PhD programmes. She has authored and edited a large number of books relevant to her discussion in this article, for example, *The handbook of research on collaborative learning using concept mapping* (Torres & Marriott, 2009); and *The handbook of research on e-learning methodologies for language acquisition* (Marriott & Torres, 2011) which aims to promote students' communication and language learning skills. Patricia's experience in the field and her background in educational technologies, distance and higher education, professional and teacher training, make her an ideal person to introduce us to the leaders in distance education in Latin America.

Her co-author, Professor Claudio Rama is also an ideal contributor to the series. He has very wide experience of higher and distance education across the whole of Latin America: for example, from 2001-6 he was UNESCO's Director of the Digital Observatory of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC). He has worked extensively in Uruguay where he has been at various times Director of the Faculty of Business Studies at the Universidad de la Empresa (UDE), and Director of the Official Transmission, Radio and Television and Entertainment System (SODRE). His many publications include recent articles and chapters on "University Virtualisation in Latin America" (Rama, 2014) and "Research as a New Challenge for the Latin American Private University" (Rama & Gregorutti, 2015).

We are also delighted to continue our occasional series on "Learning for Development in Context" with an article by Dame Carol Kidu, formerly representative for the Pacific on The Commonwealth of Learning's Board of Governors. Dame Carol discusses her involvement with The Ginigoada Foundation in Papua New Guinea and traces its development and success. "Ginigoada" means "stand up strong" in the indigenous *Motu* language, and the eponymous Foundation has brought learning and skills to thousands of children, youth and adults. The Foundation's initial free courses in the capital, Port Moresby, were so popular that they managed to acquire funding for mobile buses to take learning and development to remoter regions. Three courses are discussed: the Young Life Program which introduces children to literacy, numeracy and social sciences; Young Skills for teenagers and young adults, which includes coverage of basic business awareness, conflict resolution and occupational health and safety; and a range of course for adults, such as financial literacy skills. "Graduation" rates are impressive and the programmes have clearly brought learning and development to thousands of residents.

This kind of informal learning will be essential to meet SDG4. Community development organisations will also play a significant role, as they are often the main route for bringing education to impoverished areas. These provide the context for our first research article by Piscevicus and Hodgkinson-Williams in which they examine student-tutors' perceptions of the creation and re-use of digital educational resources in South Africa. Here, universities are encouraged to engage with the wider community through, in this case, student-run outreach programmes, which aim to improve the quality of life for under-resourced communities.

Student volunteers act as tutors and mentors to young unemployed people and school children and use digital educational resources in their work. The focus of the research was the challenges faced in the reuse of these resources, using Engeström's Activity System (1987) as the analytical framework. The authors conclude that challenges are quite substantial and hinder the full use of digital resources: for example, student-tutors did not have a clear idea about how copyright applies to online resources and had to spend time contextualising online materials.

Our second research article analyses the relationship between policies and the implementation of open and distance learning (ODL) in Rwanda. Using a Foucauldian framework, Mukama examines policy aspirations and the challenges and gaps faced in providing ODL, which is recognised as a potential means to increase access, inclusion and scalability in higher education in Rwanda. He concludes that some policies are too aspirational and do not recognise the appropriate context; some are inherited from external providers which may have led to a lack of engagement and ownership in terms of implementation; and that the institutional frameworks do not match the governance of ODL as expressed in policy documents.

Our Commentary picks up the subject of Open Educational Resources (OER) and is authored by Hasßler, Hennessy & Hofmann who discuss sustainable and scalable teacher professional development in sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing on their experience of developing and evaluating a school-based professional learning programme for primary school teachers, "OER4Schools", they identify nine key elements that should contribute to effective and sustainable professional learning in low-resourced contexts. The programme integrates interactive pedagogy, OER and the use of mobile devices and avoids top-down knowledge transmission models, which have previously been extensively used. The authors argue that their deliberately decentralised programme has encouraged the adoption of OER4Schools in new contexts – for example, Kenya, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Key characteristics identified include that teacher learning should be promoted, motivated, facilitated and also supported through OER to increase sustainability, scalability and equity.

OER are also a key feature in our book review by Pulist on the *Open movement*, edited by Jhangiani and Robert Biswas-Diener. Pulist argues that the open movement goes beyond OER, though these have an important part to play.

All the papers in this issue provide important pointers towards ways of meeting SDG4 in the future. Informal and community learning, teacher professional development, OER, strong leadership and appropriate policies and governance will be essential. Papers in recent issues also illustrate leadership, initiatives and innovations across the world in learning for development, and provide an illustration of the reach of *JLAD* across continents.

Download statistics support the international reach of *JL4D*. In 2017, article downloads came from 175 countries, including 49 Commonwealth countries. *JL4D* also received about 303 article downloads per day; the top downloads by country coming from the US, Philippines, Israel, UK, Canada, Germany and India. Authors are therefore ensured of a widely located readership and large numbers of downloads. Please keep your contributions coming!

Finally, we are particularly pleased to include below a list of our Reviewers over the last year. Article referees provide a crucial role in supporting and guiding our authors through their constructive comments and also in maintaining the quality of *JL4D*. Many thanks to all those who have found the time to make this essential contribution to our Journal. We would be pleased to hear from other potential referees: this is another way of contributing to Learning for Development.

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ⁱ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>