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Editorial: Towards 2030: sustainable development goal 4: quality education. A communication perspective

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Editorial on the Research Topic

[Towards 2030: sustainable development goal 4: quality education. A communication perspective](#)

Ambitious targets, as defined in the fourth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) on “quality education” (WEF, 2016), are essential to stimulate innovative research around complex systems and also to extend and amplify the debate well beyond the academic community. Yet to achieve those targets inclusive language within policy and practice play a critical role (Kennett, 2021), in particular when considering communication as a tool to support democratic participation and knowledge exchange beyond institutionalized borders.

This editorial provides the context in which the Research Topic *Towards 2030: Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education. A Communication Perspective* was developed. Our aim is to offer a communication perspective on this subject and collect and combine various views on what to consider when developing sustainable strategies within quality education.

Supporting the emergence of multiple perspectives has been revealed to be essential in understanding and shaping our super-complex future (Cruz et al.), after having acknowledged that consensus is not always the best way forward to develop a framework to conceptualize educational quality. The constantly floating tension (depending on the temporal dimension, location and actors from which is prompted) between the humanist/progressive approach on one side and the economist approach on the other side (Barrett et al., 2006; Ball, 2012), for example, could constitute an ever-changing distorting lens through which various elements of this complex system could be assessed. In fact, these predefined and partial perspectives could support what we define here as a *negative divergence* and an *apparent convergence*. The result of such an instrumental approach, that looks at complexity from a conceptual stance, is generally more static than the actual contexts.

Moreover, a global approach to education policymaking has been widely criticized (Johansson, 2016; Hamilton, 2017; Fischman et al., 2018; Boeren, 2019). In fact, the definitions of quality within education that have generated more impact are the ones that

were based on their openness to change and have considered their own evolution based on information, changing contexts, and new understandings of the nature of education's challenges (UNICEF, 2000). The main obstacle to a common definition arises when the outcomes of education are the focus for defining quality, instead of focusing on the intangible values attached to the learning process and identified as objectives within a specific cultural context (ADEA, 2004).

The COVID pandemic has worked as a sort of magnifying lens on the issues mentioned here and made even more obvious that lack of equity plays a crucial role in this complex system, especially when disruptions occur (Reimers, 2022).

This special e-collection includes four articles that offer an interdisciplinary perspective on key themes enlightened even more by the COVID pandemic, such as the challenges encountered by people with disabilities, misinformation and data literacy skills, barriers to learning for refugee women and their family, how to deal with uncertainty when planning for the future of education.

Pasara focuses on how the implicit social acceptance of the limited access to education affecting people with disabilities manifests itself in a number of case-study areas in rural Zimbabwe. The specific target group of this research are people with disabilities living in areas suffering extreme poverty and additional social and natural challenges. A general lack of knowledge of the social barriers faced by people living with disabilities and an inadequate decision-making process to address those issues, even more in time of crisis, are identified as the main causes of a diffuse, discriminatory social attitude.

Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) initiatives are analyzed in this study and presented as drivers for equity and social inclusion. Starting from a local perspective, the author provides a set of recommendations for capacity building with the aim to scale-up those interventions and make them more sustainable. Some reflections and recommendations shared in the results may seem relevant only to the particular areas examined in this study. Nevertheless, two key principles are applicable well beyond this specific geographical context: the multi-stakeholder approach to support access to quality education or educational equality and the community-based interventions to trigger and monitor behavioral changes toward people living with disabilities.

Gibson et al. reflect on a specific project carried out by the Smithsonian Institution during the COVID-19 pandemic and explore how data-driven conversations about science could be reframed to provide new tools for understanding and supporting informed decision making. The project "Vaccines! How can we use science to help our community make decisions about vaccines?" invited students ages 8–17 to use data to change discourse and develop their own communities using inspiration from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As became even more apparent during the pandemic, data can be misunderstood and misused. This is why it is of particular importance to create opportunities within formal and non-formal education to encourage productive conversations about data. Developing students' "Sustainability Mindsets" is an explicit goal of the Smithsonian Science for Global Goals community research guides explored in this article, that opens a fundamental reflection on the

role of scientific literacy to improve and expand civic discourse within local and global communities.

Cox et al. explore the challenges of moving ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) courses to online learning environments during the pandemic by reflecting on the experiences of four newly arrived refugee women in Scotland, in the United Kingdom, over a five-month study. A restorative pedagogy as the basis of cultural justice is proposed here through the application of ecological methodological approaches, an iterative spiral of critical participatory action research (CPAR), and the emergent framework of permaculture design of "earth share; fair share; people share. Starting from the premise that physical context is key to integration for newcomers, especially immediately after arrival, an ecological approach to language learning is suggested in this article as a way of connecting the classroom to real-world context and activating a more holistic human approach, based on meaningful, ethical, cultural just connections with people and place through *translanguaging*.

Cruz et al. explore academics' conceptualizations of the future through a thematic analysis of 83 calls for papers from 39 conferences covering four English speaking regions: North America, Europe, Africa, and Australia. All those conferences were held from 2019 to 2022 and had as their main focus one of the following themes: Teaching and Learning, SoTL (the scholarship of teaching and learning), academic staff/faculty development, educational technology and Future Conferences. While analyzing the language used by academics within this academic public sphere, the authors guide the reader in a deep and engaging reflection on how to deal with an uncertain and super-complex future that requires complex and creative responses. They revalue imagination and our ability to dream as a response to a sense of "futurelessness" and analyze opportunities for a co-created future or futures, considering the tension between local and global.

In summary the results of the above-mentioned research unpack hidden narratives and unlock context-based responses to a problem of public interest in a way that emphasizes the relevance and importance of multiple voices.

Psychologically, learning is said to have occurred if there has been a change in behavior of a subject, meaning that a person acclimatizes to what is being taught (Thangeda et al., 2016). Sociologically, if we think about quality education from a communication perspective in light of the pandemic, learning occurred through the hyper segmentation of factors and human responses in time of a globally shared emergency. Our learning was a new way of making super-complexity emerge at macro level, but it has also represented an opportunity for more feasible and sustainable solutions to be applied at micro and meso level.

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