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Editorial: Learning, digitalization, and social sustainability

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Learning, digitalization, and social sustainability

In research on sustainability, we see a bias toward environmental and, to a lesser extent, economic issues, with social sustainability rarely receiving significant attention. Against this backdrop, this Research Topic explores the interplay between *learning* – "the act or experience of one that learns… [the] knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study [, and the] modification of a behavio[u]ral tendency by experience (such as exposure to conditioning)" —, *digitalisation* – how people's lives are transformed by new communication patterns and access to information requiring digital Bildung –, and *social sustainability* –a political definition highlighting issues of justice, equality and equity linked to various discrimination grounds on both international and national levels – from a range of communicative and learning perspectives using holistic research approaches. Learning, digitalisation and sustainability have rarely been studied in an integrated way on a larger scale, so the aim of this Research Topic is to address this gap highlighting how the perspectives intersect.

In their article "*Digital tools and social-ecological sustainability: Going beyond mainstream ways of understanding the roles of tools in contemporary eduscapes*," Almén and Bagga-Gupta explore the Swedish educational landscape in relation to digitalisation and sustainability with a focus on inclusion and exclusion. Despite finding a skeptical attitude toward digital technologies, an uneven distribution of resources between mainstream classrooms, and a limited possibility to choose ways of learning based on individual needs, Almén and Bagga-Gupta argue that a multimodal use of digital technologies can provide tools for individual students to participate, facilitating inclusion and creating one-school-for-all.

Our own article, "*Lost opportunities for globalisation, digitalisation, and socially sustainable education? Advocating for digital and global Bildung in Swedish upper secondary schools*," Bäcke and Vigmo addresses the challenges faced by multiethnic and diverse students in the Swedish educational system, as ethnocentric norms often overlook the global experiences and competences, focusing primarily on Western-centric curricula and knowledge. Curricular policies need to adopt a more global approach to education, enhancing the sense of agency, motivation, and future societal contribution in diverse student groups, alongside digital literacy to navigate the complexities of a digitalized world, while maintaining a focus on social sustainability and inclusion.

In "*Gamified dances, digital and socio-emotional skills in collaborative virtual environments of university students surviving the COVID-19 virus*," Holguin-Alvarez and Cruz-Montero explore folkloric gamification approaches on social, digital and emotional competencies in an online dance program for undergraduate students with health difficulties after being infected with COVID-19. Digital and socio-emotional learning through synchronous online dancing via Zoom and interaction via Zoom chat allows for interaction between teachers and students as well as between students. They thus incorporate aspects of collaborative learning, digitalisation and socially sustainable communication in an enjoyable manner.

Drawing on aspects of the post-digital condition, platformisation, cultural memory and cultural sustainability, Heuman and Gambarato focus on the challenges of and opportunities for using major streaming media platforms and fictional streaming series in educational contexts in their article "*The learning potential of streaming media: cultural sustainability in a post-digital society.*" Relating this to societal cohesion, they point to how copyrighted material and the lack of transparency in viewer profiling may cause problems, but they also advocate for streaming media in classroom contexts to introduce new topics, challenge master narratives or discuss aspects of equality in a manner that can be highly engaging for students.

"*Languages and technologies in education at school and outside of school: Perspectives from young people in low-resource countries in Africa and Asia*" written by Kukulska-Hulme et al. explores the connection between the use of English and the access to technology for 160 13–15-year-olds in Bangladesh, Nepal, Senegal, and Sudan. With technology use during the COVID-19 pandemic as a backdrop, they stress the perceived importance among respondents as well as significant gender gaps linked to the mastering of both English and ICTs, as they view knowledge in these areas as essential for their future in order not to be "left far behind."

Tárcia et al. describe a gamified intervention in public schools in Brazil and Mozambique in the article "*Transmedia educommunication method for social sustainability in low-income communities.*" In their pilot study, they use analog games in communities with limited access to digital technologies to combat disinformation. The students, aged 11–14, are supposed to learn to recognize satire/parody, false connections, as well as misleading, imposter, manipulated or fabricated content and discuss the boundaries between truth, lies, fiction, and poetry. The *Confabulating* project highlights the South-South dimension, as it is both conceived and carried out in the Portuguese-speaking Global South.

"*Epistemic and Existential, E2-sustainability: On the need to un-learn for re-learning in contemporary spaces*," by Bagga-Gupta, re-conceptualizes sustainability and re-considers learning in both analog and digital spaces. She argues that we ought to take a wider perspective on sustainability beyond all-encompassing beliefs and that having a flexible, diverse, globally-focused, and exploratory perspective allows for communication between northern and southern knowledge systems. To highlight the consequences of static boundaries and the impact of a privileged gaze, Bagga-Gupta draws on examples from the language and learning sciences and theorizes these from a southern decolonial perspective.

In all of these articles, digital technology has the potential to become a vehicle for inclusion and socially sustainable learning contexts, but several perspectives on digital divides are visible at the same time. These divides may appear due to the lack of knowledge on the part of teachers and/or students, be based on uneven technical access or financial resources, or be a result of regulations or mindsets that risk excluding certain groups of students. Together, all seven articles accentuate the necessity to critically engage with learning and digitalisation from the perspective of social sustainability.

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