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Possibilities and priorities for IJED in times of uncertainty: A 40th anniversary analysis

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\begin{abstract}
This article reflects upon the history of the Journal, its evolving nature and rationale and upon possibilities and priorities for the future in what are uncertain times for all.
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\section{Introduction}

The year 2020 has seen unprecedented challenges for the international community that will have major implications in all sectors of society for generations to come. The immediate impact of Covid-19 has stalled educational development on all levels worldwide and has generated cross-sectoral challenges in ways that could not have been anticipated in the first two months at the start of the decade. As the International Journal of Educational Development (IJED) recognises its 40th Anniversary these and other contemporary global challenges have complex implications for future scholarly priorities, be they academic, professional or methodological, that are greater in magnitude and reach than ever before. It is in this exceptional global context that we reflect upon the history of the journal, its evolving nature and rationale and, most fundamentally, upon possibilities and priorities for IJED’s future in what are now uncertain times for all.

\section{A niche rationale: IJED foundations}

The origins of IJED have been documented in several articles over the years by Taylor (1988), Vulliamy (1988), Watson (1990) and McGrath (2010). Here we build upon this 10-year tradition in forward-looking ways that engage with changing global circumstances and related intellectual developments. In doing so, it is appropriate to first connect with a little of the early history of the Journal by quoting from a piece by Sutherland et al. (2007, p.163). This not only helps to set the scene for our analysis, but it also explains the rationale behind establishing the new journal in 1980:

In 1979 two Birmingham businessmen/project management consultants, the Ozanne brothers, decided to launch a new education journal, the International Journal of Educational Development, to fill a perceived niche in the market. They were concerned about the cynicism that they encountered in the developing countries with regard to the so-called ‘experts’ who arrived for brief visits and then felt able to write definitive reports. They were also concerned that the importance of education in the development discourse was being squeezed out by economists. They therefore aimed to publish a journal containing articles based on research into policy and practice in the developing world which might influence policy makers.

These aims continue to influence the nature and rationale for the journal 40 years later, although much has also changed as the Journal has grown to occupy a well-respected, high impact, position in the world of academic publishing. The initial focus on matters of educational policy and practice in international development continues to be at the heart of IJED, and can be seen in the themes and topics for the articles published in each volume and in the Journal’s now clearly established niche positioning.

The first two issues of Volume 1 were published by William I. Ozanne and Associates Ltd in 1981 but by 1983 William Ozanne had negotiated a promising move to Pergamon Press in Oxford. The initial Editorial

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Board was drawn largely from British academics working within the field of education and international development at the Universities of Birmingham, Manchester, Sussex, Reading, Bristol, London and York supported by colleagues in organisations such as the British Council, Commonwealth Secretariat and the then UK Overseas Development Administration (DFID at the time of writing, but now, with some contestation, proposed for reabsorption into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office). John Oxenham was the first Editor. This combination of academic interests, policy engagement and development expertise added greatly to the distinctive positioning for the new Journal, focusing on education in the ‘developing world’ and purposefully bridging, theory, policy and practice. Over the first decade the aims of the Journal were further refined in ways that actively sought greater engagement with non-formal education and with policy makers and planners working within developing countries and related international agencies. Helping to consolidate this niche positioning, when the Editorial Board decided to celebrate the first ten years of publication with a conference in Oxford, Pergamon Press in conjunction with the World Bank, agreed to both sponsor the event and help with its organisation. This was held in September 1989 on the theme of ‘Development Through Education’ and the resulting papers became available in Volume 10 (2-3) 1990 of IJED (See also Watson, 1990).

3. Engaging with the Post-Jomtien Era

1990 was a benchmark year for the field of education and international development with the convening of the first truly global agenda setting conference to be held in Jomtien, Thailand (World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA, 1990). This gave added impetus for the Journal that was reflected both in its growing influence in policy circles worldwide and in terms of academic standing. Strengthening the responsiveness of the operational structure, from the first issue of Volume 11 in 1991 there was to be an Editor-in-Chief who would also act as Chairman of the Editorial Board. Keith Watson was appointed and held the position with distinction for 16 years, generating wider international input, leading the ongoing development of an active International Editorial Board, and establishing new roles for two International Regional Editors, representing Asia and North America, respectively. The original pattern of the three issues per volume lasted until Volume 12 in 1992 when it was changed to six issues as the number of readers and subscribers increased and as the Journal’s reputation continued to grow. This was the moment too that Pergamon Press was acquired by Elsevier.

Other ways in which IJED sought to encourage research from, and about, education in the developing world included publishing PhD abstracts from early career researchers, special themed issues, and commissioned critiques of major international reports such as UNESCO’s Delors Report: Learning The Treasure Within (see Volume 19.1, 1996). Collaboration with colleagues engaged in parallel developments to coordinate what came to be known as the ‘British Resource’ in education and development proved, however, to be especially timely and significant as discussed below.

4. IJED’s connections with developing the British resource on education and development

At the very time that IJED and Pergamon were preparing their ten year anniversary conference on ‘Development Through Education’ for 1989, an initiative was coming to fruition that sought to draw together the expertise in the UK in the disciplinary area of education research, policy and practice in the so-called developing world. The concern behind this initiative was that while the UK clearly had pertinent experience and considerable expertise, it was at that time a rather fragmented constituency. It was also felt that this resource should be able to play a more active role in contributing to the shaping, monitoring and evaluating of policies in education, in both multilateral and bilateral arenas. Clearly, these ideas were in alignment with the distinctive niche that IJED had begun to develop for itself.

This process was given greater impetus by the World Conference on Education for All that was held in March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, and at which many different dimensions of the British resource were present. A month before Jomtien, Beverley Young, Director of the British Council’s Education Department wrote to others of an ‘Informal Group’ about the need to bring together the rich, diverse but scattered British resource. He then coordinated a series of meetings in the British Council between June 1990 and the autumn of the same year, drawing many representatives of the British resource together, before it was agreed that there should be a first coordinated conference in 1991.1

It was eventually proposed that the British Comparative and International Education Society (BCIES) and IJED conferences (in collaboration with BATROE)2 would be combined that year with what came to be called ‘The Oxford Conference’, planned and coordinated by a Steering Committee of some of the main groups in the British resource, with William Oxanze as conference secretary. At this conference on ‘The Reform of Education Systems to Meet International and National Needs’, the idea of a UK Forum on International Education and Training was proposed and accepted (for details of early UKFIET see Watson and King (1991), Dyer and King (1993), Watson (1996). The conference continues today as the biennial UKFIET Conference, and IJED continue to develop through their strong relationship to each other, and UKFIET itself has established a distinctive presence in the education and international development arena (www.ukfiet.org).

5. IJED: the changing contemporary landscape of education for international development

In 2006, Simon McGrath, based at the University of Nottingham in the UK, took over as Editor-in-Chief of IJED and his own retrospective review published in Volume 30 Number 6 of the Journal (McGrath, 2010) examines how changing times were reflected in the evolution of the journal in the light of the themes and content of papers published during his own term of office. Significantly, McGrath notes how a number of the early issues considered by the Journal, such as international policy agendas, targets and transfer, aid for education, curriculum quality and relevance, language and inclusion, continued to feature prominently. Although gender had been addressed as an important aspect of education and development since volume 1, it was apparent that a gender lens was being used in a greater proportion of papers and with greater sophistication by the early 2000s. This has continued to progress in the last decade. Additionally, education in post-conflict contexts had begun to emerge as a priority along with greater attention to theoretical critiques relating to the political economy of knowledge production and development partnerships, and a growing awareness of pressing global environmental challenges. Perhaps most pertinently for our present analysis, McGrath drew attention to the Journal’s efforts to recognise contested agendas and the emergence of theoretical and methodological pluralisms, to the need to open greater space for Southern voices, personnel and perspectives, and to an acknowledgement of education and development’s marginal place in both development studies and mainstream educational research.

Since then IJED has advanced under the Editorships of Mark Mason and, from 2014, Stephen Heyneman as the Journal’s leadership moved out of the UK, first to Hong Kong and then to the USA. This continuity of experienced leadership, combined with advances in the digitisation of publishing processes, have contributed to increasingly impressive turn-

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1 The early papers of the Informal Group are in the archives of the UK Forum on Education and Training (UKFIET) in the Institute of Education, University College London.
2 BATROE: The British Association of Teachers and Researchers in Overseas Education.
around times for recent submissions and allowed a growth to eight issues per year since 2019. Moreover, the geographic sources for manuscripts have continued to diversify, Chinese and co-produced submissions have become notably prominent and, reflecting global trends, an increase of material based upon quantitative research and detailed statistical data and analyses can also be seen. Over time, IJED’s geographical coverage has also extended with varied and contested levels of support. At times, there has been a hard editorial line that the journal is concerned with lower and middle income countries and that this should exclude countries that have graduated to higher levels of economic development such as South Korea and Singapore. However, at other times there has been a willingness to cover other regions outside the old ‘Third World’ notion, including contexts and development challenges within Eastern Europe, the Middle East and more. In a world with new layers of fluidity and complexity, these debates about what counts as ‘international education and development’ and where IJED should focus its attention will, no doubt, continue.

At the same time, the academic, professional and methodological landscape for education and international development has also moved on with what many see as greater tensions and contestations emerging in the international literature. Working out from material published by IJED we now consider potential implications for the Journal and the wider field. IJED has always had a strong focus on methodological trends and its engagement with new approaches and issues continues (Mason et al., 2019; Liu and Steiner-Khamsi, 2020). The impact of the PISA surveys, including PISA for Development (Sellar and Lingard, 2014; Addey, 2017; Morsy et al., 2018), has, for example, been paralleled by the growing dominance of complex and expensive, big science modalities for research and development initiatives, a resurgence of the power and influence of quantitative approaches to research, and much advocacy for the ‘big data’ movement that is currently capturing the support of researchers and policy makers worldwide (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier, 2013; Crossley, 2014). The need for robust and critical analyses of the nature, potential and limitations of such game changing initiatives is especially so in development arenas where context sensitivity has long been underplayed (Hau’ofa, 1993; Smith, 1999; Mtika and Gates, 2010), and where the potential emerges for more advantaged ‘Northern partners’ in development to further enhance their control of the production, interpretation and impact of research findings. This, along with related theoretical analyses and conceptual work are crucial areas where IJED is well placed to make timely contributions. As Liu and Steiner-Khamsi (2020, p. 8) argue with reference to the impact of the World Bank’s Human Capital Index (HCl):

‘… the Human Capital Index relies on, and in effect exacerbates test-based accountability. It needs to be considered the new ‘soft power’ governance tool par excellence, because it penalizes systems that choose not to participate in international-large scale student assessment.

Similarly, the global prominence of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since their launch in 2015 (UNGA, 2015) ensures that analyses of ongoing implementation and critiques of policy will command the attention of many agencies and future contributors to IJED. As King (2017) argues, this will require the critical interrogation of the SDGs themselves and the power imbalances embedded within the architecture of international agencies and their ‘global’ agendas (see also McGrath, 2014; Crossley, 2019).

Currently in the UK, major funding through the hugely ambitious Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) (https://www.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund/) promises to generate new interdisciplinary research highlighting partnerships between complementary teams based in the Global North and South. This has seen a major increase in education research income for the IJED constituency in the UK but also for a number of Southern partners, with both groups sometimes being involved in multiple GCRF projects simultaneously.

While such initiatives offer the prospect of long term, well-funded North-South collaboration they also bring with them new challenges, reinforce the influence of powerful funding agencies and their preferences, and generate attendant concerns for the maintenance of academic space and recognition for more radical and disruptive studies by academics acting as public intellectuals (Grieve and Mitchell, 2020; Walker and Martinez-Vargas, 2020). Moreover, the timing of the Covid-19 crisis when many of these collaborative educational research projects are just getting underway in 2020, coupled with funder reluctance to offer costed project extensions, may heighten the danger that these initiatives could end up with unrealistic timetables and revised schedules within which the more well-placed Northern authors and organisations are pressed to complete the bulk of planned published outputs in order to meet uncomfortable funder driven deadlines. While this ‘ticking of the Western clock’ is hardly new, its continued prominence in both shaping and limiting possibilities for genuine partnerships and sustainable change in the realm of international development and the SDG era is both challenging and revealing.

This points to the decolonisation of knowledge production as a crucially important arena for contemporary research that, while lacking sources for major funding, has momentum, contemporary pertinence and a critical edge that lies close to many IJED principles that have evolved throughout its 40 year history (see, for example, Mazrui, 1992; Hoff and Hickling-Hudson, 2011). It also points to the work of scholars exploring the potential of indigenous knowledges, languages and epistemologies for education and educational research (see, for example, Brock-Utne, 2010; Aikman, 2011; Fairbairn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014). With a recent resurgence in critiques of the architecture of international development, and the ‘Western’ hegemonic epistemologies embedded within global higher education (cf. Takayama et al., 2017; Vickers, 2020), IJED’s own history positions it well to engage in wider contemporary debates about ways of moving beyond traditionally dominant paradigms and worldviews. IJED, for example, has long articulated a commitment to supporting the publication of research carried out and written by Southern authors and it is now timely to revitalise this in the light of rapidly changing times.

Walker and Martinez-Vargas (2020), for instance, insist on seeing the current challenge as being far more than ‘allowing’ Southern authors access to Northern journals. Rather, it is necessary, they argue, to acknowledge the persistent effects of the colonial epistemological structure, and build new processes that contribute to improved epistemic justice. Along with others working in international education and development, such as Tikly (2004), Robinson-Pant and Singal (2013) and McGowan (2018), such arguments point towards an existential challenge for the fields of education and international development.

Global shifts in balances of power are also generating tensions and challenges for multilateral cooperation but this is, somewhat paradoxically, contrasted by what many now see as an urgent need for improved global collaboration in the face of the heightened prominence of environmental uncertainty and climate change. These are issues that demand coordinated global attention with cross-sectoral implications for human development (Samoff, 1999, 2004), social justice, the nature and role of education and, indeed, long-term planetary survival. Revealingly, it can be seen that of those emergent priorities for education and development that are already being explored, some of the most innovative work is being led and carried out within the Global South (cf. Aday, 1996; de Sousa Santos, 2012; Manteaw, 2012; Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015; McGrath and Powell, 2016; Wals et al., 2017), and at the ‘sharp end’ in some of the most marginalised and vulnerable national contexts in the form of small island developing states (see, for example, work by Koya et al., 2010; Crossley and Louisy, 2019).

A related set of arguments that McGrath noted in his 2010 analysis was the emergence of a school of thought in IJED that rejected the still-dominant economic development paradigm and the view that education’s primary purpose was to serve it. Such challenges, building upon
six future and beyond: new global challenges and uncertainties

Even as we have written this paper over several months in late 2019 and early 2020, the world around us has been profoundly shaken by a series of interrelated crises, including Covid-19 and #BlackLivesMatter, as well as continued environmental crises and heightened contestation about the state of democracy internationally (Facer et al., 2020). Covid-19 is currently the most acutely felt of these within the IJED community, and this will, undoubtedly, generate future contributions and insights from the journal, while demonstrating its ongoing relevance for a new era.

While leaving space for others, and IJED itself, to carry this agenda forward, it is pertinent here to note that, in terms of international education and development, many analysts currently point to the new possibilities and potential for education technology solutions. During the current lockdowns, educators around the globe have been seen to be successfully using social media to keep in touch with learners who would otherwise become isolated. Indeed, blended learning strategies, mixing face to face study with variable levels of online provision, look to be emerging as a favoured strategy, or contingency plan, for the immediate future of higher education worldwide. However, the challenges of delivering digital content have also highlighted the depths of digital divides, between rich and poor, of course, but also across levels and forms of education. (Majumdar and Araiztegui, 2020) and the World Bank (2020), for instance, highlight the particular difficulties that Southern vocational education and training systems are facing in going online given the large amounts of practical learning involved in many programmes. Exploring the emerging possibilities and limitations of education technology is, therefore, likely to become a more important theme for analysis in the field of education and development in the near future and beyond. This is made more pressing and controversial by the size of the financial interests involved in promoting education technology ‘solutions’ at the present moment, and by the power and extent of the vested interests involved. More broadly, the current moment points to the need to revisit matters of teaching and learning that go beyond the simple question of technologies to consider what the effects of Covid-19 are and might be for what is learned, by whom and how, and the ways that new approaches may both undermine and reinforce existing inequalities.

In conclusion and in looking beyond times dominated by Covid-19, for many there is the disturbing realisation that virus-related problems, acute though they are, may pale into insignificance in the face of environmental uncertainty, the global climate crisis and the socioeconomic and cross-cultural implications that this holds for all (see, for example, recent work by Tikly, 2020; and Rosenberg et al., 2020). How we move forward and build more equalised and mutually beneficial relations between Southern and Northern personnel, knowledges and epistemologies remains a challenge for all involved in the processes of education and international development. This is all the more critical in times when opportunities to meet in person or to maintain other avenues for improved interaction are constrained. This highlights the importance of journals such as IJED continuing to stimulate theoretically informed, rigorously researched and locally grounded dialogue in education and international development. Moreover, this re-emphasises, albeit in very different times, the central and enduring importance of IJED’s niche rationale established at the time of its founding. We are, indeed, living in unprecedented times of challenges and uncertainties and IJED is well positioned at the start of its fifth decade to continue to make significant, insightful and timely contributions.

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