



Yusra Laila Visser Research Fund

to promote and award *amazing research* on human learning for our time and our world



Yusra Laila Visser (1975—2020)

There are things we learn in life without ever realizing that we are learning, because we don't learn them in school. Yusra, who co-founded the Learning Development Institute, played a key role in unraveling the myriad circumstances in which such incidental learning happens. She made use of the hundreds of learning stories we collected from people around the world during the early years of the current century. We reported on our findings at several annual conventions of both the AECT and AERA. These studies led, among other publications, to an invited special issue of the Educational Technology Magazine on *Broadening the Definition of Learning*.¹ It wasn't for the first time that attention was drawn to important, yet unexplored, areas of human learning. Already in 1985, Gagné had noted that "a very large part of common education...is nowadays being attained by incidental learning" (pp. 8, 9), but that research was seriously lacking.²

Life poses its challenges. Yusra had a rare genetic disease, Ehlers Danlos Syndrome (EDS). Its complex impact on the human organism is progressively debilitating. Yusra knew it and occasionally mentioned that she expected her life to be short, and so it was.³ She also knew that the enduring pain she suffered could only increase. Yet she remained cheerful and comforting to others, realizing that without the pain of life, life will not reveal its beauty. She learned to be resilient and considered it a privilege to have had the opportunity to learn. Having gone through the experience, she wanted to share what she had learned with others. Resilience is important for effectively coping with everyday circumstances in ordinary life, just as it was vital for the extraordinary circumstances that determined Yusra's life. Thus, at the time of her death, Yusra's research was focused on the study of such 'quotidian resilience.' She was unable to complete the work. Others will have to take over.

Resilience is an example of a complex learning outcome. The complex world of which we are a part abounds with issues of learning that are similarly complex. Dealing with such issues requires the mind to abandon its default option of explaining the world in terms of linear relationships. Multiple factors are at stake. They all interact and impact our mental and moral growth as we transform ourselves throughout life. Together they constitute the 'conditions of learning' for us to become the constructive citizens so badly needed in our 21st century planetary society. The research community should feel compelled to search for complex answers to complex problems and rethink the deeper meaning, for our time, of what Cronbach and Suppes⁴ so adequately referred to in 1969 as 'disciplined inquiry.' It is against this backdrop that the Yusra Laila Visser Research Fund will seek to stimulate *amazing research*, research that makes you reach for your telephone and call a friend, perhaps a continent or two away, and exclaim: "Wow! Amazing! Did you read it?"

As the research practice evolves, it should eventually become more transdisciplinary and methodologically responsive to the nature of the problems addressed. It will then be relevant to inspire diverse applications in dissimilar cultural contexts around the world. It will reveal factors that foster transformative learning for sustained human existence in the Anthropocene. Ultimately, it will contribute to our collectively building a better world.

To achieve these goals, the YLV Research Fund considers at this stage the following actions:

- an **annual open-access review publication** on *amazing research and development in areas of transformative learning relevant to human existence in the Anthropocene*;
- an **annual YLV Prize** for such research and development; and
- **provision of seed money** for promising initiatives in this area, assuming future growth of the Fund.

We welcome suggestions, which can be sent to Jan Visser (jvisser@learndev.org), President, Learning Development Institute.

¹ Visser, Y. L., Rowland, G., & Visser, J. (Eds.). (2002). Broadening the definition of learning [Special issue]. *Educational Technology Magazine*, 42(2).

² Gagné, R. M. (1985). Instructional technology: The research field. *Journal of Instructional Development*, 8(3), 7-14.

³ See for a tribute <http://jvisser-ldi.blogspot.com/2020/07/yusra-laila-visser-1975-2020.html>.

⁴ Cronbach, L. J., & Suppes, P. (Eds.). (1969). *Research for tomorrow's schools: Disciplined inquiry for education*. New York: The Macmillan Company.