

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR ITS MEETING ON JUNE 18, 2002

INTRODUCTION

This report covers Year 2 of the Learning Development Institute. The previous Annual Report (<http://www.learndev.org/dl/AnnualRpt2001.pdf>) describes the general philosophy behind the creation and operation of the Institute. That philosophy has remained unaltered during the second year.

As stated in last year's Annual Report, LDI "sees as one of its important tasks to call attention to the multiplicity of factors that promote and facilitate learning," rather than focusing its effort on merely one or a few specific areas. Such a position requires LDI to be present and establish validity among communities pertaining to diverse fields of interests, taking up critical positions in each of them, generate collaboration across boundaries regarding themes that transcend specific disciplinary interests, as well as caring for the growth of a new integrated concern with human learning from a transdisciplinary perspective. This is no doubt a massive task which, by virtue of the adopted philosophy, cannot but lead to a risky level of dilution of one's effort, which is particularly dangerous for a young organization like LDI. Nonetheless, there are clear signals that during its second year LDI has significantly grown, as compared to its first year of existence, in visibility, recognition, and, most importantly, impact.

Such a positive conclusion at the opening page of the Annual Report for LDI's second year should not be taken to mean that the battle has been won and that from now on it is sufficient to build on the achievements of two years of hard work. Rather, it should be interpreted as a strong

encouragement to continue on the road we chose to follow, aware that much additional hard work lies ahead.

In the following pages I hope to highlight some of the most salient aspects of what the functioning of LDI during the past year has entailed and to document in what respects I believe such functioning should be seen as unique and significant.

THE NETWORKED INSTITUTE

LDI is distinct from many other institutions in having conceived itself as a networked operation. While being distinct in this respect, it is by no means unique. There are other examples of organizations that owe their growth and sustained success to a focus on networking among scientists without necessarily starting off in an environment, however small, with walls around it. An example is the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO). The “EMBO & EMBC Annual Report 2001” explains how EMBO originated in the early nineteen-sixties from initial discussions among a restricted group of scientists, including James Watson, Leo Szilard, Max Perutz, John Kendrew, Victor Weisskopf and Sidney Brenner. They all had their own institutional base, which they probably never considered as something they would want to exchange, at least not in the short run, for an envisioned, but at the time still utopian, European Molecular Biology Laboratory, modeled after the meanwhile successfully functioning European centre for the development and advancement of high energy physics, CERN, in Geneva, Switzerland. They were happy where they were and the EMBO idea could develop thanks to the fact that all initially participating individuals had a secure institutional basis to operate from.

I choose the example of EMBO deliberately as, at the time of its inception, it shared with LDI the concern to bring scientists together around a broad scientific development area that was evidently, in the eyes of the scientists involved, becoming crucially important for humanity but that, on the other hand, did not yet have the desired recognition with traditional funding sources, whether public or private, and that, in addition, was much too big to be “hosted” within the purview of any of the contributing disciplines. There was a clear need for a new area of concern, called “molecular biology,” to be developed and established. Yet, as the history of molecular biology during the subsequent decades shows, there was no clear definition of what the term meant. In fact, there was a need for such a definition to emerge from the practice of ongoing research and dialogue among researchers. Interestingly, now that it is possible in the field of

molecular biology to have a retrospective look at what happened, it can be concluded (EMBO & EMBC Annual Report 2001) that the now widely adopted concept of molecular biology represents “a definition of the scale at which analysis is performed and also an acceptance that description of phenotype and anatomical detail is not adequate” (p. 17) for a deep understanding of the living world.

The comparison with LDI’s area of concern is striking as it seems justified at this stage to make a prospective similar claim regarding the new conceptual concerns surrounding the deepening of understanding of human learning. While in the case of the understanding of life a focus on the very small, the molecular level of organization, was required, in the case of the understanding of learning we seem to be in need of a dual effort at refocusing analysis, namely down to the very small, i.e. the functioning of the brain and the neuronal processes taking place within it, and, at the other end of the spectrum, the human being as a whole in a lifespan perspective as well as in the perspective of the historical, cultural and social processes in which human beings become organized and develop complex organizational structures that as such also display learning behavior. Moreover, as in the above quote from the EMBO report, progress in the development of the science of learning is contingent upon “an acceptance that description of [the most obviously visible detail of the learning process] is not adequate.”

In such a situation where there is a clear need for the emergence of a novel framework for joining forces to open up an area of work inspired by hitherto nonexistent perspectives, networking – as opposed to building more or less rigid new organizational structures – seems to be the preferred way to move ahead. Compared with the conditions surrounding the creation of an organization like EMBO four decades ago, LDI finds itself in the privileged position that networking has become so much easier thanks to the greatly enhanced and much cheaper communication and networking technologies. They have been used extensively and effectively.

While LDI is not alone in being a networked institution, it can probably claim to have developed the practice of that concept in unique ways, particularly in exploiting opportunities for symbiotic relationships while working with individuals rather than through the establishment of connections with their institutions. It has thus been possible to achieve goals at virtually no cost, ignoring for the time being that all the work done by LDI officers has been largely voluntary.

POSITIONING SIGNIFICANT IDEAS AND DOING SO IN WAYS THAT MATTER

Much of LDI's work during its second year of existence has concentrated on positioning the concerns for which it stands among fairly mainstream communities. The idea behind this is that preaching to the already converted is an obvious waste of time and that, if something is worth its salt, it should be possible to convince mainstream folks to pay serious attention. The apparent success in following this line of action can be interpreted as a validation of LDI's vision and mission. In addition, it has helped LDI to become recognized as a unique, valid, and relevant player whose advice should be listened to and whose ability to build human capacity should be sought.

In a number of cases LDI has actively sought opportunities to get its messages out; in other cases – and they seem to become increasingly more frequent – it merely had to select among opportunities that were offered to it. The former category of events comprises for instance conferences of professional organizations such as the American Educational Research Association and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology at which LDI has been highly successful in getting submitted proposals for paper presentations, roundtables, workshops and panels accepted, even though the content of proposed events was often at odds with mainstream expectations in these organizations. The initiative to edit an entire special issue of Educational Technology Magazine on the implications that broadening of the definition of learning would have for educators and educational technologists is another example of an LDI initiated activity.



Ray Amirault delivering opening remarks at the panel on *Learning Objects Technology: Implications for Educational Research and Practice* at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans, April 2002

On the other hand there have been such prestigious invitations to intervene in the framework of the Rencontres de Versailles 2001, to provide the Rapporteur-General function at

major UNESCO meetings, or to present keynotes at important international and national events, where the initiative came entirely from outside LDI. Of a similar nature are also the invitations to author book chapters and articles.

Somewhere in between of LDI initiated actions and responses to initiatives generated from outside LDI are those instances in which, after something had been started at someone's initiative, LDI has moved to explore the

opportunity in question in further depth in pursuit of its aims. An example of this category of developments is the research on problem based learning undertaken at and in collaboration with the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora, Illinois, which has subsequently resulted in the creation of opportunities for capacity building and ongoing collaborative work in both the area of *Problem Oriented Learning (POL)* and LDI's *The Scientific Mind (TSM)* focus areas of work. An additional example is the initiative of the University of Guadalajara in Mexico to invite LDI for the launching of

its INNOVA program (a lecture cum workshop series in the area of educational innovation) which has opened possibilities for continued work in developing the professional capacity of INNOVA's faculty and collaborating professionals. Similar developments may result from LDI's participation in May 2002, at the invitation of Algeria, in the work of the Université de Formation Continue in Algiers to create a virtual university.



An early morning gathering at the Chateau de Versailles in France, June 2001, during that year's "Rencontres de Versailles" where LDI intervened in the debate on *Historical memory and knowledge: New pedagogies resulting from new information technologies.*



Participants at the Second International Symposium on the Virtual University, Algiers, Republic of Algeria, May 2002.

The above are but a few examples of how, after two years of operation of the Learning Development Institute, a self-generating pattern of activities starts emerging, resulting from the Institute's natural interaction with the world around it. This is a clear sign that the formidable investment made, both in time and effort, starts paying off and that LDI is on its way to become a significant entity that is appreciated and counted with by others.

ACTIVITIES

Following is an annotated overview of major events since the previous Board of Directors meeting. More detailed information about each of them can be found on the www.learndev.org Web site under "events."

- ***The Book of Problems (or what we don't know about learning)***. (This is a major ongoing effort, to be formally launched during the forthcoming International Conference of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology in November 2002 in Dallas, Texas, geared at outlining directions for research in the science of learning. Jan Visser, Yusra Laila Visser and David Solomon are the coordinators for the event.)
- ***Bringing Space Down to Earth***. (This was a workshop, held in Vienna, Austria, in June 2002, organized by the EURISY Association in collaboration with the Austrian Space Agency to discuss the possibilities of space technology applications for the development of distance education. The workshop took place in the context of the Annual Meeting of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space [COPUOS]. LDI provided the keynote and an invited additional paper on the drawbacks of distance education.)



Looking at the meaning of wisdom as a driving concept for the development of human learning

- ***La Innovación: Necesidad Científica, Opción Artística***. (LDI President Jan Visser inaugurated in May 2002 the series "Cátedras de Innovación Educativa" of the Coordinación General del Sistema para la Innovación del Aprendizaje (INNOVA) of the University of Guadalajara in Mexico with a keynote on *Innovation: Scientific necessity and artistic choice* and two workshops, one on *Knowledge management*

in virtual learning environments: Towards a wisdom university and the other one on Learning in virtual environments.)

- **Internet : Outil pédagogique pour la formation à distance.** (The Algerian Université de Formation Continue organized this year in Algiers the Second International Symposium on the Virtual University. The symposium took place in May 2002. LDI's contribution consisted of a paper on "Points de vue divers sur l'apprentissage humain au niveau universitaire dans un environnement d'information et de communications digitalisées." LDI President Jan Visser also served on the Scientific Committee for the symposium.)

- **Learning Objects Technology: Implications for Educational Research and Practice.**

(This was a Panel Session organized by Yusra Laila Visser and Ray Amirault at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association



From left to right: panelists Jan Visser, David Merrill, Mike Hannafin, David Wiley and Mike Spector listening to the points of view expressed by the sixth panelist, Ed Gaible.

(AERA), held in April 2002 in New Orleans. The panel brought together six panelists who shared their critical views with approximately 100 attendees of the session. In view of the importance of the debate, AERA decided to record and make available on audio cassette the entire session.)

- **Second Order Learning Stories.** (This was a roundtable session held at the above mentioned 2002 Annual Meeting of the AERA in New Orleans. During the one-hour session results were presented and discussed of research developed and carried out by Jan Visser [LDI], Yusra Laila Visser [LDI and Florida State University], Ray Amirault [LDI and Florida State University], Cole D. Genge [University of Massachusetts at Amherst] and Vachel Miller [University of Massachusetts at Amherst].)
- **La educación y el aprendizaje en el tiempo de las nuevas tecnologías de información y de comunicación: Un diálogo entre Federico Mayor y Jan Visser.** (This is the title of a book chapter. authored collaboratively by LDI President Jan Visser and Federico Mayor, President of the Culture of Peace Foundation in Madrid, Spain. The book was published in

Februart 2002 by Editorial Ariel in Barcelona, Spain. The event is representative of a developing closer relationship between LDI and the Culture of Peace Foundation.)

- ***The purpose of instruction and education.*** (This was an outgrowth of a teaching activity undertaken by LDI researchers Yusra Laila Visser and Ray Amirault at Florida State University. In February 2002 they decided to involve Jan Visser in an online discussion with graduate students on the referred theme, which was followed in April 2002 by a face-to-face encounter in Tallahassee.)
- ***Research on Problem-Based Learning at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy.*** (This activity is well on its way to reach completion in what may be expected to become a notable doctoral dissertation. Carrying out the research at IMSA, the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, has generated a number of initiatives that are currently being explored and further developed for continued collaboration between LDI and IMSA, both in the POL and TSM focus areas.)
- ***Research on the Use of Innovative Instructional Strategies in Computer Science Curricula.*** (A paper on this theme was presented by Ray Amirault and Yusra Laila Visser at the International Conference of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology held in November 2001 in Atlanta, Georgia. LDI's interest in this theme is motivated by the consideration that the world of computer applications offers an environment in which it becomes increasingly crucial that professionals be able to manage complexity and change with the use of adaptive problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills that may be applied in all types of problem areas, and not just the ones that pertain to the technology of the day. We believe that this ability to adaptively solve problems becomes increasingly important also beyond the area of computer science.)
- ***Development of an Electronic Training System for Generating Orthographies of Unwritten Languages.*** (This constituted a meanwhile successfully completed area of collaboration which involved two LDI researchers – Ray Amirault and Yusra Laila Visser – with an important UNESCO activity, requiring expertise in linguistics, instructional design and computer technology to be combined in order to generate the desired product.)

- ***Learning after September 11, 2001: A collaborative reflection.*** (Only days after last year's September 11 events, an initiative was launched in the names of LDI President Jan Visser, Nobel Laureate Leon Lederman, Culture of Peace Foundation President Federico Mayor, and the Co-Director of the Center for Research on Peace Education, Gavriel Salomon, to invite themselves and others to collaboratively reflect on lessons to be drawn from the events for the development of human learning. The exercise resulted in a thought-provoking collection of short essays by scholars, thinkers and practitioners from around the world. It was first published on the LDI Web site and later also brought out in print in a collaborative effort between LDI and its partner CIRET, the Centre International de Recherches et d'Etudes Transdisciplinaires in Paris, France.)
- ***Educational Technology Magazine - Special Issue.*** (The initiative to generate this publication was first suggested by Gordon Rowland of Ithaca College, now also a LDI fellow. It followed the presentation by Yusra Laila Visser and Jan Visser of the results of their Learning Stories Research at the International Conference of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology held in October 2001 in Denver, Colorado. The publication challenged authors and readers to think about learning in ways that transcend the boundaries of established educational practice in a variety of ways. It is being well received by the professional community.)
- ***V Reunión Nacional de Currículo para la Educación Superior: Escenarios para la Universidad del Siglo XXI.*** (This is another activity that emerged from earlier work. In February 2001, Jan Visser taught principles of instructional design to a group of faculty of the Universidad Central de Venezuela. The interest it generated resulted in an invitation to present a paper and conduct a workshop session during the following year's National Meeting on Higher Education Curriculum for the 21st Century held in February 2002 in Caracas. The occasion provided an important opportunity to position issues such as transdisciplinarity, problem-orientation and wisdom as key concepts for thinking through the nature of tomorrow's learning environment at the highest levels of academic accomplishment.)
- ***LDI collaboration with UNESCO on activities within Learntec 2002 - Global Forum on Learning Technology.*** (The collaboration with UNESCO in this area started a year earlier.

Its success led to the invitation to participate in the 2002 event, held in February 2002 in Karlsruhe, Germany, as well. Like the year before, the expert meeting entrusted Jan Visser with the task to draft the Rapporteur-General's report. Not only is this a high and prestigious responsibility, it also provided an opportunity to highlight relevant emphases that are important for the development of technology enhanced learning. Visser's scientific contribution to the Global Forum on Learning Technology was selected to serve as a starter for the discussions that followed.)

- ***Workshop at International Conference of Association for Educational Communications and Technology.*** (This workshop was proposed to the AECT and organized and facilitated by Jan Visser, Yusra Laila Visser and David Solomon. The latter is Creative Director at PentaMark Worldwide in Troy, Michigan, in addition to being a fellow of the Learning Development Institute. The three-day workshop, which focused on the reinvention of learning, took place in November 2001. It was well attended, particularly considering that it fully coincided with almost the entire conference program. The successful implementation of the workshop leveraged further LDI's status as a preferred contributor to the development of AECT's professional community, a status that is now well recognized by the AECT leadership and its members.)
- ***Increasing Human Potential - Review of Research Proposal of Santa Fe Institute Consortium.*** (Resulting from an earlier stay as Resident Researcher at the Santa Fe Institute, NM [October/November, 2000; see previous Annual Report], during which a clear collaborative interest started to develop to study human learning in the transdisciplinary perspective that drives the research programs at SFI, Jan Visser was asked a year later to be one of the reviewers of a proposal for a large scale research effort by a consortium involving the Santa Fe Institute focusing on the functioning of the brain in infants and adolescents during crucial periods of the development of their learning behavior.)
- ***Instructional Design in an International Setting.*** (This is an example of online collaboration between the Learning Development Institute and the University of Southern Alabama. The latter invited LDI President Jan Visser to be their online guest in a graduate course on instructional design taught at a distance during the Fall term of 2001. The

developing dialogue among students and facilitator/online guest was an interesting and useful exercise for all parties concerned to explore and create new meanings of learning. Following the event, Visser wrote a short piece on “Designing in a melting pot” for the December 2001 issue of *The Link*, the newsletter of the Online Learning Laboratory of the University of South Alabama.)

- ***International Symposium on Learning Communities - Fòrum Universal de las Culturas - Barcelona 2004.***

(The city of Barcelona in Spain is in the process of preparing a major event, the Universal Forum of Cultures – Barcelona 2004, to celebrate humanity’s rich cultural diversity. In October 2001 it invited international experts, among which LDI’s Jan Visser, to shed their light on the issue of creating communities of learning.



Evolving dialogue about learning communities at the international symposium in Barcelona, Spain, in October 2001

Visser’s paper on *Learning communities: Wholeness and partness, autonomy and dependence in the learning ecology* was selected as one of the three keynotes. Further collaboration with the organizers of the Universal Forum of Cultures – Barcelona 2004 is likely to ensue.)

- ***La Reinención de la Educación Superior en un Mundo en Cambio*** (Workshops for



Lya Visser facilitating a group session on motivational communication in distance education at the September 2001 ANUIES workshop in Mexico City

ANUIES, the Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior in Mexico, are a spin-off of the close relationship between LDI and the University of Guadalajara, which dates back to December 1999. This year’s was the second occasion we collaborated with ANUIES’s Dirección de Educación

Continua to help build human capacity for the improvement of Mexico's higher education system. In September 2001, Lya Visser, a professor at Nova Southeastern University and fellow of LDI as well as LDI President Jan Visser, conducted workshops on respectively "El Papel de la Motivación y de Comunicacion en el Proceso de Cambio en la Educación a Distancia" and "La Reinención de la Educación Superior en un Mundo en Cambio." The experience with workshops like these is now becoming the basis for the development in LDI of a specific area of work dedicated to the building of human competence to foster improved practices of learning facilitation.)

- ***Nova Southeastern University - Summer Institute, Instructional Technology and Distance Education programs.*** (Collaboration with Nova Southeastern University has been an ongoing event since almost the inception of LDI. Contributions were made to several Summer Institutes organized by NSU as well as to training of students in the area of instructional design. In July 2001, NSU's Summer Institute for the Instructional Technology and Distance Education programs counted with LDI's participation and professional input in a four-day workshop on "Learning: The disposition for dialogue in a world of change" in addition to a panel discussion, organized and facilitated by LDI, on "Changing learning – learning to change," involving, among other individuals, NSU President Ray Ferrero.)

- ***Rencontres de Versailles 2001.*** (The Chateau de Versailles was the setting in June 2001 for the World Cultural Summit inspired by the theme "Great Regions of the World and Globalization: Historical memory/ learning/ power/religions." LDI President Jan Visser was among the invitees as a contributor to the debate on "Historical memory and knowledge: New pedagogies resulting from new information technologies.")



Rencontres de Versailles, June 2001

CONCLUDING REMARK

As the above description of select activities shows, the documented results of two years of the Institute's work are testimony to LDI's resilience in responding to the challenges afforded by the environment in which it works. At the time the Institute started its work in early 2000 it was far from clear that within any foreseeable timeframe it would be possible to come to such a conclusion. It is gratifying to be able to do so now.

Tallahassee, Florida, June 18, 2002.

Jan Visser
President