

# BOOK REVIEW

**Lifelong Learning for Capability.** By Leonard Cairns and Margaret Malloch (2024), 150 pages. ISBN: 978-3-031-68239-1 (print), Cham: Springer. \$179.99 (hardcover)

In *Lifelong Learning for Capability*, Cairns and Malloch present a compelling and timely exploration of human learning with a central focus on capability. The book offers a significant reconsideration of the purpose, theories, models, and approaches to human learning, set against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving and unpredictable world that influences formal educational settings and informal learning experiences. A core question underpins the book: *Why do humans learn?* The authors' answer, grounded in humanistic and existential basis, is *Learning to Be*. This idea is further clarified throughout the book, culminating in proposing two notable frameworks: the Four-Dimensional Learner and the Capability Learning Model. These frameworks may provide a roadmap for developing competent and capable individuals in an unpredictable future.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 lay the groundwork for the book's central arguments. In Chapter 1, the authors define human learning as "a process of change in an individual or group through active interaction with their surrounding environment" (p. 5), emphasizing it as a holistic, purposive, and social activity. This is followed by a review of several psychological theories related to motivation, needs, meaning searching, and awareness. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed and critical examination of learning theories from historical, philosophical and psychological perspectives. Chapter 3 focuses on human learning issues, including consciousness, places, metaphors, neuroscience, artificial intelligence (AI), and pedagogy. These issues are interconnected and deeply relevant to the ontological and technological changes shaping the twenty-first century.

Chapters 4 and 5 introduce and elaborate on the book's central ideas. Chapter 4 discusses the dimensionality of the learner as "an active holistic being" (p. 56). Deriving from the concepts of *Capable Learner* and *Capable Society*, the authors propose the Four-Dimensional Learner, which consists of four dimensions: Lifelong (temporal), Lifewide (breadth), Lifedep (depth), and Lifetech (technological). Notably, the newly introduced fourth dimension of Lifetech, is considered essential for empowering learners to function effectively in this era of technology explosion—marked by developments in machine learning, AI, and the Metaverse—or the so-called emerging Industrial Revolutions 6.0, which seeks deep integration of humans and technology, challenging human being and learning in our foreseeable future.

Chapter 5 delves into the distinction between *Competence* and *Capability*. The former focuses on measurable skills acquired by an individual. At the same time, capability is a more holistic concept of both current competence and future actions dealing with unpredictable and unfamiliar learning contexts. Therefore, capability means far more than independent cognitive skills; it has three basic elements: Ability, Self-efficacy, and (societal) Values. The book's core argument, the Capability Learning Model, is presented in a two-dimensional diagram (p. 90). In this diagram, the horizontal axe represents learning contexts, and the vertical axe represents learning tasks ranging from familiar to unfamiliar, thus creating four ideal-type positions of capability. Among these, the 'Z Zone' (independent capability) is crucial, as individuals have to deal with uncertain problems in unfamiliar contexts, becoming self-efficacious capable learners who move beyond the competence approach of passive acquisition of dependent knowledge.

Chapters 6 and 7 contribute to lifelong learning in formal and informal places, respectively. Chapter 6 focuses on learning in formal places, tracing the meaning of "schooling", "education", and "curriculum", all of which have undergone substantial transformation since the early modern era, from

Pestalozzi and Lancaster, to contemporary critical perspectives on formal education, particularly the works of Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire. Chapter 7 explores lifelong learning outside formal institutions, introducing the PROUT model (PRO from “process” and OUT from “outcome”), which critiques the dichotomy of learning as a process that results in a product. Instead, the authors contend that *learning to Be* encompasses an embodied, self-directed process that dynamically interacts with the surrounding environment, in which the process and outcomes are fundamentally interconnected.

In the final chapter, Chapter 8, Cairns and Malloch reclaim their vision to develop capable learners in a capable society with their proposals to rethink and restructure human learning. Moreover, the authors present two suggestions for implementation: (1) The lifelong individual learning account, funded publicly by the government and privately by parents and employers, to support and invest in individual learning throughout their lives. (2) The development of local educators, whose duty is to empower adolescents by organizing small clusters of adolescent students in their neighbourhoods, guiding their learning, career planning, and decision-making in a student-centred and problem-centred manner.

To sum up, *Lifelong Learning for Capability* contributes to rethinking human learning from the capability perspective. Cairns and Malloch provide insights from both theoretical innovation and practical experience. Their interdisciplinary analysis, which combines perspectives from philosophy and psychology, makes their arguments comprehensive and convincing. The two frameworks proposed—the Four-Dimensional Learner and the Capability Learning Model—highlight a central, though implicit, theme of the book: a future-oriented approach to human learning that empowers learners to be resilient and adaptive to changes across time and space. The authors’ focus on these topics and their straightforward writing style make the book both engaging and accessible.

However, several points warrant further consideration. First, the two-dimensional Capability Learning Model may need elaboration, as its potential oversimplification limits its ability to fully represent the complexity of human learning and the multifaceted nature of capability development, including social interactions, cultural backgrounds, and emotional and environmental conditions. Second, while the work addresses technological advancements and their impact on learning, it does not deeply explore broader societal challenges such as gender inequality, access to resources, political conservatism and populism, and international oppression and injustice. A more critical examination of these issues is called for further development of the *Capable Learner* concept.

In conclusion, as the 34th volume in Springer’s “Lifelong Learning Book Series,” which began in 2004, this book offers fresh perspectives on a topic of universal importance. Lifelong learning remains a universal value advocated across nations and international organizations. This relatively slim book, as the authors admit, “is evolutionary rather than revolutionary” (p. xi). Still, its unique focus on capability may contribute meaningfully to realising a lifelong learning future.

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