



**European Educational Research Journal**  
**Open Call for papers**

**21st Century skills: designing learning environments  
to reach dispositional learning outcomes?**

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by August 31, 2017**

The European Commission (EC) is arguing that, with a view to full citizenship, education can no longer restrict its goals to well-defined, easily operationalized learning outcomes. Rather, education is challenged to prepare students for complexity, unpredictability, engagement and constant change. On one of the sites of the EC (<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/competence-frameworks-european-approach-teach-and-learn-21st-century-skills>) one can read the following: “On 10 June 2016, the Commission adopted a new and comprehensive Skills Agenda for Europe. The aim is to ensure that people develop a broad set of skills from early on in life and to make the most of Europe’s human capital, which will ultimately boost employability, competitiveness and growth in Europe. Critical thinking, entrepreneurship, problem solving or digital competences are just some of the competences enshrined by the New Skills Agenda. These skills emerge today as key to allow people to develop good-quality jobs and fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. But how can these new skills and competences be described and acquired?”

Setting aside possible critical comments on the orientation of this Skills Agenda and the supposedly novel character of the proposed skills and competences, from the perspective of designing learning environments and assessing learning outcomes, the statement is both troublesome and challenging. Troublesome, because a confusing use is made of notions such as ‘skills’ and ‘competences’; challenging, because the statement calls for a reflection on how the ‘skills and competences’ can be conceptualized, their development can be stimulated and evolutions can be assessed.

The call from the EC refers to one of the basic issues in education: how to design learning environments inducing the development of learning outcomes that

- (a) are regarded as extremely important by different stakeholders both within and across disciplines
- (b) are complex, being composed of different elements that continuously interact
- (c) have a motivational / attitudinal component in addition to a cognitive component
- (d) cannot be fully specified in advance (although manifestations can be recognized post hoc)

For the sake of terminological clarity this type of learning outcomes are referred to as 'dispositional learning outcomes'. In line with the triadic theory of Perkins and colleagues (2000)<sup>1</sup>on thinking dispositions, this type of learning outcomes have several components: an ability (the possibility to act in a specific way), a sensitivity (a feeling for when the ability can be enacted), and an inclination component (a willingness to act).

This special issue aims at establishing the state of the art of our understanding of whether and how the development of such dispositional learning outcomes can be adequately supported and assessed. It aims at bringing together research – conceptual and/or empirical – that helps to comprehend the conditions that might favor / restrain the realization of this ambition. This research may address the nature and relevance of dispositional learning outcomes, the assessment of dispositional learning outcomes, core elements of learning environments that support the development of dispositional learning outcomes, and how these elements (interactively) can be said to be effective (for different types of students). Of special interest are contributions that reveal how such assessment approaches and/or learning environments can be designed with a view to making them broadly applicable and sustainable.

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, D., Tishman, S., Ritchhart, R., Donnis, K., & Andrade, A. (2000). Intelligence in the wild: A dispositional view of intellectual traits. *Educational Psychology Review*, 12(3), 269-293.