

## **EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP: A PROPOSAL FOR TRANSFORMATION, AN EXPERIENCE OF (CO)SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN POLYTECHNIC HIGHER EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract**

Education, Citizenship and Development are currently inseparable concepts. Educating for global citizenship is inevitably a responsibility to be assumed in the development of educational practices, especially in Higher Education Institutions that train education professionals. According to Óscar Jara (2016), the contemporary scene is a time and space of multiple changes that prompt questioning about the kind of educational processes we want to foster: those that enable adaptation to change(s), while simultaneously allowing the generation of transformative capacities in those who participate, towards the type of society we aspire to. In the context of modern societies that aim to be open and democratic, HEIs must fully embrace these concerns as a civic and social responsibility that characterizes them, based on the reality that surrounds them. They should demonstrate willingness and commitment to finding solutions to identified problems and be concerned about their impact in favor of a more developed, humane, and supportive society. The ESE/IPSantarém has been on a journey of reflection, action, and research in building a course of action that seeks to adopt and consolidate perspectives and practices that are simultaneously reflective, formative, interventionist, and investigative around Education, Development, and Global Citizenship in Higher Education, particularly in Polytechnic institutions. In this process, we identify a cross-cutting investment in developing actions, projects, and partnerships that involve this mission, within a civic and supportive culture that promotes relationships with communities, social responsibility, and awareness for lifelong learning from a global citizenship perspective. Here, we will share the main objectives and proposals under development in this context, the implications for formative and institutional practices, as well as the new challenges and strategies that have been emerging.

**Keywords:** *Education, development, global citizenship, social responsibility.*

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### **1. The mission of higher education, the role of social responsibility and ED/ECG**

This perspective highlights the central role of education systems and all training agents and contexts for social integration and fulfilment and emphasises the centrality of knowledge and the human factor in the face of various vulnerabilities, risks and social fractures in terms of the knowledge acquired in different contexts, the weight of professional and economic logics, the exclusive responsibility of the individual; motivation for learning; or the relationship between levels of schooling, lifelong learning and the reproduction of inequalities. This role seems to correspond to one of the vocations of higher education's mission to overcome the risks of inequality and extreme exclusion by reducing the gap between those who have these opportunities and those who don't (Alves, 2015, 2016): the consolidation of a broad, comprehensive and civic education, suitable for active intervention in professional and social integration contexts, and the possibility of transforming the surrounding conditions. Confronting these challenges is an important contribution to reconfiguring the development of training, profiles and the most appropriate training practices, with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) playing a crucial role in sharing, analysing and systematising these experiences, models and assumptions (Raposo & others, 2022).

This approach has mobilised us to problematise education, knowledge and lifelong learning itself, given the need to continue questioning the development of the school institution, education systems and learning processes, given the difficulty of integrating social changes (Teixeira, 2021).

Within the framework of modern societies that want to be open and democratic, HEIs must assume their civic and social responsibility, showing themselves to be available and committed to finding solutions to the problems identified, as well as concerned about their impact in favour of a more developed, humane, inclusive and supportive society. Education for Development and Global Citizenship (ED/ECG) presents a way(s) to promote learning processes that allow for collaborative reflection and action on reality, transforming it based on its problems.

Looking at higher education as a space and time in which future professionals are trained - including education professionals - the construction of knowledge that favours the possibilities of developing critical thinking will be a fundamental asset of HEIs (Boni & Walker, 2016). For some, professional learning will be a process that accompanies lifelong learning, involving, in addition to knowledge and skills in a specific field and the ability to reflect on professional contexts, self-knowledge and the ability to define personal and social projects in a given context (Alves, 2015, 2016 cited by Teixeira, 2021). Faced with the challenges of contemporary times, which call for educational processes to be questioned, HEIs themselves are increasingly challenged to reflect on the type of educational practices they develop and the extent to which they contribute to the development of capacities for transformation and change in all those who participate in them (Jara, 2016). The confrontation with this and other challenges in some training profiles, particularly in the field of education, has contributed to the call for a commitment to the development of people and care in the relationship with others. This approach presupposes, encourages and enables training and intervention processes based on a critical reading and social involvement in contexts and problems, prioritising the relationship with people and the values that move them from a perspective of active and global citizenship. In higher education learning contexts and processes, these assumptions have inspired curricular concepts based on promoting autonomous, reflective and investigative learning, while simultaneously fuelling change in the subjects themselves, as subjects who are available for learning and for discovering other capacities or possibilities (Ganpatsingh, 2019; Teixeira, 2021). Jara (2016) states that all forms of education that take on a cultural and political content contain within them a way of thinking and feeling that gives them an intellectual and moral direction at the same time. By proposing an ethical framework for learning processes in schools, both classroom and non-classroom, GCED thus finds a fundamental (and viable) place in HEIs.

In turn, the dynamics of the social responsibility of organisations, particularly HEIs, have become increasingly important. Today, it is a mandatory requirement for a 21st century organisation to take care of the impacts caused by its existence, maximising the positive ones and cancelling out the negative ones as far as possible. In this way, each organisation is called upon to realise its effective commitment to the community it serves (ORSIES, 2018).

Social responsibility emerges as a fundamental pillar in the context of polytechnic higher education, especially when aligned with the quest for transformative and inclusive education. From this perspective, the integration of (co-)social responsibility actions and projects becomes not just an option, but an imperative necessity. This approach, focused on the interconnection between education, development and global citizenship, aims not only to train students with solid academic knowledge, but also to equip them with a critical awareness and sensitivity to contemporary social challenges. Thus, the experience of (co)social responsibility in the context of polytechnic higher education is not restricted to the classroom, but extends beyond the walls of the institution, actively contributing to the construction of a more just, supportive and aware society.

Responsibility for the impact of one's actions and choices can be a driver of learning. Placing sustainability and democracy as the horizon for lifelong learning implies that learning processes, limited, specific, local and contextual (as they always are), are recognised as part of a broad social unit and, therefore, a new societal agenda focused on sustainability and democratisation is a permanent learning agenda that allows society to change (Raposo & Mesquita, 2018).

Strengthening DE/GCE in Higher Education means fully embracing all of its dimensions: Pedagogical - an active learning process; Political - aimed at social transformation, based on permanent critical self-reflexivity; Ethical - based on specific principles and values: solidarity, equity, justice, inclusion; Collaborative - based on sharing experiences and building knowledge together, and desirably so. We see ED/GCE as a training process for this transformative education which, through an in-depth approach to current issues, becomes an instrument for societal change and transformation. Since GCED is in itself a process of transformative education, we believe that it is possible to develop processes that address and deepen the problems of today and their relational complexity, thus placing education as an instrument of global social transformation, contributing to the construction of a world where justice, equity and solidarity are effectively the pillars of society(ies) (Coelho et al., 2020; Raposo et al., 2022).

## **2. The Transforming schools project and the ED/ECG Learning Centre at ESE-IPSantarém**

The Transforming Schools Project - promoted by the Gonçalo da Silveira Foundation and funded by the Camões IP Institute - has been strengthening Development Education as a space for critical reflection and social transformation, based on collaboration with and between HEIs, namely the Higher Education Schools (ESE) of Santarém, Viana do Castelo and Bragança and the Polytechnic Institute of Beja. Through this project, it has been possible to implement processes for the structural and institutional integration of ED/ECG within the higher education institutions involved, making it possible to strengthen their commitment not only in the curricular spaces, but throughout the structure of the ESEs, by: i. strengthening the dynamics of ED/ECG in the ESEs/IPs and their relationship with the territories; ii. creating centres for collaborative work in ED/ECG and iii. promoting opportunities for dissemination, sharing and discussion on ED/ECG. We will try to share the main objectives and proposals under development, the implications for training and institutional practices, as well as the new challenges and strategies that have been emerging.

Currently in its 3rd edition (September 2023 to August 2026), the Project aims to deepen the transformative role of Higher Education through the integration of ED/ECG in the co-construction of knowledge and the involvement of educational communities, proposing to continue to contribute to ESE/IP being part of the construction of a culture of care, solidarity and social justice. Bringing together the complementarities of curricular and institutional integration of ED/ECG and crossing all its potentialities, we assume the centrality of higher education in the integral formation of citizens. This intersection will make it possible to strengthen its commitment to DE in curricular, institutional and community spaces.

The first edition (2018-2020) was based on the need identified by the organising team to introduce Development Education more intentionally in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which is why the assumption was made from the outset that schools play an essential role in social transformation, both in the daily life of local territories and for all their potential for transformation, reflection and action at a global level, based on the ethical proposal and principles of action inherent in Development Education/Education for Global Citizenship (ED/ECG).

From the lessons learnt as a result of the collaborative work carried out, it became clear that the project's continuity should go beyond integrating DE into the curricular units of higher education courses and into teaching spaces, as had been envisaged and achieved in the first edition. Considering that social transformation has an implicit political dimension, it also seemed obvious to focus on the institutional integration of DE in higher education beyond teaching spaces, i.e. in a more transversal and structural way. It was in this context that the ED/ECG learning centres emerged in each of the partner HEIs, created in the 2nd edition (2020-2023) and being consolidated in the 3rd (2023-2026).

At ESE-IPSantarém, the ED/ECG Learning Centre includes lecturers from various courses, non-teaching staff and students, and since its creation, it has promoted relations with existing structures at ESE and the Institute. It is housed in the Pedagogical Support Centre and is transversally involved in various actions with the Social Responsibility Office, constituting a collaborative work group that provides answers to the needs of the educational community. It has been possible to create resources and opportunities for disseminating, sharing and discussing ED/ECG with the creation of a physical space for the centre at CAP, integrating mainly bibliographic, documentary and pedagogical resources - methodologies and content. Various actions have been promoted and/or realised in collaboration with some CUs from different courses: CU Social Diversity and Interculturality (Degree in Social Education); CU Global Citizenship (Degree in Multimedia Production in Education). Particularly important has been the collaboration with the Social Education Degree's Internship CU, through which the students themselves have been collaboratively building and implementing intervention projects based on the Centre and the diagnosis of needs that have been identified.

In short, it's a journey of awareness, decision-making and collaborative action, driven by concrete questions that are problematised and lead to processes of training-research-action: What is the role of HEIs in reading and responding to the challenges that society faces on a daily basis, in its complexity and constant change? How do the people who work in HEIs position themselves in the face of the problems of their communities and the world? How can participatory and collaborative processes be included in the training of educational agents?

## **3. Some results, challenges and concluding remarks**

Is it possible, in the organisational context, to find spaces (institutional, curricular and transversal) that promote and validate horizontal relationships and collaboration between peers in identifying problems and proposing solutions?

Is it possible to develop processes that address and deepen the problems of today and their relational complexity, thus placing education as an instrument of global social transformation that

contributes to minimising the problems linked to justice, equity, solidarity that are felt today and to the progressive construction of a better society?

In fact, the conviction and experience of this project point to ED/ECG itself as an instrument of change that affirms itself in the construction of a just, equitable and supportive society, in other words, in social transformation.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight some actions, results and challenges that could give meaning to these issues.

By way of example, we'll share one of the most recent projects, which has been promoted by students developing their internship project in the area of Social Education and who have carried out some of the most recent activities. This was the "Let's Start The Change" project, which set itself the following specific objectives: To contribute to the integration of ESD in an institutional context; to promote information and knowledge of ESD issues and projects; to develop and value the development of global citizenship skills in higher education; and to facilitate global citizenship attitudes and skills.

The activities included:

- Podcast "Let's Talk About", bringing together a set of interviews and themes previously identified with students ("EDCG Concept and Nucleus"; "Entering the labour market"; "Professional experience and practice"; "Transforming Schools"; "The ESES+ Programme and active citizenship"; "Ubuntu"; Valuing the roles of non-teaching staff");
- Workshops with students in collaboration with the UC: "Political Literacy and Citizenship"; "Sustainable Practices"; "Financial Literacy";
- Group dynamics, also in collaboration with the UC: "Day in Nature"; "Active Citizenship"; "Culturality"; "Empathy, respect and dialogue"; "Come and Relax";
- Mural of suggestions and opinions, to involve ESES students and give them a voice.

In terms of results, the National Meetings between Nuclei from the different Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the extended team meetings or the meetings of each nucleus, have continually allowed the evaluative systematisation of the main learnings:

- The integration of contributions in the students' formative, personal and professional development process and in the preparation for active citizenship.
- The opportunity to adjust training and teaching practices with the students themselves;
- Valuing the impact of transformative actions;
- Awareness of and commitment to the ethical and political dimension of action;
- The confrontation, sharing and questioning of other perspectives and experiences in other contexts and the learning that takes place through relationships.

The challenges identified are diverse, but they continue to be an ingredient for the continuity of the process, with difficulties or constraints that have been with us since the beginning, but which are being reconfigured: resources (time, people and financial); visibility among students and their wider participation; the need for permanent (re)conceptualisation, both because of the complexity of the processes and issues, and because of the inter/transdisciplinarity that requires the participation and involvement of actors from different educational backgrounds or disciplinary areas.

The various actions have given rise to transformative processes and learning (considering the assumptions of the conceptions we've been sharing here about ED/ECG and transformation), of which we would highlight: the first edition of the Project; the National Meetings, the Training of Educational Agents actions; and the appropriation of the Commemoration of the Day of the Santarém School of Education as a day of reflection/training/promotion of ED/ECG.

In this phase of the project (3rd edition), one of the focuses has been to continue to deepen the reflection on the pedagogical intentionality in the learning processes that we intend to propose: a transformative intentionality that allows us to think about any problem in the sense of social transformation. It's about building a democratic school/institution that proposes the transformation of power relations and human coexistence, that generates concrete capacities for intervention (thinking, questioning, creating) and new possibilities; that is geared towards the realisation of a collective utopia and that makes dialogue between knowledges operational.

The challenge that emerges is also to bring the voice and action of the community outside the HEIs into this intentionality and critical, democratic and transformative practice, with greater visibility and a more active role, boosting this extension with the community from an ED/ECG perspective, which leads us to bring the founding questions of our perspective on ED/ECG back into thought and action: how do HEIs relate to the community in a pedagogical, political, ethical and collaborative way?

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