
FOOTPRINT ARTICLE 3

Challenges for emancipatory education in 2014... seen from 2020



Welcome to the *5th Conference on Development Education (DE)* hosted this year, in 2020, by our colleagues at the Hegoa organisation in Vitoria-Gasteiz. It is a pleasure to see so many familiar faces here today, friends and colleagues that meet up from time to time to debate, discuss and explore new possibilities in our field of work. Others, who have not been able to attend, are maybe tied up with new initiatives. We will no doubt be asking after them, since remembering them and keeping them present in our thoughts helps us to keep pushing on.

We probably all look to the past with a touch of nostalgia. No doubt you will have heard the old "it wasn't like this back in..." and some of us have a long past to look back over! During the more relaxed moments of this event, lunches and dinners, even the odd dance, we will surely want to catch up on all that has changed since the last Conference in 2014². Back then, we faced a number of challenges, which could be taken on by NGOs, social movements, education centres, academia, public institutions, etc. If memory serves, these challenges were discussed in terms of the following ideas, in no particular order of importance.

Challenge 1: The redefinition of DE and Cooperation

It was time to move on, basing our approach on pairing together Cooperation (in the South) and DE (in the North). The context had changed and we were able to fully appreciate something we already knew to be true: the dominant, neo-liberal, heteronormative and ethnocentric model affected people and communities in both the North and the South. As such, we had to redefine what we had been doing up to that point, thinking of global strategies that took on different forms depending on each context and place.

¹ **INCYDE**, Cooperation and Development Initiatives, a small cooperative society dedicated to social initiatives, was set up by Esther Canarias Fernández-Cavada and Fernando Altamira Basterretxea. They began providing social consultancy services in 2000, facilitating institution-building processes through training sessions and consultations on assessment, systematisation, strategic planning, diagnosis, generation of strategic knowledge and advice on methodology and organisational wellbeing. The central theme of its work is to contribute to the empowerment of people and institutions seeking to promote human, sustainable, equalitarian and inclusive development.
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² The reports from the working groups at the 4th Conference can be downloaded from the following link: <http://www.congresoed.org/post-congreso/>

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It was vital to identify the up until then invisible links that existed between the different realities and movements that were cropping up all over the world, proposing alternatives to this dominant model. Although we knew that each context was different and that not everyone was affected by this dominant model in the way same.

Along this path, we moved away from a vision of "weighing up cases of oppression and exclusion" towards an intersectional approach, where social class, race and gender are three fundamental and interrelated categories³, among others, which help us to better analyse each individual context and ensure our work has a bigger impact on changing realities.

As such, we also revised the terms Cooperation, DE and Education for Global Citizenship. We began to envisage emancipatory processes in the Global North and the South. Not an emancipation guided by a select few, convinced of the path this process should take, but rather a collective emancipation where we all search, test, try, act, unlearn and learn together.

Challenge 2: Participation and processes

We looked beyond specific projects and continued prioritising processes, processes that complement each other and actively involve the Global North and South. We believed that a range of methods could be used to carry out this work, including:

Systematisation, which allowed us to create new knowledge and, in some cases, new theories based on the practices carried out, with input from those directly involved in these activities. It was thought of as a research method that could help us to build a greater number of more grounded arguments to intervene in the areas in which we worked⁴.

³ "An intersectional approach is not a simple balancing act: it focuses on the convergence of factors of exclusion that are reinforced when they manifest in certain bodies, spaces and representations. These factors of exclusion appear in all aspects of life whenever a subject is constructed and they include, among others: forms of marginalisation, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, lesbophobia, transphobia, restrictions based on physical, intellectual or mental capacity, migrant status, social class or national or ethnic origin. BERNÁ, D.: *Cartografías desde los Márgenes. Gitanos gays en el estado español* (p. 218) en PLATERO R. (L.) (Ed.) (2012): *Intersecciones: cuerpos y sexualidades en la encrucijada*. Bellaterra. Barcelona.

⁴ CANARIAS, E. Y ALTAMIRA, F. *La Sistematización: una experiencia para generar nuevas realidades en* PASTORIZA, J. L. (Ed.) (2014): *Educar para a Cidadanía Global. Experiencias, ferramentas e discursos para o cambio social*. Vigo: Fundación Isla Couto.

https://iniciativasdecooperacionydesarrollo.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/educar-para-a-cidadanc3ada-global_fundacionislaquito_2014.pdf

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Strategic planning, which helped us to envisage the new scenarios in which we want to act. It seemed that this method no longer made sense as the societies we lived in were constantly changing. However, this strategic outlook allowed us to go beyond the immediate context, giving meaning and coherence to each practice.

Evaluation, more than just a critical assessment, helped us to understand our progress, whether through the limitations or the potential of the work carried out.

When launching the methods, either these three or different ones, we thought it was vital that the people involved participated from the very beginning, since they posed the first questions about the process. This dialogue among different parties allowed us to establish links between different dialogues, something Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls "knowledge ecology"⁵, putting everyone on an equal footing, rebalancing asymmetrical relationships between technicians, politicians, academics... and everyone else.

In order to develop these processes, we thought that public institutions needed to be involved to ensure that regulations and standards were modified to support this work. We knew that some institutions might be unwilling to accept these more open and dynamic proposals. In this case, when we came across uninterested, closed, static, controlling and critical institutions, we joined forces with other social movements to affect and promote change. This was all possible when instead of fighting on a sector-by-sector basis; we adopted a more global vision, where one social movement's fight is taken up by all the rest.

Challenge 3: Building collaborative action on the streets

Another challenge that we identified back in 2014 was the need to get out on the streets, to recover a space that NGOs should have never forgotten. We believed it was the ideal place to meet as equals with other social movements and people we worked with⁶, where it was natural to interact with a whole range of people, creating strong networks and alliances based on shared interests.

For years, we had been restricted by the design of projects created in offices. People often found, with certain frustration, that they were living a double life: as political agents in their free time, moving in politically charged circles, while at work in NGOs they played the role of technical staff, removed from these social processes.

⁵ DE SOUSA SANTOS, B. (2010): *Refundación del Estado en América latina. Perspectivas desde una epistemología del Sur*. Quito: Abya-Yala (pp. 56-59).

⁶ CANARIAS, E. Y ALTAMIRA, F. *¿Tenemos miedo a rozar las estrellas con la punta de los dedos?* en BERASALUZE A. Y OVEJAS M.R. (coords.) (2011) *IV Jornada de Trabajo Social: Más allá de la dependencia*. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco.

<http://iniciativasdecooperacionydesarrollo.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/trabajo-social-articulo.pdf>

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We realised that these two spaces needed to be reconciled and that we needed to recover our politically active role, through NGOs and structures that facilitated and strengthened this aim.

As such, we decided to position ourselves here, in marginalised communities, alongside those who suffer the consequences of the dominant model on a daily basis, which also included all of us. We discovered that, from our experiences and closeness to other realities in the Global South, we could share a vision, analysis, links and strategies for action with people from different places looking to create global alternatives based on solidarity and justice.

Challenge 4: Genders

In the years leading up to 2014, we had made significant progress in incorporating Gender into our processes. However, we realised that producing global proposals between the North and the South and with a gender-based perspective was still a significant challenge.

The advances that the feminist movement had been proposing for some time helped us to open new horizons. The dominant model was heteropatriarchal and manifested in thousands of different guises, excluding everyone who did not fit the normative model. These people included, among many others, people with minority sexualities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans⁷ and intersexed (LGBTI), whose rights were being violated all over the world.

At the time, we began to realise that desire, sex, sexuality and gender are very diverse concepts and that we had not done enough to incorporate these different categories into our educational and social work. As such, since the last DE Conference, we have incorporated Genders into our proposals, building partnerships and networks with new political agents in the Global North and South⁸.

⁷ Transexual, transgender, transvestite.

⁸ "From our point of view, citizenship includes, among other things, the right to choose and to make decisions relating to sex and gender, the way in which each individual and community wishes to interpret these concepts based on their own opinions. As such, we are not just talking about LGTTBI citizens but about the freedom to choose and envisage other ways of experiencing sexuality and feelings of those who have yet to define their sexual identity, as well as the freedom of all other people to make these choices. "Libre y conscientemente" AA.VV. (2013): *Los deseos olvidados. La perspectiva de género y de diversidad sexual en la Cooperación al Desarrollo, en la Educación para la Ciudadanía global y en la promoción y defensa de los DDHH de las personas migrantes y refugiadas*. Bilbao: Nahia (p. 9).

<http://iniciativasdecooperacionydesarrollo.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/nahia-los-deseos-olvidados.pdf>

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Challenge 5: Social transformation

We realised that caring for people, for each and every individual, was a fundamental part of transformational educational processes. Yet we were also aware that this care needed to include a social and collective dimension, promoting processes of building and strengthening political agency.

The social transformation that we wanted to encourage could be defined as somewhere between the individual and the collective, moving beyond the postmodern concept of individual self.

This is why, in our educational processes, we tried to understand and conceptualise what was going on in these multi-sided realities. Yet we were also careful to not neglect other matters, which were equally necessary to bring about this change, such as feelings, subjectivities, desires... the way in which each individual experiences these realities. We created group dialogues around these experiences, giving them a social and global dimension.

Challenge 6: Emancipation of NGOs

The systematic crisis that had such drastic consequences in countries in both the North and the South gave rise to new, fresh, dynamic, alternative and bold forms of organisation. Some NGOs managed to step up to this new challenge, although in no way naively, by looking to other more horizontal organisational models and by redefining traditional power relationships. Spaces were made for greater participation and access to decision making, in collaboration with other people and organisations from the Global North and South.

The NGOs that introduced the key elements of emancipatory education into their working methods, making a concerted effort to recover their identity as a social movement, are those which managed to come up with new alternatives to the dominant model. These NGOs were able to evolve and create a new vision in such challenging times.

I am sure we have made great progress in some of these challenges, although others will still need a lot of work. And I am sure that those which seemed so important in the context of 2014 have now taken on a different significance. In any case, I wanted to share with you those which seemed most important at the time. These are not the only challenges we faced back in 2014, but rather those which, from our point of view, our selective and subjective memories, full of people, ideas and feelings, stand out from that Conference back in autumn 2014. The most important thing is to keep moving forwards. Step by step, hand in hand. ©