



ADDRESSING PEDAGOGICAL TENSIONS IN EMOTIONAL EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITY

An integrative path

ABORDANDO LAS TENSIONES PEDAGÓGICAS EN LA EDUCACIÓN EMOCIONAL EN LA UNIVERSIDAD
Un camino integrador

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ABSTRACT

As higher education teachers we undertook a self-study research focused on emotional education, during two school years. The analysis of the students' portfolios and the teachers' fieldnotes provide evidence to problematize some tensions and challenges identified along the process, namely for integrating personal, cultural and institutional dimensions, facing the unpredictability of a participative process and opening new paths. Students valued the work centred on their own goals, the building of a personal learning project in conjunction with a class collective project, the relational practices based on an ethics of care, the diversity of mindfulness and meditation proposals, amongst others.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Pedagogía de la educación superior
Educación emocional
Competencias emocionales
Ética
Meditación
Autoestudio
Enfoque integrador

RESUMEN

Como docentes de educación superior realizamos un autoestudio centrado en la educación emocional, durante dos años escolares. El análisis de portafolios de los estudiantes y de notas de campo de los docentes proporciona evidencias para problematizar algunas tensiones y desafíos identificados, como por ejemplo, integrar las dimensiones personal, cultural e institucional, enfrentando la imprevisibilidad de un proceso participativo y abriendo nuevos caminos. Los estudiantes valoraron el trabajo centrado en sus propias metas, la construcción de un proyecto personal de aprendizaje en conjunto con un proyecto colectivo de clase, las prácticas relacionales basadas en una ética del cuidado, la diversidad de propuestas de mindfulness y meditación, entre otras.

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1. Introducción

The main objective of this paper is to understand how emotional education can be integrated at university, balancing personal, cultural and institutional dimensions. Emotions are the gateway to work using an integrated approach with our students, future professionals of education. In the future, these students should be capable of addressing the needs of children and young people from a range of social settings, implement educational programs and work with multidisciplinary colleagues. This requires them to have emotional and social consciousness and know how to self-regulate and manage relationships. This is a work that goes beyond the personal and interpersonal dimension of emotions and seeks the development of a critical awareness of the society in which they live, through participation in broader social and institutional processes and opening up to cultural perspectives different from the dominant culture they belong to.

We promote a curriculum based on different theories instead of a singular theory, challenging students to experience different paths of emotional education. Also, each class is open to the unpredictable either concerning the personal, institutional, social and cultural environments of students, boosting those opportunities even further.

In the next sections we briefly present an emotional education framework of the study and its research methodology, including the fieldwork, method and data analysis. The content analysis and discussion is organized around three main questions: How to meet students' desire for emotional competencies improvement and incite new paths? How to introduce a cultural and affective dimension of emotions, namely in practices with roots in other cultures, integrating it in a distinct pedagogical and academic culture? How to articulate a collective project, integrating both the individual and the institutional demands? We conclude with final considerations about our questions and projections for future work.

1.1. Emotional education

Emotional and social competencies are acquired and developed over a lifetime, and it is important to integrate them in initial and continuing education (Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Mayer *et al.*, 2008; Weissberg *et al.*, 2015). They are relevant to interpersonal, intrapersonal and professional development, and have potential implications for both group and institutional climate and culture. Individuals, when confronted with a particular event, experience different emotions and that experience is multidimensional. At a biological level, emotions are innate, automated programs and established by the genome; but also susceptible to the influence of personality, culture and education, in terms of frequency, intensity, duration, expression, specific contents and situations. In a broader sense, de Rivera and Paez (2007) refer to the emotional climate as surpassing an individual emotional focus and integrating a social and cultural emotional dimension. Hence, emotions are understood as an individual, social and cultural phenomenon (Damásio, 2010).

Emotional education, for children and young people, has been identified as an asset in addressing problems such as school failure (Greenberg, 2010), drug abuse, eating disorders and antisocial behavior (Rêgo & Rocha, 2009) – bullying and cyberbullying (Caetano *et al.*, 2016), and mental health issues such as loneliness, sadness, depression and suicide (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2016). Some studies show that emotional training courses for young adults improve their levels of emotional competencies (Nelis *et al.*, 2011). Others identify that professionals of education, as our students will be, who have high levels of personal emotional competence can positively influence the negative thoughts and feelings of others, and are more prepared to manage conflicts (Gross, 2014; Valente, 2019), thereby supporting positive health and wellbeing within the school environment.

As teachers we need to take into consideration not only the results but also the process, in articulation with the theoretical frameworks which guided curricular organization. Goralska (2020) stresses two main discourses on emotional education: (i) technological-instrumental - that emphasize effectiveness of teaching and techniques in order to achieve fixed goals, coherent “with norms and standards current in a given culture” (p.113), also the development of knowledge, skills and behavioral competencies; (ii) humanistic-critical - that enhance contextualized socio-cultural emancipation, where “individuals build their emotional experience, which goes far behind their knowledge and skills” (p.115). Our approach is based on the latter one.

Therefore, as teachers, we looked for practices that would enable us to work with our students not only with the personal aspects of emotions and emotional competencies, but also with the social and cultural dimensions of emotions, whilst allowing the development of the students and recognising their position in the University institution. We draw on cultural practices based on an ethics of care, and an ethics of responsibility in relation to the other, inspired particularly by the philosophy of Levinas (2003), by conceptualizations of psychologists such as Gilligan (2008), and by various cultural traditions (e.g., Nhat Hanh, 2010).

Practices of meditation and mindfulness are also identified as supporting social and emotional learning (Carvalho *et al.*, 2016), and developing consciousness discourse and compassion (Gidley, 2009; Lau, 2009). These theories have inspired several traditions and educational programs (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Sumedho, 2012; Williams & Penman, 2015) that we bring to our classes for further development. We assume that:

change should be viewed as non-linear, as a rupture in ideas, as a way to shift ideas and practices in unpredictable, rhizomatic ways. Discourses circulate in unpredictable ways, in and out of global/local spaces and places; they don't move fast or with certain direction. Resistance, deterritorialization and reterritorialization occur constantly. (Bloch, 2013, p.77-78)

We give importance to the dynamic relationship between emotions and other dimensions, such as the contextual, the cognitive, and ethics. The emotional and ethical dimensions are identified as being linked closely and dynamically (Goleman *et al.*, 2019; Saarni, 2015). Ethical values, individual dispositions and ethical reflection have an impact on the competencies that are promoted socially, on how situations are experienced emotionally, and on how the emotional climates of groups and institutions are configured. But the reverse also happens, because emotions are constituents of our experiences of value and influence our ethical decisions (Lee & Selart, 2014). This is why we encourage teamwork, critical friends, rotated roles of mutual support and taking care.

Emotions are thus the gateway to work in an integral and integrative approach with our young students, future educational agents. A work that goes beyond the personal and interpersonal dimension of emotions and seeks the development of a critical awareness of the society in which they live, through participation in broader social and institutional processes and opening up to cultural perspectives different from the dominant culture they belong to.

Although we struggle for the introduction of a critical pedagogic approach, we feel constrained by students' expectations, by the institutional habitus and by the multiple emotional and ethical theories, with all their complexities. We embrace the challenge to develop the dialogue between different discourse communities, with a multi referential approach, and we assume, in accordance with the authors, that

it is not necessary for teachers to adopt an openly critical view of the content, since critical reflection will naturally emerge through the students' interactions", namely the interactions with diverse cultural frameworks and with institutional challenges that "introduce students to a phronetic process by forming a dialectic relationship between this knowledge and the apprentice [...] experience along with the disruptive aspects involved in this experience. (Hahn & Vignon, 2019, p.350)

2. Objectives

The two objectives of this research paper are to understand and critically analyze our pedagogical practices at university, and to discuss how emotional education can balance personal, cultural and institutional dimensions.

For this purpose we inquire three questions, which constitute three of our main challenges:

- How to meet students' desire for emotional competencies improvement and incite new paths?
- How to introduce a cultural and affective dimension of emotions, namely in practices with roots in other cultures, integrating it in a distinct pedagogical and academic culture?
- How to articulate a collective project, integrating both the individual and the institutional demands?

3. Research methodology

We, as authors and teachers of the Curricular Unit - *Emotional Competencies* (CU-EC), undertook a process of collaborative self-study (Akinbode, 2013; Koster & Berg, 2014; Loughran, 2009), to evolve the training process and develop knowledge about it (e.g., Caetano & Sobral, 2016; Caetano, Freire, & Sobral, 2018; Sobral & Caetano, 2020; Sobral & Caetano, 2021). As we were together during classes, we analyzed and reflected upon both what we experienced and planned.

We analyzed issues and dilemmas that arose within the training, looking critically at our own practice and conceptions which were influenced by the institutional context and the dynamics happening in the class/group, the reactions of students to both our and their proposals. So, this research paper is the result of a collaborative self-study approach, in the sense that most of the scholars understand it. As Mena and Russell (2017) explain, there are two forms of collaboration in self-studies and ours follows the one where a group of colleagues undertake self-study together, instead of only being external and critical friends. In accordance with LaBoskey (2004), we analyze our practice and re-examine our teaching in order to improve it. We also try to provide exemplar-based validation to establish trustworthiness, using multiple sources and methodological techniques. This paper builds a dialogue between analyzed data from field notes of the two teachers' diaries (DT1/DT2) and students' portfolios (P1, 2, ...), which included individual (with competencies development self-monitoring) and collective projects, narratives, reflections about both the educational and their learning processes. Teachers jointly defined goals and training strategies with students, involving them on self-observation and reflection, providing a continuing feedback support.

This study took into consideration several ethical principles and procedures, including anonymity and informed consent. From the beginning, students were informed about both the investigation procedures - focused on the emotional and ethical dimension of teaching and learning - and their right to withdraw. Some of them chose not

to participate, and we didn't use their data in our research and papers. Special attention was also given to the care relationships between participants (Zeni, 2009) to avoid causing harm.

3.1. Context and participants of the study

At the *Institution* a group of academics, master's and doctoral students engaged with a project entitled *Emotional and Ethical Education*. The main objective is to understand how the emotional dimension can be articulated with others, namely ethics, constituting a core of intrapersonal, interpersonal and professional development in the education of teachers, student teachers and of other professionals of education. The project includes three focus of research: 1) research team educators' training, a self-study of self-learning processes; 2) higher education students' initial training; 3) teachers' training, from kindergarten until secondary.

In the context of this paper, we will focus more specifically on the pedagogical work with two groups of students undertaking the *Course of Education and Training (2)*, within the 2nd semester optional Curricular Unit - *Emotional Competencies (CU-EC)*. The CU-EC is delivered for 1.5 hours a week by 2 teachers. From the first group we received sixteen signed informed consents and from the second group we received ten signed informed consents, which makes a total of twenty six participants. The participants' age ranges from 19 to 30 years old with most students being between 19-21.

3.2. Educational process

The work developed with the students had two strands, one individual and one collective. It was proposed that the students draw their own individual learning, i.e., process of self-diagnosed needs/desires, action plan concerning socio-emotional competencies development, self-monitoring, and research projects. The collective project was built based on mutual topic interests, leading to program adaptations and new proposals of activities.

Some lessons were organized by small students' groups, with teachers support, and others were dynamized by teachers, considering students' interests, the curricular program, strategic principles and the opportunities that arise at the school, university, surrounding communities and the city.

Theoretical and practical moments were developed through a cooperative process, using diverse activities proposed by students and teachers, such as: group dynamics, dilemmas' simulations, searching for social and emotional programs, writing narratives about significant events, self-observation, meditation, sharing emotional experiences and self-regulation strategies, debates. Some of the classes' plans were elaborated with rotating pairs of critical friends.

Classroom based sessions adopted a U shape layout and took place indoors, outdoors (near the lake) and outside the institution (attending cultural events). Additionally, students also participated in an annual Seminar entitled *Diversity, Education and Citizenship (DEC)* in which the teachers belong to the scientific and organising committee.

Students captured their reflections and learning in a portfolio, whose access links were posted in Moodle platform and teachers gave regular feedback since it had a formative character. There were also collective moments of assessment regarding their learning and the educational processes.

4. Data presentation and discussion

The curricular unit lessons sought to promote activities under the different axis of emotional competencies learning and development: the emotional level of the Self, the Other, the Action and the Consciousness (Goleman, 2010).

The results presented here concern data from two different class groups. Teachers' understanding of the benefits from the experience and research developed during the first year were taken forward into the second delivery of the sessions.

During the continuing process of data analysis, some questions and dilemmas emerged, among which we highlight three of them next.

4.1. How to meet students' desire for emotional competencies improvement and incite new paths?

At the beginning of the school semester, we invited students to reflect on the competencies they would like to develop based on their answers to a questionnaire on educators' emotional competencies (Veiga-Branco, 2005). Afterwards, we put two major 'panels' on the classroom' walls, both divided into four quadrants according to the areas of the emotional competence model of Goleman highlighted above. The central questions were: „what competencies do I want to develop?“ and „how do I think I/we can develop those competencies?“. Students received four post-it notes to write *what* and *how* they would like to work on, i.e., a competence they would like to develop in themselves and/or with/towards others, and how they would do it.

The following table summarizes the major aspects referred by the students as starting point for the development of their own Individual Project (at short, medium or long term), systematizing information on the *Action Plan*

document, which supported self-reflection regarding assessment of goals established towards improvement and/or change, at a personal and interpersonal level.

Table 1. Students' emotional competencies self-diagnosis

Areas	Need / desire for change			
	1 st year	Fi	2 nd year	Fi*
Self-consciousness	Develop self-esteem/ confidence	7	Develop self-awareness	4
	---	-	Develop self-esteem/ confidence	2
Self-regulation	Emotions	1	Stress/anxiety	9
	Perfectionism	1	Self-management	6
	Pessimism	1	Pessimism	6
	Nervousness/anxiety	1	Frustration	3
	Mood swings	1	Inner calm	3
	Criticism	1	Attention to present and future	2
	Impulsiveness	1	Focus in the moment	1
	Time	1	Aware of surroundings	2
	---	-	Flexibility	2
	---	-	Anger	1
	---	-	Fear	1
	---	-	Impulsiveness	1
	---	-	Time	1
	---	-	Rely on others	1
---	-	Humility	1	
Social consciousness	Understand others	1	Understand others' perspectives, emotions, and feelings	5
Relationships management	Develop communication	2	Develop communication	4
	Speak in public	2	Be less introvert	3
	Conflicts	1	Team spirit /cooperation	2
	Accept criticism	1	Interactions/Conflicts	2
	Learn to express feelings	1	Impartiality	1
	Be less introvert	1	Be less influenceable	1
	Be less influenceable	1	---	-

Source: Sobral & Caetano, 2022

*Fi stands for the frequency of students indicating each item.

There seem to be points of confluence in respect to some of the aspects pointed out by the students regarding competencies, social and emotional traits, especially, the development of: self-awareness through knowing themselves better; self-regulation of emotions such as anxiety; social consciousness by being attentive to others; and relationships management through communication with others. Particularly in relation to this last point, students were aware that the communication process covered both verbal as well as body expression and is a key element which is crucial to their present and future practice as educators. They alluded to the necessary

interventions and presentations in class during the course, but also professional demands, where communication is a primordial and essential element in the interaction between people.

It appeared, from their *Action Plans*, that they considered the emotional regulation a difficult task, referring to instability and reactive feelings, namely impulsivity, nervousness, and anxiety: "What I intend to change is my anxiety. I've been harmed several times by my anxiety, both in my professional and my academic performance." (P5)

Empathy is an ability that links us to the Other, calling for appreciation/recognition and for tuning in with their emotions and feelings. Akamatsu and Gherghel (2021) emphasize empathy usually leads to increase prosocial motivation and its absence might lead to antisocial behaviors. Therefore, it also emerged the conviction of working towards a better/more salutary conflict management:

One of the competences that I have been talking about and that changes my emotional state a lot is how to act in a situation of conflict. Thus, it was that same competence that I proposed to improve, not only to have the greatest social balance, but also, and more importantly, considering my personal balance. To implement this change, I decided I would reflect more when I find myself in a moment of conflict, and in a more peaceful place. (P10)

On the CU-EC we sought to address these self-diagnosed needs and desires by proposing and carrying out several activities in class, and by using the students' proposals, implemented by them. In the portfolios there are several reflective records that indicate how the students valued this strategy considering it at first as a challenge:

I knew this course would represent a challenge, to the extent that the title suggested much more than merely content transmission, it appealed to emotions, (...) something more personal. Several times I had to expose myself in activities and I had to learn how to express my feelings. This was one of my major difficulties and, simultaneously, one of the largest contributions of this CU. Nowadays, I know how to better identify physical and emotional reactions, and I try to get to the root of the problem, not to find an immediate solution, but to reflect upon what's happening and why. This development, to be able to do so, took time, becoming richer with every activity that we did. All with a different dynamic and purpose, all interesting and helpful. (P11)

Regardless of this self-diagnosis, the training process not only focused on providing conditions for the development of self-awareness and personal learning projects, but mainly opened a space where students were required to engage with unpredictable situations. New student proposals and interests kept emerging that we had not initially anticipated. We, as teachers, were also in permanent self-challenge as we considered the learning opportunities that arose. For instance, with the first group we went to an event outside the University, organized by a Cultural Institution in conjunction with a School of Arts, propounding students to reflect upon questions of identity and emotion through artistic performance. This event induced a performative practice in our class, using mirrors for self-expression and feedback among students.

Each year we continue to introduce new practices, unknown to most students, for example, meditation practices, namely mindfulness. With the first group of students, this process was done timidly. Nevertheless, student's reflections revealed both interest in such activities and development of wellbeing. This led us, in the following year, to assume a systematic mindfulness practice.

A basic principle of the CU-EC: all practices were important for the development of students' skills, but they needed training, persistence, extension to other contexts to integrate them as relevant competencies. Hence, students would benefit from extending meditation practice into their daily lives, given its importance in the development of a perception, understanding and regulation of emotions. At class, those practices were usually articulated with broader themes and reflections.

Into mindfulness practices, we introduced different visions and experiences, such as the reading of tales and poems:

We started the practice by reading a text where a Buddhist practice was confronted with practices guided by positive western perspectives, where instead of appealing to only what is understood to be positive emotions and rejecting negative ones, expelling them, it is assumed the transformative potential of each one and appeals to the sense of compassion and the collective and planetary good, so that the suffering of humanity and the planet is accepted, the so-called negative emotions are transmuted and what we understand to be positive emotions is returned. Then, the practice proposed by Atisha started. (DT1)

Seeking to deepen a poetic sense of our relationship with life and to appeal to an ethical reflection on solidarity and the sense of otherness, the reading of a poem by Ana Viana was chosen for meditative practice. It invoked the mirroring that we find in others and supports our self-knowledge and empathy. The poem begins like this: *I made you a painting to see yourself, through me...* (DT2)

After each meditation, students would write a sentence or two about what they had experienced and later reflect on difficulties and/or benefits. At their individual portfolios students reflect on their experiences, difficulties and development, as the following example:

Another interesting aspect of this class was the fact that the mindfulness exercise was not carried out by one of the teachers, but by my colleague SS, who in my point of view managed to do it very well. At first I thought it was a little funny when they were closed listening to a voice so familiar to perform this exercise, but as soon as I started to concentrate on what she was saying I was able to be more relaxed and focused on the directions she was providing. (P15)

Those range of practices were articulated with the theoretical research and the writing process (Sobral & Caetano, 2020). Also, connecting theory with practice, we tried to challenge the centering on the self and to be open to a social and cultural approach to emotions.

We didn't provide a particular sequence of predetermined practices since we wanted them to be meaningful and contextualized in each class, which was open to new possibilities arising from the present moment and unpredictability. This was a great challenge, since we tried to link class contents and students' evolutive learning process, particularly meditation, balancing with a widening of cultural experience.

Another unresolved issue is about the actual participation of students in curriculum design and development. We cannot claim that the whole process is discussed with students even because at the beginning of the semester the plan is undetermined, however, at crucial moments they are involved in curricular decisions. At the same time, we struggled with a permanent feeling of unease, which led us to wonder whether we should not have made a meticulous plan for the whole semester.

4.2. How to introduce a cultural and affective dimension of emotions, namely in practices with roots in other cultures, integrating it in a distinct pedagogical and academic culture?

The cultural dimension of emotions was considered especially important and the reading of tales that referred to emotional experiences of Eastern spiritual traditions (Buddhism, Hinduism), and the approach to educational and cultural practices in contexts of contemporary art, were some of the activities carried out to open students' minds to other values and philosophies of life. The diversity is also a search to avoid being captured by a closed vision.

The activity that seemed to have had the most impact was the one inspired by a Buddhist practice referred to by Nhat Hanh (2010), which we termed „take care of“. We intended to work simultaneously with the collective dimension of the emotional climate and promote ethical development through practice and reflection on values and actions of care and solidarity.

All the present students wrote their names on paper, placed inside a hand-embroidered cloth bag. It was suggested a dynamic entitled „take care of“ and we spoke about its source. The students seemed to join with enthusiasm and, as the papers were removed one-by-one, their facial expressions and gestures reflected some surprise and even grief. (DT2)

This was the proposed activity that left all feeling hesitant: *Taking care of* someone with whom we might not even talk? How to care for someone? At first, we all thought we would say hello and ask about the weekend. Later, more detailed texting and talking begun, then got to know better each other. (P4)

Nonetheless, clearly there were some who had great difficulty in leaving the narrower nucleus of their relationships:

Inquired about the practice “taking care of”: *What did they feel? What did they do? What did they expect to feel and to make the other feel?* The opinions and experiences were diverse: some students did not feel comfortable to send even a short SMS to the colleague whom one was caring for throughout the week, and others claimed to have initiated a lengthy conversation with a colleague with whom it was not usual to speak. (DT2).

At some point, they entered a routine and were challenged to surprise their colleagues. Overall, this activity led students to look differently at each other, to seek what they had in common through sharing and to develop ethical relationships:

This is a very interesting and beneficial activity to deal with other people and take responsibility for someone, because our course requires that a lot, although we are not directly linked with the kids [child/youth], we will deal with everything concerning them [in the future]. (P12)

Concrete action was the daily gateway to regular reflection, where pairs weekly rotate. In parallel to this, activity objectives continued to be understood and achieved by students:

I believe the primary objective was met, because at the end of the semester it was remarkable that people felt freer to express their emotions and difficulties, during activities. We managed to form a good working group and create new personal relationships. This proximity wasn't only visible inside the classroom but also outside: breaks, lunch time, other CU, etc. (P2)

We also received a final challenge from the students, encouraging us – teachers – to proceed with the proposed activity, with a view to personal and collective well-being, to practice a more harmonious knowing-how-to-be in society.

I think this is an activity that must accompany the CU always, even if students complain initially, as we did. In the end we realized that the complaint even brought us together more and after it became part of the routine and we have not only one person to look after but everyone was watching for each other. (P4)

As teachers, we embraced the challenge and with the following group we continued with these practices, adopting some of the same micro-strategies and introducing others, namely asking students to suggest weekly tasks to be undertaken in pairs and new and unusual ways to carry out the activity had emerged:

The purpose of the activity is based on, for a week, the pairs must take care of an egg. They cannot lose or break it and cannot be replaced. The basic idea is that the pair of students take care of the egg, as if it was a baby. This activity aims to draw student's attention into knowing how to share and how to care. The egg must be taken to the classroom every week, and the process of taking care must be documented by the pair working together, and mutual support is crucial for the activity to be carried out successfully. (P8)

4.3. How to articulate a collective project, integrating both the individual and the institutional demands?

To open new horizons and experience new dimensions of emotions, we introduced the concept of *Emotional Climate* (de Rivera & Paez, 2007) in order to deconstruct possible simplifications of analysis that focus on just the conception of emotions as an intra-individual process. This enabled the students to understand the cultural nature of emotion. In the same sense, we looked to develop practices that informed the social and cultural dimensions, enabling group development and its insertion in broader projects of the university institution (Caetano & Sobral, 2016).

We assume the emerging character of the individual and collective dimensions and wanted the educational process to have not only a person-centered character, but also include critical dimensions (Goralska, 2020). In both years, the individual students' projects have contributed to the joint reflection on the collective project, with the possibility to extend to an institutional level, since we were organising committee members of a Seminar Diversity, Education and Citizenship (DEC) to be held at the *Institution* and we invited students to consider the possibility of their involvement.

The theme of the Seminar where the first group participated was *Through Peace, for Peace*. Students had the opportunity to critically reflect on and through peace, since they claimed it was a feeling that was difficult to achieve in their lives. So why not start to build peace within, through peace gestures in our surroundings, particularly where they spent most of their daily time – class and university. The preparation for this Seminar, acted as a catalyst for change in the emotional climate of the group, as students were required to work with peers they were less familiar with:

Another of the activities that I felt was incredibly positive for the class, was the preparation of the seminar. All the students were engaged in a spirit of cooperation and joy, each group had some tasks which contributed so that this seminar was different from others. (P9)

Students' collective project was, hence, to work together to dynamize two main activities: elaborate and deliver a small questionnaire on peace and create a space to interact with the Seminar participants, asking for their peace definition and its importance.

This experience led some of the students to participate in a scientific event for the first time and provided an opportunity for reflection and ethical practice about peace, in everyday life and in the world.

It was the first time I participated in such an event like this and I think it was a good experience. I really enjoyed having participated. (P16)

So we decided to do a " clothesline of peace " in which participants put on a piece of paper what they understand peace to be and its importance and, with this participation in our initiative, they had the right to a balloon with the phrase „by peace, for peace“ on it. It was nice doing this activity because it felt that the work developed in the classroom was beyond the class group and that we can always make a small gesture that stimulates and involves others to reflect on a subject as important as is the case of peace. (P3)

With the participation in the seminar, it would not make sense that we didn't reflect on the importance of peace (...). For me, peace encompasses many other concepts and perspectives that transcend it. Peace means harmony, respect, freedom, self and hetero-knowledge and many more concepts that do not depend on anyone else but humans. In order to achieve peace it is necessary to find inner peace, devoid of prejudices and judgments that degrade others. Peace is the acceptance of others as they are, accepting their faults and appreciating their qualities. The harmony between Nations and people is necessary; to not impose one's ideologies but reflect on them, discuss what is important. (P17)

However, those little situations that disrupt our peace are nothing compared to situations that disturb the peace in the world, and it is necessary to be aware of it. In part, this seminar comes to show one of the most powerful weapons to change the world: education (Nelson Mandela). (...) I honestly believe that the only way to create world peace is through not only the education of our minds, but also of our hearts and our souls (Malala Yousafzai). (P18)

Despite the apparent motivation to develop this collective project, many questions are still open, because we fear that for some students the motivation was more extrinsic than intrinsic. We have tried to read between the lines of their reflections if they felt obliged to develop something that they did not assume as their own. However, data suggest the opposite, as the following statement reveal:

In general, I think all groups worked quite well, something I don't remember seeing happen before. We could assume the responsibility of contributing so that seminar attendees had another type of experience. I don't think there was anything wrong to point out, we were all cheerful and quite receptive about the project. (P6)

The second group was involved at the following DEC Seminar, that took place a year later, with another theme: *Landscapes, Languages and Utopias in the City*, and their participation in the event was focused on the organization of a collective video, as described by one of the students:

Everyone took images to class, collected in different areas where they live or wherever they went. The challenge launched, entitled *Emotional Landscapes and Languages in the City*, went through three stages: identify one emotional message from the image; identify the impact on the observer (ourselves); and critically reflect on the power of emotional images (denounce/announce), what is the possible intention of the message to be transmitted by the author and the interpretation of and in the observer. (DT1)

This collective project led students to consciously reflect on the messages raised by the images that represented their experiences in daily life. Using this visual perspective, enabled a critical reflection on society and culture:

For this exercise, we should recall all photographs/images the group collected, be attentive and present. The first image pop in mind was mine: the graffiti of a waterfall. This remarkably interesting urban art project caught my attention through the concept of transformation, rehabilitation of something vandalized. Also, the idea of perspective change, considering that graffiti was initially associated with vandalism. However, now there are graffities considered pieces of art, admired and respected by most of society. Colors like green and white were used, associated with transformation, renovation, positivity and that is precisely what the piece represents. (P7)

We believe the groups succeed by articulating the individual, collective and institutional levels altogether at once, since they were given the chance to work on their interests, explicitly related to their individual *action plan* (e.g., stress/anxiety, self-management, awareness of the self and the surroundings, communication, interactions – conflict, empathy, etc.), in collaboration with their colleagues, working in teams and being actively involved in institutional events.

However, we are always in doubt about the level of critical consciousness favoured by these practices and if they are not mere epiphenomena in an institutional academia where students are more concerned with declarative knowledge, and if we are swimming against the tide.

Despite that, we are eager to rise more discussion into the learning space, around hard themes such as racism, oppression and social injustice and to develop the so-called pedagogy of discomfort, to “make it possible for teachers and students to use their discomfort to conduct new emotional (co-)understandings” (Goralska, 2020, p. 117).

5. Conclusions

This paper presents data from an ongoing research that will continue with other groups, which will allow us to deepen our practical knowledge, diversify pedagogical strategies, and explore its learning potential. Considering all the questions addressed in this paper, and both students and teachers' descriptions and reflections, we conclude that it is important to continue research into the emotional and ethical education of future education and training professionals. Of particular importance is the integration of these dimensions in an integrative,

creative and adapted way and by balancing personal, cultural and institutional processes for the forthcoming groups of students. We assume, as emphasized by the author, that:

if it is only possible to raise or further elaborate fundamental questions in emotional states such as wonder (see Aristotle 982b), existential boredom or angst (see Heidegger, "Was ist Metaphysik"), or hope (see Bloch, Principle of Hope 86-128), then the collective habits and the institutional frameworks that prevent these emotional experiences are also to be considered threats to the possibility of raising these questions, and, consequently, also threats to the very possibility of making a truly radical critique of these habits and institutions. (Marín-Ávila, 2020, p.59)

We emphasize the importance of student motivation and active participation in the educational process, with emancipatory and empowerment intentions, guided by principles of freedom, care and responsibility. The valorisation of individual and collective interests that are identified, discovered and incited, stimulates the construction of both their individual and collective project, going beyond a person-centred perspective, hence without losing each individual contribution, but integrating them in a holistic and critical approach. Likewise, the solidarity develops with the practice of taking care of each other, by building greater social cohesion among small groups, within the entire class and with the other classes and institution colleagues. Also, the valorisation of the organization and deepening of small research projects is related to the pleasure of meeting with oneself and with others.

Once more this is a constant challenge to us. Balancing all those forces is not easy and may not be clearly understood by our students, by ourselves and by our readers. Because it is a work in progress, we try several ways of dealing with the unbalances, tensions and dilemmas raised by such an open path.

Furthermore, the students' involvement in the institution, brokering a purely personal approach, through participation in events and in the broader research, brings us several problems. Here we detect limitations - to consider in the future - such as the lack of a greater and more conscious level of participation by students in the decision-making processes on research in all its phases, although it is still not easy for us to understand how this can be done, given the constraints of the duration of the CU-EC.

In this paper, we highlight the cultural dimension of emotional experiences and the range of different ways of integrating them into daily life, some inscribed in ancestral traditions of cultures largely unknown to our students, others involving students in contemporary events that go beyond the classroom to think about the city where they live, placing them in relation to manifestations of different order, namely of artistic nature. In this way, they become involved in the discovery and experience of values, visions and cultural practices, unfamiliar to them or with which they begin a new relationship. We intend to engage in an aesthetic enjoyment and contemplative experience, but also in the critical reflection on our societies and in the creative imagination of new utopias. But we are aware that for many this is difficult to grasp and we question if it is not much more a concern for teachers than a conscious process for students.

We intend to intensify this participation in future decision-making about the emotional development areas, the activities, and potential projects. We feel the need to continue to be provocative and go further with our *outside of the box* proposals. We are aware that each group will be a challenge to our collective creativity, unrepeatable in its particularities, but at the same time an opportunity to test our principles and find ways to deal with the problems and dilemmas that we will be putting forward. We are also aware that some are probably unsolvable and that our concerns and dissatisfactions constitute reason to continue the search, to improve and perhaps reach deeper and more lasting changes in people and institutions with which we work.

Finally, we stress the collaborative process in which both of us as educators were building this course. It was collaborative both by the very nature of it being a collaborative self-study and our engagement with a team of researchers involved in a broader project, with whom we have published papers (e.g., Correia *et al.* 2019). This collaboration enabled us to experience and reflect together some of the activities we proposed to students, also giving us the confidence to take risks. We reinforced our conviction that in higher education, as well as in other levels of education, it is necessary to develop joint working dynamics, networks and communities of practice (Wenger, 2001), progressing and strengthening a collaborative culture that may be contagious to teachers and students.

Our wish is that this work will be an inspiration to introduce in a more structured way this emotional dimension in the training of professionals of education, to create the curricula in a way that is open to the participation of students and to integrate this multidimensional perspective, where personal, cultural and institutional dimensions are integrated and deepened.

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