Editorial

Global education in Europe at crossroads: Contributions from critical perspectives

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1 INTRODUCTION: WHY A SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE CROSSROADS OF GLOBAL EDUCATION IN EUROPE

In 2019, a group of scholars all over Europe joined in a Symposium at the ECER – European Conference on Educational Research 2019. Organized by researchers based at the University of Porto, Portugal, the symposium aimed at debating current challenges faced by global education in Europe – the "crossroads" in the title[1]. This special issue is partially the result of discussions occurred there. Both the symposium, and the call for this issue that was later warmly welcomed by JSSE, intended to promote a dialogue between research and pedagogical experiences from northern, eastern and southern European countries. A point of interest was the significantly different socio-historical and political backgrounds, standpoints and agendas regarding global education found across Europe, regardless of a shared background. We encouraged prospective authors to situate topics discussed against this type of framing, having a particular interest on critical and postcolonial analysis (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Andreotti & Souza, 2012), including theoretical ones, in all levels of education.

  Global education is a highly polysemic term. In this special issue, global education is understood as those educational attempts and questionings that aim to nurture alternative presents and futures that are more just, caring and wholesome for all of us. Throughout the special issue, equivalent or related terminology is used by authors, such as, global citizenship education. Specially in the last 15 years, global education has expanded significantly in Europe from policy to curricula (Hartmeyer & Wegimont, 2016). Global education is key for envisioning future education, amidst complexity and uncertainty (Bourn, 2015), and vital to address global challenges like those in the 2030 Agenda. Global education is also relevant in the appeal to reconstruct citizenship beyond national(istic) and simplistic imaginaries and promote a global awareness, belonging and action, increasingly translated in the idea of being a "global citizen" (Sant *et al.*, 2018).

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Understanding of how (borderless) world challenges intersect has been a goal of global education for decades and is increasingly seen as a key "competence" for citizens. The Covid-19 pandemic has, unfortunately, proved us first-hand the meaning of "global" and how global challenges amplify each other. In a way, the dominant collective feeling is now that "nothing is new, but everything has changed", to quote the words of António Nóvoa and Yara Alvim (2020, p. 35) about the post-pandemic school. Across the world, pre-pandemic struggles remained, crystal clear, as the most pressing ones in the present time. Severe (pre-existing) social inequalities, policies openly choosing profit over people and some groups of people over others, have been disproportionally connected to higher mortality rates among black and ethnic minority groups, poorer health care, social assistance, education attainment or unemployment[3]. The fact that the 1% of billionaires not only concentrate the 99% of the world wealth, but that their profits continued to escalate during the pandemic[2] should count as the definition of everything that is wrong in the current global world.

Critical, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives of global education have been concerned with the pre-existing structural reasons of inequalities, drawing attention to sociohistorical factors, and with proposing alternative modes of collective living and relating. Such perspectives are also potentially relevant for confronting Europe's historical challenges, particularly in countries with a poorly addressed colonial legacy (Coelho, Caramelo & Menezes, 2019). They open up the room for situated, self-aware and politicized understanding of current challenges, discourses and agendas (including the 2030 Agenda) through education.

2 ON-GOING DEBATES AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS ISSUE

The debate on challenges faced by global education is an ongoing one, as demonstrated by two other very recent pieces dedicated to this. Torres and Bosio (2020, p. 100) point out issues like the theoretical fragility of this field, framing global education as "an intervention in search of a theory", in need of a "meta-theory" (p. 105), and whose effectiveness is yet to be established. The imbalance between theory and practice can be related to the emergence of global education as an action field first, and only later as an academic subject, and to the fact that higher education has been slow in adopting global education (Bourn, 2015). A second piece, a special issue edited by Bentall (2020), notes a number of pedagogical tensions. They range from the challenges faced by educators regarding different educational purposes of this education, and the hardships on helping students to navigate complex issues (e.g., global digital media). The (non)applicability of "global citizenship" beyond its western origin and the problematic nature of North-South study visits are also debated, raising a number of questions of growing concern for postcolonial scholars (Martin & Griffiths, 2014). In sum, the fact that the global education discourse often accommodates at once humanist, critical, neoliberal or even neo-colonial views (Andreotti, 2011), with substantially different intents and effects, is a source of many tensions.

The texts in this number of JSSE further some of these issues, through research conducted in nine different countries, mostly European.

Magdalena Kuleta-Hulboj, in *Critical and postcolonial perspectives on global education: The case of Poland*, offers a critical account of the Polish situation of global education. The author frames Poland as a country that does not fit the "Global North-Global South dichotomy". The mixed stance of Poland hasn't been sufficiently acknowledged in the literature and is best understood against the metaphor of "triple coloniality" (p. 8). She argues that understanding this is an important step to more inclusive, less binary views on post and decolonial approaches to global education in general and to a more substantial theorization of the field in Poland, yet to be reached. Kuleta-Hulboj's analysis also perfectly exemplifies how the escalate of populist, non-democratic politics in recent years has significantly decreased the room and funding for global education. Other European countries, including some with long-lasting experience of civil society

organizations on Global Education (e.g., Italy) are also facing similar hardships. As the author recalls, "under these conditions the implementation of global education is much harder, but at the same time more needed" (p. 18).

The following three papers are focused on pedagogical experiences of and for global education issues, from teachers and students' perspectives.

Valeria Damiani, in *Educating pre-service teachers on global citizenship – Research perspectives from a preliminary study in the Italian context*, reflects on how the lack of formal inclusion of global education in initial teacher education (ITE) in Italy impacts future teachers. The author conducted a survey with future pre-primary and primary education teachers, in order to understand their interest and perceived preparedness for handling global education topics and competences in their future practices. The study suggests that, despite the "recent political and educational discourse on global citizenship education [GCE] at the national level (…) the initiatives undertaken by different actors appear fragmented, mostly related to general recommendations, and do not address ITE (…) [and that] pre-service and in-service teachers generally feel they are not well prepared in tackling GCE in class in relation to its core elements, i.e. knowledge, attitudes and engagement" (p. 32). Damiani connects this lack of investment to larger issues of the school system, such as the focus on instruction, the prevalence of transversal programmes and the outsourcing of education. This highlights the influence played by systemic factors in this particular area of education.

Karen Pasbhy, Marta da Costa and Louise Sund, in *Pluriversal Possibilities and Challenges for Global Education in Northern Europe*, focus on debunking Western colonialism in teaching global issues. Their work is based on workshops and interviews conducted with secondary teachers in England, Finland, and Sweden, countries where global education is part of the curricula. The text offers a contribution to the post and decolonial pedagogy and pedagogical tools for global education, based on the HEADSUP tool, on which the study and workshops were grounded. The authors draw attention to the influence of teachers' background and experience in the ways that issues related to Western colonialism are viewed and addressed. Despite particularities and challenges experienced, the authors conclude that "several teachers deepened their approach and co-produced a teacher resource supporting the application of HEADSUP to classroom practice" (p. 45). Pashby, Costa and Sund argue for the need for plural and pluriversal approaches and a stronger anti-racist stance in global education, that is highly relevant for Europe's colonial background.

Thomas Nygren, David O. Kronlid, Esbjörn Larsson, Judit Novak, Denise Bentrovato, Johan Wassermann, Oakleigh Welply, Anamika, and Mona Guath, in *Global citizenship education for global citizenship? Students' views on learning about, through, and for human rights, peace, and sustainable development in England, India, New Zealand, South Africa, and Sweden*, offer a perspective on the student side. Their text is based on a multi-case transnational survey conducted in the referred countries, with upper secondary school students, that focused on students views and experiences on "education *about, through,* and *for* human rights, peace, and sustainability" (p. 63). This broad text frames human rights, peace, and sustainability education issues under the global citizenship education umbrella, contributing to the debate on the identity of global education. Authors found that *knowing about* human rights, peace, and sustainability, doesn't necessarily translate in to *acting through* and *for* these issues – with students in all countries feeling the latter are harder than the former. Students, authors concluded, do not necessarily recognize they had contact with issues like peace and sustainability during their school journey. The article also allows readers to reflect on how the multiplicity of dimensions of global citizenship (e.g., global awareness) (Dower, 2003) interact and are experienced in the school curriculum and everyday activities. The results by Nygren and colleagues exemplify how global education assumes different meanings across countries, therefore authors "call for differentiated and localised approaches in attempts to reach common and shared goals" (p. 64) and for non-western approaches to global education.

Anne Schippling, in *Researching global citizenship education: Towards a critical approach*, stands for the need to overcome the methodological nationalism often implicit in research. Global education, the author suggests, should embrace "tools that transcend" it (p. 98). Schippling does a methodological contribution to the field based on the concept of "transnational capital", applying it to the study of biographical case studies of students attending an International Baccalaureate school in Germany. Schippling's analysis pinpoints the ways that the global citizenship education discourse serves, at once, market-oriented and social action purposes. This echoes the already mentioned ideological pluralism embedded in global education as well as the way education rehearses and reproduces inequalities. These are two very important debates for global education scholars, and the author argues for extended research about them through practices and empirical discourses.

Two book reviews complete the theme of this issue. Martin Affolderbach reflects on the book *Global education in Europe revisited. Strategies and structures - policy, practice and challenges* (2016), a useful state-of-the-art on the situation of global education in several countries in Europe in the last decade. The book has the particularity of joining contributions from scholars, policy makers and civil society organizations in the field, mostly connected to international development and education. The book demonstrates the European background of national systems of global education and establishes important points towards an agenda for global education in Europe.

La Salete Coelho and Sara Franch analyse *The Bloomsbury handbook of global education and learning* (2020), a diverse compilation of theoretical and empirical contributions from scholars around the world. They analyse how the book is set to present global education as a distinctive field of education with significant progress in the last years. The book gathers core theories and concerns in global education, placing this field as disruptive and complicit in many of the issues it has been trying to address, namely, coloniality. Global education practices in academia, schools, and NGOs are also discussed.

3 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The texts included in this special issue exemplify several "crossroads" faced by global education, at the epistemological and conceptual levels, as well as pedagogical, methodological and political. We focus on three of them, that we consider to be particularly important for global education in the coming years: the multi-stakeholder identity, the consolidation of academia and the contribution of and for decoloniality and the decolonization debates.

Especially in its traditions of development education and global citizenship education, global education is a "multi-stakeholder" field of education. Books reviewed for this issue are a good example of this. Unlike other subjects of education, global education emerged, at least partially, from practice-to-theory, and from policy and civil society actors to academia. In theory, this means that global education is perhaps well positioned to bridge policy, practice and research. In other words, to better demonstrate how can global issues be made more "tangible" through up-to-date research and teaching, that will then inform adequate policies, and be translated to impactful practices. This is, of course, a simplification, the point here being the possibilities of a knowledge field forged in practice. However, several texts included in this special issue draw our attention to the fact that, despite the progress made so far, political and academic efforts in global education in Europe have been insufficient and poorly articulated. The fragility of teacher training (initial or continuous) is a symptom of that, in clear contrast with the growth of global education, citizenship and development issues in school curricula (see e.g., Hartmeyer & Wegimont, 2016). This also helps to understand the actual "experience" by those enrolled in global education (see Nygren *et al.*; Damiani; Pashby, Costa & Sund, in this issue), and to question to what extent gaps found are related to national and local contexts.

How can this "multi-stakeholder" identity be better articulated and translated in an effective support to the field, nationally and at European level? This multi-stakeholder nature is sometimes vested with a homogenous "celebratory" discourse, in contrast with long-lasting, fragmented, struggles. A better articulation between policies, practices and research, increased programmatic funding, or better adjustment of global education to country-specific socio-historical backgrounds remain highly challenging. Have the existent global education policies been supported by or conducive to more research investment? What has been the impact of current training and research in global education policies (national, European or even international)? How could civil society organizations and higher education institutions link in critical issues such as teacher training and community engagement? This multi-stakeholder identity should be considered in the consolidation of global education as academic field too.

Other than these, other challenges persist, namely because in several European countries (e.g., Poland, Portugal), global education is still rather new to academia. An important amount of research evidence has been disseminated in subject-specific publications outside the mainstream indexed journals (ANGEL, 2020), perhaps narrowing or diluting some of the ongoing debates. Nevertheless, publications in indexed journals in the field of social sciences are growing, particularly, in the last decade and mostly concerning global citizenship education (ANGEL, 2020). To what extent is the lack of institutionalization of global education in many higher education institutions preventing academia to offer new study programs, research and intervention, and to attract and retain researchers in this field? Which steps could be taken to consolidate global education as a "distinctive pedagogic field" (Bourn, 2020, p. 287)?

This challenge of strengthening global education as recognizable academic field, coexists with the growing need of (continue to) deepening the dialogue with related fields, such as international and comparative education, international development, sociology, political sciences, citizenship studies or social sciences education. A good example is the urgency of connecting with the decolonization debates happening worldwide and in many European countries. There is room for critical, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives on global education to connect to vibrant debates happening on the need to decolonize higher education, the curricula or development (see Schöneberg, Narayanaswamy, and the Convivial Thinking Writing Collective, 2020), positioning global education as dialogic organic field. At the same time, critical, postcolonial and decolonial global education already offers particularly favourable pedagogical settings to issue those debates too (see Stein *et al.*, 2020) and their role should be furthered, while remaining vigilant of the complicity and limitations of global education.

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1   ENDNOTES

[1] A one-day symposium entitled "Global Education at Crossroads: Which Contributes from Critical Perspectives in Europe?". ECER 2019 took place at the University of Hamburg, in September 2019. More on the symposium at https://eera-ecer.de/ecer-programmes/conference/24/contribution/48418/ (access on 02.12.2020).

[2] See for instance the Guardian piece by Rajeev Syal from the 24th of September 2020 "Covid: ethnic minorities in UK at greater risk of financial hardship – report", available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/24/covid-ethnic-minorities-in-uk-at-greater-risk-of-financial-hardship-report (access on 02.12.2020).

[3] See for instance the Business Insider piece by Hiatt Woods from the 30th of October 2020 "How billionaires saw their net worth increase by half a trillion dollars during the pandemic", available at https://www.businessinsider.com/billionaires-net-worth-increases-coronavirus-pandemic-2020-7 (access on 02.12.2020).