

THE RIGHT TO A SECOND CHANCE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS WHO RETURNED TO EDUCATION

DIREITO A UMA SEGUNDA OPORTUNIDADE: LIÇÕES APRENDIDAS DA EXPERIÊNCIA DE QUEM ABANDONOU E REGRESSOU À ESCOLA

DERECHO A UNA SEGUNDA OPORTUNIDAD: LECCIONES APRENDIDAS DE LA EXPERIENCIA DE QUIEN ABANDONÓ Y REGRESÓ A LA EDUCACIÓN

Filipe MARTINS, Alexandra CARNEIRO, Luísa CAMPOS, Luísa MOTA RIBEIRO, Mariana NEGRÃO, Isabel BAPTISTA & Raquel MATOS
CEDH - Research Centre for Human Development,
Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Porto

Received date: 12.XI.2019

Reviewed date: 21.XI.2019

Accepted date: 12.II.2020

KEY WORDS:

early school leaving
school engagement
second chance
education
support relationships
social inclusion.

ABSTRACT: Based on a holistic perspective of education that articulates school pedagogy and social pedagogy, the main goal of this paper is to identify effective ways to ensure the right to education to vulnerable and marginalised young people who have dropped out of school. The research leading to this paper was part of a European research project which investigated how young people's responses to conflict can provide opportunities for positive social engagement. This specific study explored early school leaving and school re-engagement from the point of view of a group of 20 Portuguese young early school leavers who later returned to school through Second Chance Education. Through a qualitative approach using individual in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus group, the study sought to offer a comprehensive reading of early school leaving and school re-engagement by addressing the diversity of motivations, experiences, factors and consequences associated with them, as well as the role that educational policies and school factors can play in it. The study's findings revealed that, for many socially and economically vulnerable youngsters, mainstream schools are places of individual failure and interpersonal conflict where they don't feel welcomed and from which they stop expecting positive outcomes. This favours a progressive disengagement from education that reinforces social marginalisation. However, the findings also showed that by engaging in second chance education projects, youngsters develop greater commitment to education and identify relevant positive changes in terms of personal and skills' development, behavioural adjustment and establishment of life goals. According to the participants' experiences, the holistic and individualised socio-pedagogical approach of such projects is particularly apt to respond to their needs. Community-based educational

CONTACT WITH THE AUTHORS

FILIFE MARTINS. Universidade Católica Portuguesa. E-mail: fmartins@porto.ucp.pt

	<p>approaches, practical and participatory learning environments, and the emotional investment and support from teachers and staff are shown to be the most effective socio-educational features when trying to re-engage vulnerable young people in education.</p>
<p>PALAVRAS-CHAVE: abandono escolar precoce envolvimento escolar educação de segunda oportunidade relações de suporte inclusão social</p>	<p>RESUMO: Partindo da articulação entre pedagogia escolar e pedagogia social, o principal objetivo deste artigo é identificar formas eficazes de garantir o direito à educação a jovens vulneráveis e marginalizados que abandonaram a escola precocemente. A pesquisa que levou a este artigo fez parte de um projeto europeu que investigou como as respostas dos jovens ao conflito podem oferecer oportunidades para um envolvimento social positivo. No presente estudo explorou-se o abandono e o re-envolvimento escolar a partir do ponto de vista de um grupo de 20 jovens portugueses que abandonaram a escola e que mais tarde a retomaram via projetos de Educação de Segunda Oportunidade. Através de uma abordagem qualitativa, utilizando entrevistas individuais, observação participante e grupos focais, o estudo procurou uma leitura abrangente do abandono e do re-envolvimento escolar, abordando a diversidade de motivações, experiências, fatores e consequências a eles associados, bem como o papel das políticas educativas e dos fatores escolares nestes fenómenos. Os resultados do estudo revelam que, para muitos jovens social e economicamente vulneráveis, as escolas regulares são lugares de fracasso individual e de conflitos interpessoais onde não se sentem bem-vindos e dos quais deixam de esperar resultados positivos. Isso favorece um distanciamento progressivo da educação que reforça a marginalização social. Por outro lado, os resultados também mostram que, ao envolverem-se em projetos de Educação de Segunda Oportunidade, os jovens demonstram maior comprometimento com a educação e identificam mudanças positivas em termos de desenvolvimento pessoal e de habilidades, ajuste comportamental e estabelecimento de objetivos de vida. A abordagem sociopedagógica holística e individualizada da Educação de Segunda Oportunidade demonstrou ser particularmente adequada para responder às necessidades destes jovens. As estratégias educativas baseadas na comunidade, os ambientes de aprendizagem prática e participativa e o investimento emocional de professores e funcionários revelaram-se os recursos socioeducativos mais eficazes para re-envolver jovens vulneráveis na educação.</p>
<p>PALABRAS CLAVE: abandono escolar temprano participación escolar educación de segunda oportunidad relaciones de apoyo inclusión social</p>	<p>RESUMEN: Partiendo de la articulación entre la pedagogía escolar y la pedagogía social, el objetivo principal de este artículo es identificar formas efectivas de garantizar el derecho a la educación de los jóvenes vulnerables y marginados que abandonaron la escuela temprano. La investigación que condujo a este artículo fue parte de un proyecto europeo que investigó cómo las respuestas de los jóvenes al conflicto pueden ofrecer oportunidades para una participación social positiva. Este estudio exploró el abandono y la reincorporación escolar desde el punto de vista de un grupo de 20 jóvenes portugueses que abandonaron la escuela y luego la reanudaron a través de proyectos educativos de segunda oportunidad. Con un enfoque cualitativo, utilizando entrevistas individuales, observación participante y grupos focales, el estudio buscó una lectura integral del abandono y la reincorporación escolar, abordando la diversidad de motivaciones, experiencias, factores y consecuencias asociadas con ellos y el rol de las políticas educativas y factores escolares en estos fenómenos. Los resultados de lo estudio han revelado que, para muchos jóvenes social y económicamente vulnerables, las escuelas convencionales son lugares de fracaso individual y de conflicto interpersonal donde no se sienten bienvenidos y donde ya no esperan resultados positivos. Esto favorece un distanciamiento progresivo de la educación que refuerza su marginación social. Por otro lado, los resultados revelan que, al participar en proyectos educativos de segunda oportunidad, los jóvenes muestran un mayor compromiso con la educación e identifican cambios personales positivos de desarrollo personal y de habilidades, ajuste de comportamiento y establecimiento de objetivos de vida. El enfoque socio pedagógico holístico e individualizado de la educación de segunda oportunidad ha demostrado ser particularmente apropiado para satisfacer las necesidades de estos jóvenes. Las estrategias educativas basadas en la comunidad, los entornos de aprendizaje prácticos y participativos y la inversión emocional de los maestros y el personal han demostrado ser los recursos socioeducativos más eficaces para volver a involucrar a los jóvenes vulnerables en la educación.</p>

1. Introduction

This paper explores Early School Leaving (ESL) and school re-engagement from the point of view of young people who have dropped out of school before concluding compulsory education and later returned to school through Second Chance Education projects¹. In the last two decades ESL

has become a high priority social problem for European institutions, policies, and governments, as well as in academic research². This focus has oscillated between approaches that favour education as a basic right to self-development and a precondition to citizenship and social inclusion for all, and perspectives that give priority to the qualification of young people to respond to the

needs of the labour market and enhance productivity and international competitiveness (Magalhães, Araújo, Macedo, & Rocha, 2015). Within this ambiguous framework, ESL has been largely analysed from an external “expert” point of view (by researchers, policy makers, educational leaders, and educators) and through quantitative and explanatory approaches that ultimately reduce the understanding of the phenomenon to the enunciation of individual or family risk factors and to its negative social and economic consequences (DeWitt *et al.*, 2013). This ‘individual-dominated’ view of ESL (Nada *et al.*, 2018) tends to stress youngsters’ (and families’) disabilities and disruptive behaviours, as well as parents’ poverty and low qualifications, in order to explain students’ academic failure and inability to conform to school norms, thus leading to school disaffection and, eventually, to school dropout. Nevertheless, this view often fails to take into account school-related factors (DeWitt *et al.*, 2013; Van Houtte & Demanet, 2016) and ends up reinforcing stigmatised and blaming visions of young people who drop out of school (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; te Riele, 2006a; Tilleczek *et al.*, 2011).

In contrast, there is a lack of studies that seek to understand the phenomenon from the point of view of young people themselves, searching for more procedural and contextualised readings that can address the diversity of motivations, experiences, factors and consequences associated with ESL, as well as the role that educational policies and school-related factors can play in it (Magen-Nagar and Shachar, 2017; Smyth, 2007; Tilleczek *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, some literature has emerged, mainly in Anglo-Saxon contexts, which has privileged an ethnographic approach to ESL, often explicitly committed to the appreciation of the voice and experiences of early school leavers, as well as to the identification of alternative socio-educational and pedagogical responses that can promote their social inclusion and their progressive empowerment (Jonker, 2006; Smyth, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2001; Smyth & McInerney, 2013; Tilleczek *et al.*, 2011). These studies, however, are scarce in Portugal.

ESL has been high in Portugal for most of the past three decades, even though its rate has been systematically decreasing, particularly in recent years (50% in 1992, 43.6% in 2000, 28.3% in 2010, 11.8% in 2018) (FFMS, 2019). This decrease is mostly due to the growing intervention of the Child and Youth Protection Services in cases of school absence and dropout, to the implementation of major national wide programmes and inclusive policies aiming to reduce school failure, as well as to the increase of vocational training

programmes offered to young people with unsuccessful and/or problematic school trajectories. In 2018, according to official data, 11.8% of Portuguese youngsters between 18 and 24 were out of school without completing compulsory education (12th grade). ESL in Portugal has always been more frequent among males (32.4% in 2010 and 14.7% in 2018) than females (24.0% in 2010 and 8.7% in 2018) (FFMS, 2019).

Although ESL rates in Portugal have been dropping, young people with diverse and un-linear trajectories of cumulative disengagement from education (Dale, 2010; Tomaszewska-Pękała, Marchlik, & Wrona, 2017) continue to be widely present in Portuguese society and tend to be pushed to its margins. These are precisely the young people who are the focus of this study. Second Chance Education (SCE) is one of the rare socio-educational measures available to early school leavers, both under and over 18 years old. In the context of educational research and policy recommendations addressing ESL, compensatory or SCE strategies have been recognised, alongside prevention and intervention strategies, as essential for reducing early dropout rates (Dale, 2010; Day *et al.*, 2013; European Commission, 2013). These are well established and recognised in many European countries, although still incipient in Portugal³. SCE projects welcome youngsters who had unsuccessful and often conflicting paths throughout mainstream school leading to prolonged school absences or to effective school dropout before finishing compulsory education. These projects aim to provide psychosocial support, academic qualifications and a positive educational experience to early school leavers, mainly through individualised, flexible and participatory pedagogical approaches and vocational and artistic training. They usually develop a community-based approach, connecting with other relevant institutional agents (youth protection and youth justice services, health services, education and training agents, local enterprises and charities) to foster young people’s social, cultural and economic inclusion and initiative.

2. Objectives

Based on a broad and holistic perspective of education that articulates school pedagogy and social pedagogy, the main goal of this study was to contribute to the identification of more effective ways to ensure the right to education to all young people, regardless of age or academic qualification. In order to achieve this goal, the study was designed according to the following specific objectives:

1. To identify school related factors that contribute to cumulative school disengagement and early school leaving;
2. To identify the educational factors that motivate early school leavers to engage and persist in SCE projects.

The study adopted a biographical approach based on the trajectories and experiences of Portuguese young adults (over 18 years old) who had dropped out of school before completing lower secondary education and who later reengaged in education through SCE projects. The research was led by the following questions:

1. How have early school leavers experienced their previous educational paths? And how did these experiences transform their identities and biographies?
2. Why did they engage in a SCE project and how do they experience their current participation in it?
3. What benefits do early school leavers identify from participating in a SCE project? What factors contribute to achieving those benefits?
4. What lessons can be drawn from the experiences and perspectives of early school leavers that are relevant to socio-educational intervention with young people in similar situations?

3. Methodology

In order to address these research questions, the study followed a qualitative approach based on the analysis of the perspectives, daily activities and interactions of young people engaged in SCE projects. This approach was considered the most appropriate, not only because there is a lack of studies that seek to understand ESL by taking the voice of young people into account (Tilleczek *et al.*, 2011), but mainly because it allows a more contextualised and comprehensive reading of the diverse reasons, meanings, choices, factors and associated outcomes that are at play in ESL and school (re)engagement (Jonker, 2006; Nada *et al.*, 2018; Smyth, 2007; Smyth & McInerney, 2013).

Participants in this study were part of a larger group of young people with pathways of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour who participated in an 18-month ethnographic case study carried out in Portugal within the PROMISE project (see Matos *et al.*, 2018). The participants in the present study were recruited from two SCE projects in the north of Portugal. In total, 20 young people participated, 7 of them girls (this gender imbalance was a direct reflection of the gender imbalance

among students in the SCE projects, and among early school leavers in Portugal, in general). Most participants were aged 18 (n=7), 4 were aged 19, 4 were aged 20, 1 was aged 21, 1 was aged 22 and 3 were aged 24. All respondents were single. One respondent was a mother of a young child. Approximately half of the respondents (n=9) lived at home with both parents or with their mother (n=8); one lived with his father, one lived alone and another one lived in a residential care facility. 10 participants mentioned to have had previous contact with the Youth Justice System and/or with the Child and Youth Protection System. Although no quantitative socioeconomic data was collected, participants' reports about place of residence, employment situation and household life make it possible to determine that most participants come from a low socioeconomic context.

The two SCE projects where participants were recruited are civil society initiatives (although working in close collaboration with the public education system, including taking place in public facilities and recruiting teachers from public schools) which offer a lower secondary education qualification to young people from 15 to 24 years old who have dropped out of regular school. One of the projects welcomes around 60 students per year; the other receives about 30 students. Both projects have a pedagogical approach based on the arts and on vocational training (mainly cooking and catering), and foster students' participation in school management and in local community artistic or solidarity projects or in catering services. Students can join these projects via a Youth Protection or Youth Justice Services order (this is the case of most students under 18 years old), or by their own initiative (the case of most students over 18 years old).

At first, all respondents were given an information sheet outlining the research and providing contact details of the researchers and were assured that they could choose not to participate in or withdraw from the research at any point. Additionally, all participants were asked to sign a consent form. No individual files were accessed during the research and all information gathered was provided directly by the participants.

Data to this study were collected over a period of 7 months (January to July 2017) using semi-structured interviews, participant observation and focus group. Individual in-depth voice-recorded interviews were conducted with all participants by the same researchers who conducted participant observation, with an average length of 39 minutes per interview. The semi-structured interview questions were specifically designed to this study and explored respondents' previous

educational paths and experiences, their process and reasons to engage in the SCE project, their current experience in these projects, as well as the perceived personal changes brought by this engagement.

Due to the similarities between the two SCE projects and to better access conditions to one of them, participant observation was mainly conducted in one of these projects. It lasted throughout the whole research period, and it focused on students' daily activities and some key project events (weekly assemblies, external visits, festive events). Additionally, a focus group was held in this project at the end of the research period. It was attended by 9 participants (two girls and 7 boys aged between 18 and 21), lasted for 28 minutes and addressed participants' past experiences in mainstream school and how they compared it with their present experiences in the SCE project.

The interviews and the focus group were transcribed verbatim and the participant observations were recorded in field notes. Both sets of data were anonymised, coded (using *Nvivo 11*) and analysed thematically by all the research team members.

4. Results

This section presents the key findings of the study, organised in four main themes that related to the study's research questions: participants' past experiences in mainstream school and its' perceived consequences; the efforts made by the participants to change their lives by reengaging in education; the personal changes they recognised as a result from this reengagement; and, finally, the educational factors that made these changes possible.

4.1. Conflicts in school

Several and overlapping structural challenges and disadvantages were evident across the narratives of the participants in the study, namely related to low socioeconomic status (poverty and precarious employment conditions), place of residence (mainly deprived and stigmatised urban neighbourhoods) or gender inequalities (mostly felt by girls in terms of moral judgment, limitations to individual freedom and barriers to access the labour market). These disadvantages were pictured by most respondents as determining their life opportunities and choices in several domains (education, work, family, mobility), often putting them in vulnerable, risky or marginalised positions. Consequently, these young people were highly prone to social stigmatisation, as well as to recurrent

conflicting or problematic experiences, namely within their families, with their peers or intimate partners, in their neighbourhoods, with the police or other justice or protection agents and institutions, and, of course, at school (for further detail regarding young people's experiences of conflict see Matos *et al.*, 2018).

Mainstream schools were the sites where the participants referred to have had the most conflict-based experiences throughout their lives. These were mentioned both in individual interviews and in the focus group and tended to be particularly related to resistance or undisciplined behaviours at school, as well as to the lack of interest or motivation to be in school: 'I didn't want to go to school, I didn't like school' (Óscar⁴, 18 years old); 'At my old school, I beat the record of disciplinary offences, really, ... there wasn't a single class where I wasn't sent to the student's office with a disciplinary offence, because I was always getting into trouble' (Andreia, 18).

Some young people perceived their learning difficulties as individual inabilities that justified school failure - 'I always had trouble in school, even when I was younger... Some [kids] took the test in five minutes, while I left with only half the test done' (Óscar, 18). Others mentioned to have experienced violence at school (whether as victims or as perpetrators of bullying or aggression to teachers or staff): 'I had a hard time staying focused, ignoring what others were saying about me, not thinking about what would happen to me if I were out on the break. I often came out [to recess] and there were already people there to harass me' (Lourenço, 24).

However, the most prominent aspect respondents referred to when recalling their past experiences in mainstream schools were situations where they felt that the school as a whole, and teachers in particular, didn't care about students. Some referred to mainstream schools and its teachers as having distant and non-supportive relationships with the students, as well as low expectations and low commitment towards them: 'School thinks we are not capable, doesn't insist. You don't come, you don't get. It's finished. Give up, go away. You're expelled' (Elsa, 20); 'Mainstream school teaches, but it doesn't care about students, basically. ... many schools always want to check our records, our past, and don't mind about our present or our future, they just want to know our past' (Telma, 19).

Moreover, the feeling of being discriminated against by schools and teachers due to their low achievement, place of origin (poor neighbourhoods) or past behaviour was recurrent among participants, often referring to schools that would

transfer them to other institutions or refuse their enrolment: 'We had school records, school failure and all those things, bad behaviours, disciplinary offences, and all that' (Sérgio, 18). This fostered relationships with conventional schools and teachers often built upon mutual negative expectations and distrust, individual accountability for failures and mistakes, conflict and, ultimately, marginalisation.

Based on the participants' narratives, as well as in other studies on ESL (Alves *et al.*, 2014; McFadden & Munns, 2002; Smyth, 2007; Tilleczek *et al.*, 2011), it becomes evident that, for many vulnerable young people, schools become places of individual failure and interpersonal conflict where they don't feel welcomed and from which they stop expecting positive outcomes. These unsuccessful and/or problematic paths in mainstream school favour the emergence of a vicious circle of conflicting behaviours and conflicting institutional responses and lead to the accumulation of symbolic and material factors that distance and disengage young people from education, eventually ending in school dropout (Lessard *et al.*, 2008). 'I left school at 13, 14; it was a decision of mine' (Martim, 20); 'I wanted to do a vocational course and get out of regular school' (Elsa, 20).

However, despite these reported overall negative feelings and repulsive relations towards regular school, most participants in the study stated that they would later regret having dropped out of school because they felt school dropout turned out to be just another step in the circle of their social marginalisation, making them even more vulnerable to unemployment, poverty and deviant behaviour, as well as to social stigmatisation and conflict:

'Maybe a lot of people looked down on me because they knew that I wasn't doing anything with my life [because he dropped out of school], because I wasn't working, they thought maybe I was going back to what I was before [deviant behaviour], I wasn't going anywhere.' (Marco, 24).

4.2. Searching for a second chance

All the participants of this study have gone through problematic, conflictual and/or unsuccessful experiences in mainstream schools and have felt discrimination and personal disadvantage because of it. However, by having enrolled in a SCE project, they felt they were also engaging in a change-seeking path that would help them to overcome this vulnerable and stigmatising situation. And for some this really felt like their last chance to seek positive changes for their lives:

'It's an excellent opportunity. ... For example, I'm 24 years old, I'm young, but to finish my education I'm not that young anymore, right?' (Santiago, 24).

In fact, education was, again, at the centre of the life of these youngsters, not as a site of conflict, but as a site of agency. Many respondents mentioned that they had made personal efforts searching for new education opportunities and/or striving to be successful in the educational paths they were in. Five respondents claimed to have arrived at the SCE project via institutional indication and ten others via the suggestion of family or friends, some of whom had previously been enrolled in SCE projects themselves. However, most participants clearly stated that they came to the projects - and stayed in the projects - because they wanted to, and not because they were told to.

What motivated me was my conscience, my conscience. Maturity increased, did it not? It got to a point that I had to say, "I have to go back to school and improve myself." The social worker got me this [the SCE project] and I came. I grabbed it, to make people happy and that was it... (Edgar, 21)

When asked about the reasons for being in the SCE project, most respondents tended to stress the new opportunity to reengage with school and continue or finish their education. Other reasons referred were: more opportunities to find work in the future, the possibility to 'be someone in life' and have a better future, and, finally, the willingness to meet their own or others' (family, teachers) expectations regarding their future: 'My family and work, I have to be someone. If I were alone, I wouldn't mind being a bandit, my friends are all in jail. But no, I have a sister, I have a mother, I have a grandmother' (Marco, 24).

This new engagement in education tended to be experienced by the participants as an opportunity to set a new course for their lives. Consequently, it became a source of pride in themselves, whether because of their renewed commitment in school activities, because of the positive way they were seen by others for reengaging in education, or because of their own sense of self-improvement in aspects like maturity, responsibility, behavioural adjustment, effort and self-reliance: 'Yes [it changed the way I saw myself]. I gained more self-esteem and confidence in myself' (Elsa, 20).

4.3. Change in progress

Change was a central issue for the participants of the study, as all of them were seeking to build new life paths that differ from their problematic past

experiences through reengaging – and succeeding – in formal educational trajectories. When asked about the personal (felt or expected) changes they perceived as resulting from their engagement in a SCE project, respondents were almost unanimous in stressing positive outcomes in a wide diversity of dimensions. The most referred set of benefits was ‘personal growth and new ways of thinking’, encompassing ideas like ‘growth’, ‘evolution’, ‘recognising past mistakes’, ‘willingness to change’, ‘new life goals’, ‘looking at life in a positive way’, and ‘higher aspirations’: ‘how am I going to explain? Now I dream bigger than I dreamed before’ (Raquel, 19).

A second set of benefits highly referred by the respondents was related to a greater well-being and feelings of self-value, self-esteem and of ‘being capable’.

They give me the strength to go forward, and to me, that raises my self-esteem, doesn't it? And it makes me see myself in a better light. You are getting there, you have people who care about you, you already have something to hold on to and move forward’ (José, 19).

Another relevant set of benefits recognised by the respondents was related to the improvement of personal and social skills (keeping calm, respecting others, communication, team work), the improvement and diversification of relationships (better and/or new relationships with family, teachers, peers, other adults), and the adjustment of past behaviours that they now considered to be problematic: ‘My mother didn't like it very much that I was getting home late, for example, and when I told her that I was struggling to find a training course, our relationship started to improve’ (Miguel, 20); ‘Ahhh, like working in a team... Knowing how to respect others... with everything’ (Manuel, 18).

One last cluster of positive changes identified by the participants was related to education and learning, namely building a better relationship with education and/or the school, improving or acquiring new skills or fields of interest, and specific curricular learning: ‘Always being in school, always going to school. It's one of the things that changed in me. There was no school that could hold me there for so long’ (Hugo, 19); ‘I'm learning well. They teach you mathematics in a very different way from mainstream school, so that in a certain way you can understand things better’ (Edgar, 21).

These positive experiences, in turn, made it easier, or even possible for respondents to achieving a school degree and getting better academic qualifications, thus improving their opportunities

to find better jobs and have a better future: ‘I finished this in an instant. The teachers thought that I was going to bail on this’ (Óscar, 18); ‘It is knowing that I can have continuity in my future, to know that this can provide continuity’ (Martim, 20).

4.4. Supporting change

In the face of such positive impacts identified by the participants, the study focused on the factors that, according to them, made these changes possible. The narratives about the ways participants experienced the SCE projects were very telling on this regard. Such as the impacts they identified, their experiences were also typically positive and almost all respondents stated ‘to like’ or ‘to feel good’ in the SCE projects. These positive feelings tended to be strongly associated with a sense of being welcomed, listened to, respected, not being judged, and being valued and supported in this new context, especially by the adults present.

Not here; here you have that help, even if you are having a bad day you always have that call from the other side, like, good mood, you know it's the best for you and we need you, like, no other school does that. It's like that. Ahh, in other schools if you don't want to go, do not go (Marco, 24).

They help us a lot. If I have to talk, if I have to vent, you can go to them. They give advice; it's like a second mother and a second father, basically. I feel good, it's different. The warmth, the cosiness, the trust, is completely different. (Júlia, 18)

So I consider the [project name] a good place to be. Teachers strive to help us, in whatever they can. They do not just teach us stuff here, do they? They help us with many other problems. Personal problems, just like anyone has. (Santiago, 24)

No teacher ever spoke as well about me as these teachers do. (Óscar, 18)

The relationships established within these contexts were highly valued by most respondents, particularly the relationships with teachers and staff. These were described in a highly positive tone, invoking notions of family, warmth, friendship, acceptance, conviviality, and closeness. Most teachers were pictured as agents of trust, care, persistence (‘not giving up’) and support, thus becoming significant adults that truly respected, appreciated and expected the best out of the participants. These aspects could be confirmed through participant observations, as relationships between students and teachers were indeed witnessed as

close, affective, supportive and frequently joyful. It was also striking to witness how most teachers knew about students' personal life circumstances and challenges and were frequently available to give advice and help them at this level.

For most participants these highly valued relationships were acknowledged as major levers of personal change, namely by helping them to improve their self-esteem and self-efficacy, to reach moral and behavioural adjustment, to reinforce their commitment to school, work and/or family, and to define long-term life goals. Although the role of supportive and individualised relationships has long been stressed in the academic literature as a key success factor to promote behavioural rehabilitation (Caise and Haines, 2015; McNeill et al., 2012) and educational attainment (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely, 2008; Johnstonbaugh, 2018; McFadden & Munns, 2002; Meltzer, Muir, & Craig, 2018), this kind of relationships came as quite a new experience for most participants and, for many, it seems to have made a great difference in their lives.

One particular aspect that the respondents appreciated in these educational settings, felt as directly related to personal change, was the sense of commitment that teachers and staff dedicated to the projects and to each of their students. This was confirmed by the participant observations conducted in the SCE project in a wide variety of moments and practices (e.g., teachers phoning students who were missing classes or who were going through a tough period, having long talks with students who were going through personal problems or who misbehaved in some way, welcoming students back to the project after long periods of absence, working until late or at weekends to prepare school activities, helping students find new training opportunities, internships or jobs, medical or legal consultations, going to court hearings, etc.). According to some respondents, this kind of commitment from the adults made them commit themselves to school in a completely new way.

I like to feel responsible, I like to feel that I have responsibilities with this [the SCE project]. I like... before I would wake up and "Hey, school! What is this?! I go there and do what? Now I wake up and come straight away. This is not even school, it's the [name of project]. It's 10 o'clock, teacher Elisa must be there already, teacher Jorge must be there already. Let's go! We call each other "let's get up". It's this motivation, you know? A person feels the need to come here. It's not like "school." (Nelson, 18)

Another aspect that was strongly valued by respondents were the teaching methods and the structuring of the daily activities. These tended

to be described as flexible and adjustable to the students' individual needs, moods, preferences and learning paces. This was something easily observed in the SCE projects, as many students were frequently out of the classrooms, happily moving through the school and performing all kinds of practical activities or running errands for the teachers inside or outside the school. The teaching methods were also praised by participants for their creativity (through the use of arts) and for their practical nature (through vocational training and real activities in/for the community). Respondents felt these pedagogical features made learning easier and more appealing for them, because it made them feel challenged and capable of reaching new goals. They also valued the fact that learning was more attuned with the labour market reality that they would have to face in the future.

Sometimes, with a game you'll understand better [maths] than working on equations the whole week; and in English as well. I really like English. Portuguese too. They do not badger you with that boring subject, pum pum pum ... they find a way for you to understand things... with games, with books and with readings and poems, etc. It's pretty good stuff. (Edgar, 21)

Finally, the opportunities these students had to make suggestions and choices about their learning process as well as about the overall project activities and rules (e.g., in weekly school assemblies, which could be observed as highly participated moments) were also stressed as positive by some respondents.

Maybe not doing everything the way the teachers would. We give some ideas and then we see if it's possible or not. I think this would be interesting because it also draws more from the student as well, motivates the student. That part also motivated me in the project; it was also getting away from the expected and choosing something else. (Rita, 20)

These spaces for agency provided by the SCE projects gave youngsters the opportunity to experiment practical, 'hands-on' and creative tasks and join in decision making processes, thus fostering a sense of belonging and ownership regarding the SCE project, alongside with self-pride and self-value for discovering new interests and skills and for being able to accomplish new challenges. As widely referred in academic research and recommendations about school (re)engagement (Davies, Lamb, & Doecke, 2011; Rajasekaran and Reyes, 2019; Smyth, 2007; Tomaszewska-Pękała et al., 2017) and desistance from antisocial behaviour (McNeill et al., 2012), these aspects, in turn,

showed to be particularly relevant for participants to adopt more prosocial behaviours, (re)engage in education, become open to new perspectives and build new life goals.

Lastly, it is relevant to stress that most of these highly valued aspects – respectful, trustful, committed and supporting relationships, adaptable and participatory activities – were precisely the ones respondents tended to stress as the most different from the experience they were used to in previous formal education contexts, particularly in regular school:

‘Because I think here teachers are different from regular school. Regular school teaches but doesn’t want to know about students, basically. But not here, here you notice the affection that the teachers feel for us. They make us feel good, like we are at home’ (Telma, 19).

Moreover, this perceived contrast made many participants willing to share their own experience with other young people who dropped out of school and persuade them to participate in the projects, much like some of them had been previously persuaded to come by other former students. In their views, SCE projects were particularly fit to many youngsters they knew and with whom they shared similar circumstances: friends, siblings or cousins, mates from their neighbourhood, peers from former schools, which they described as the ‘more problematic’, ‘those whom no one believes in’, the ones ‘at home doing nothing’, the ones marginalised by the school or the family.

And if many primary and secondary schools don’t want to know of these ‘non-students’ who will want to? Are they going to stay on the streets? Are they going to become drug addicts? If not for [project name] nobody else will want to know about them. If not for schools like [name of project] they are refugees in the streets, they have nothing. (Roberta, 18)

I think these people, the problematic ones, I think they should really come here to spend a day with us. In what school have you seen a teacher cooking with the students?! Nowhere ... right? And here it’s wonderful, I like being here. I love it and I think these people would love it too. (Andreia, 18)

Like, if I see a colleague of mine talking about school and stuff, I’ll say, “Oh, come to my school.” (Hugo, 19)

5. Discussion and conclusions: learning from the real ‘experts’

This study sought to call into attention and emphasise the responsibility of society as a whole to give an adequate response to those vulnerable

young people to whom school has failed. The findings evidenced, alongside academic literature (Alves et al., 2014; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Smyth, 2017; Tarabini, Jacovkis, & Montes, 2017; Tarabini et al., 2019; te Riele, 2006a), that mainstream school continues to have difficulties dealing with the sociocultural diversity of students, making it especially hard for young people from low socio-economic status or the working class to meet its expectations and be successful, pushing already vulnerable young people to a cumulative process of school disengagement and eventual dropout. However, these young people are precisely the ones to whom education can make a bigger difference. But instead, school keeps making many of them even more vulnerable.

Alternatively, at the core of educational re-engagement measures, particularly SCE projects, is precisely the aim to meet the specific needs of the socially and educationally excluded young people. And this might be the main lesson to learn from this kind of initiatives. Unlike many mainstream schools, SCE projects focus on addressing the specific life circumstances of marginalised youth, trying to respond in an individualised, integrated and flexible way to the cumulative debilitating effects of poverty, family ruptures, risky or antisocial behaviour, social stigmatization and school exclusion. As the participants in this study eloquently voiced, it’s by getting to know each student and his/her life challenges, as well as his/her interests and skills, and by respecting, valuing and expecting the best out of each one, that these projects are able to make a positive difference in young peoples’ lives.

Through listening to the voices of early school leavers that later reengaged in education – the real “experts” – it becomes clear that a holistic and comprehensive socio-educational praxis that foster personal development beyond strict academic goals responds the best to vulnerable and marginalised young peoples’ needs (McPherson, 2019; Savelsberg, Pignata, & Weckert, 2017). According to the narratives and practices collected in this and other studies (Llena-Berñe et al., 2017; McGregor et al., 2015) it is possible to highlight several aspects of the SCE socio-pedagogical intervention model that seem to have a positive impact on young people’s behavioural adjustment, educational (re)engagement and social inclusion.

A first lesson to be learned from the SCE approach is the central role that students play in these projects. Unlike most of their past experiences in conventional schools, here students feel they are listened to, respected and valued for what they are and for what they can be, and not for who they were in the past, or for who they cannot become. In SCE young people feel they

can have a 'fresh start' (Tarabini, Jacovkis, & Montes, 2017) as partners in the teaching and learning process, treated and trusted as equal and entitled to express their views, choose, create and take responsibility for the projects' activities and for their own educational path (McPherson, 2019). This promotes students' sense of belonging and ownership (Willms, 2003) about the educational settings and paths they are in, thus strengthening their commitment and autonomy towards education and learning.

A second lesson to draw from early school leavers' experiences in SCE projects is about the decisive role of emotions and affective bonds in school (re)engagement (Macedo, Santos, & Araújo, 2018; McFadden & Munns, 2002). Students are extremely sensitive about the emotional investment teachers and other staff put in their relationships with them. And they tend to respond accordingly to it. The 'emotional labour' made by teachers (McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills *et al.*, 2016) to welcome, support and inspire their students leaves strong positive marks on them, as widely stated by the participants in the study. When expected the best, students tend to give their best. Even by engaging others like them in SCE through their own example, which can be seen as an extraordinary case of generative agency or 'giving back' (McNeill & Maruna, 2007). This shows how much teaching can be a profession of care (te Riele, 2006b) and hospitality (Baptista, 2012, 2016), enabling students, especially those most vulnerable and on the margins of society, to feel at home in school.

Finally, one last lesson to learn from SCE projects is the usefulness of its' community-based approach to education, making frequent pedagogical, experiential and support links with diverse agents from public, private and third sectors. This helps students to broaden and diversify their learning experiences, as well as their social support networks and, consequently, enhance their social capital and future opportunities (Johnstonbaugh, 2018; Smyth, 2004).

The in-depth nature of the research carried out in this study, although providing a procedural and contextualised understanding of the factors promoting school disengagement and reengagement, is also a limitation since it is unable to identify wider patterns and factors relevant to a larger range of social and cultural contexts. The study's synchronic approach also limits the understanding of the extent to which SCE attendance affects young people's life trajectories at different levels (e.g. family, education, employment, social mobility, civic participation). Future lines of research on school (dis/re)engagement factors should include mixed methods of cross-regional and cross-cultural comparisons among different pools of young people, both in and out of school, as well as a diachronic approach focusing on a multi-level life course analysis. Further research and policy and practice recommendations are also needed regarding efficient ways on how to adopt learnings from alternative socio-educational arenas, like SCE, to early school leaving prevention in mainstream schools.

Notes

- ¹ This paper results from a post-doctoral research that was carried out within the European research project *PROMISE - Promoting Youth Involvement and Social Engagement - Opportunities and challenges for 'conflicted' young people across Europe* (May 2016 to April 2019) which investigated how young people's responses to conflict can provide opportunities for positive social engagement. This project was funded under the European Commission's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, Grant Agreement no. 693221.
- ² According to the European Union, ESL refers to "those young people who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training" (COM, 2013, p. 8).
- ³ On August 6, 2019 SCE has finally been formally recognised by the Portuguese government through the Order No. 6954/2019 of the Secretary of State of Education. Until that date only two SCE projects existed in the country.
- ⁴ All participants' names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

References

- Alves, N., Guimarães, P., Marques, M., & Cavaco, C. (2014). School means nothing to me. Vocationalism and school disaffiliation in Education and Training Courses in Portugal. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 4164-4169. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.910
- Baptista, I. (2016). Para uma fundamentação antropológica e ética da educação: A escola como lugar de hospitalidade. *EDUCA - International Catholic Journal of Education*, 2, 203-214.

- Baptista, I. (2012). Ethics and Social Education – Interpellations of Contemporaneity. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*, 19, 37-49.
- Bradshaw, C. P., O'Brennan, L. M., & McNeely, C. A. (2008). Core competencies and the prevention of school failure and early school leaving. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 122, 19-32.
- Caise, S. and Haines, K. (2015). 'Children First, Offenders Second: The Centrality of Engagement in Positive Youth Justice', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 54(2): 157-175. doi: 10.1111/hojo.12099
- COM, European Commission. (2013). *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving*. Brussels.
- Dale, R. (2010). *Early school leaving: lessons from research for policy makers*. Lyon: Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training.
- Davies, M., Lamb, S., & Doecke, E. (2011). *Strategic review of effective reengagement models for disengaged learners*. University of Melbourne, Centre for Research on Education Systems. Retrieved from <https://education.unimelb.edu.au/cres/publication/reports> [Accessed at August 3, 2019]
- Day, L., Mozuraityt, N., Redgrave, K., & McCoshan, A. (2013). *Preventing early school leaving in Europe - lessons learned from second chance education*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- De Witte, K., Cabus, S., Thyssen, G., Groot, W., & van den Brink, H. M. (2013). A critical review of the literature on school dropout. *Educational Research Review*, 10, 13-28. doi: 10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.002
- Ecker-Lyster, M., & Niileksela, C. (2016). Keeping students on track to graduate: A Synthesis of school dropout trends, prevention, and intervention initiatives. *Journal of At-Risk Issues*, 19(2), 24-31.
- FFMS. (2019). Taxa de abandono precoce de educação e formação: total e por sexo. PORDATA – Estatísticas, gráficos e indicadores de Municípios, Portugal e Europa. Retrieved October 31, 2019, from <http://www.pordata.pt>.
- Johnstonbaugh, M. (2018). Conquering with capital: social, cultural, and economic capital's role in combating socio-economic disadvantage and contributing to educational attainment. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(5), 590-606. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2017.1406069
- Jonker, E.F. (2006). School hurts: refrains of hurt and hopelessness in stories about dropping out at a vocational school for care work. *Journal of Education and Work*, 19(2), 121-140. doi: 10.1080/13639080600667988
- Lessard, A., Butler-Kisber, L., Fortin, L., Marcotte, D., Potvin, P. & Royer, E. (2008). Shades of disengagement: High school dropouts speak out. *Social Psychology of Education*, 11(1), 25-42. doi: 10.1007/s11218-007-9033-z
- Llena-Berñe, A., Agud-Morell, I., Paéz de la Torre, S., & Vila Mumbrú, C. (2017). Exploring key moments of empowerment of young people through their own life stories. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*, 30, 81-94. doi: 10.7179/PSRI_2017.30.06
- Macedo, E., Santos, S.A., & Araújo, H.C. (2018). How can a second chance school support young adults' transition back to education? *European Journal of Education*. 53, 452- 455. doi: 10.1111/ejed.12312
- Magen-Nagar, N., & Shachar, H. (2017). Quality of Teaching and Dropout Risk: A Multi-Level Analysis, *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 22(1), 9-24. doi: 10.1080/10824669.2016.1242069
- Magalhães, A. M., Araújo, H. C., Macedo, E., & Rocha, C. (2015). Early school leaving in Portugal: policies and actors' interpretations. *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*, 45, 97-119.
- Matos, R., Martins, F., Carneiro, A., Campos, L., Ribeiro, L., & Negrão M. (2018). *Young people with paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour (case study report)*. Porto: CEDH - Research Centre for Human Development, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Published online <http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Young-people-with-paths-of-psychosocial-risk-and-deviant-behaviour.pdf>
- McFadden, M., & Munns, G. (2002). Student engagement and the social relations of pedagogy. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23(3), 357-66. doi: 10.1080/0142569022000015409
- McGregor, G., Mills, M., te Riele K., & Hayes, D. (2015). Excluded from school: getting a second chance at a 'meaningful' education, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(6), 608-625. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2014.961684
- McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2012). Alternative education sites and marginalised young people: 'I wish there were more schools like this one'. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(8), 843-862. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2010.529467
- McNeill, F., & Maruna, S. (2007). Giving up and giving back: Desistance, generativity and social work with offenders. *Developments in social work with offenders*. London: Research highlights in social work (No. 48), pp. 224-339.
- McNeill, F., Farrall, S., Lightowler, C., and Maruna, S. (2012). *How and why people stop offending: discovering desistance*. Glasgow: Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, University of Glasgow.
- McPherson, C. (2019). It's just so much better than school: the redemptive qualities of further education and youth work for working-class young people in Edinburgh, Scotland, *Journal of Youth Studies*. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1599103
- Meltzer, A., Muir, K., & Craig, L. (2018). The Role of Trusted Adults in Young People's Social and Economic Lives. *Youth & Society*, 50(5), 575-592. doi: 10.1177/0044118X16637610

- Mills, M., McGregor, G., Baroutsis, A., te Riele K., & Hayes, D. (2016). Alternative education and social justice: considering issues of affective and contributive justice. *Critical Studies in Education*, 57(1), 100-115. doi: 10.1080/17508487.2016.1087413
- Nada, C. I., Santos, S. A., Macedo E., & Araújo, H. C. (2018). Can mainstream and alternative education learn from each other? An analysis of measures against school dropout and early school leaving in Portugal. *Educational Review*. doi: 10.1080/00131911.2018.1508127.
- Rajasekaran, S., & Reyes, J. (2019). *Back to School: Pathways for Reengagement of Out-of-School Youth in Education*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Savelsberg, H., Pignata, S., & Weckert, P. (2017). Second chance education: barriers, supports and engagement strategies. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 57(1), 36-57.
- Smyth, J. (2017) Youth insecurity in schools: what's going on with class?, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 26(2), 211-227. doi: 10.1080/09620214.2016.1191964
- Smyth, J. (2007). Toward the Pedagogically Engaged School: listening to student voice as a positive response to disengagement and "dropping out," (pp. 635-658) in D. Thiessen and A. Cook-Sather (eds) *International Handbook of Student Experience of Elementary and Secondary School*. Dordrecht: Springer Science Publishers.
- Smyth, J. (2004). Social capital and the 'socially just school', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(1), 19-33. doi: 10.1080/0142569032000155917
- Smyth, J., & Hattam, R. (2001). 'Voiced' Research as a Sociology for Understanding 'Dropping Out' of School. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 22(3), 401-415. doi: 10.1080/01425690120068006
- Smyth, J., & McInerney, P. (2013). Whose side are you on? Advocacy ethnography: some methodological aspects of narrative portraits of disadvantaged young people, in socially critical research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(1), 1-20. doi: 10.1080/09518398.2011.604649
- Tarabini, A., Curran, M., Montes A., & Parcerisa, L. (2019). Can educational engagement prevent Early School Leaving? Unpacking the school's effect on educational success. *Educational Studies*, 45(2), 226-241. doi: 10.1080/03055698.2018.1446327
- Tarabini, A., Jacovkis, J., & Montes, A. (2018). Factors in educational exclusion: including the voice of the youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(6), 836-851. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2017.1420765
- te Riele, K. (2006a). Youth 'at risk': further marginalizing the marginalized?. *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 129-145. doi: 10.1080/02680930500499968
- te Riele, K. (2006b). Schooling practices for marginalized students - practice-with-hope. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10(1), 59-74. doi: 10.1080/13603110500221750
- Tilleczek, K., Ferguson, B., Edney, D. R, Rummens, A., Boydell, K., & Mueller, M. (2011). A contemporary study with early school leavers: paths and social processes of leaving high school. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, 3(1), 1-39. doi: 10.29173/cjfy12172
- Tomaszewska-Pękała, H., Marchlik, P., & Wrona, A. (2017). *Finding inspiring practices on how to prevent ESL and school disengagement. Lessons from the educational trajectories of youth at risk from nine EU countries*. Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw. Retrieved from https://www.uantwerpen.be/images/uantwerpen/container23160/files/Deliverable%205_1_Publication%206_final_final_15_12_2017.pdf (Accessed at April 27, 2018)
- Van Houtte, M., & Demanet, J. (2016). Teachers' beliefs about students, and the intention of students to drop out of secondary education in Flanders. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 54, 117-127. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2015.12.003
- Willms, J. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation. Results from PISA 2000*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

HOW TO CITE THE ARTICLE

Martins, F., Carneiro, A., Campos, L., Mota, L., Negrão, M., Baptista, I., & Matos, R. (2020). The right to a second chance: lessons learned from the experience of early school leavers who returned to education. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*, 36, 139-153. DOI: 10.7179/PSRI_2020.36.09

AUTHOR'S ADDRESS

FILIFE MARTINS. E-mail: fdmartins@porto.ucp.pt

ALEXANDRA CARNEIRO. E-mail: acarneiro@porto.ucp.pt

LUÍSA CAMPOS. E-mail: mcampos@porto.ucp.pt

LUÍSA MOTA RIBEIRO. E-mail: lmribeiro@porto.ucp.pt

MARIANA NEGRÃO. E-mail: mnegrao@porto.ucp.pt

ISABEL BAPTISTA. E-mail: ibaptista@porto.ucp.pt

RAQUEL MATOS. E-mail: rmatos@porto.ucp.pt

ACADEMIC PROFILE

FILIFE MARTINS. Filife Martins is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculty of Education and Psychology and a member of the Research Centre for Human Development (CEDH-UCP), where he conducted postdoctoral studies in Social Pedagogy. He holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (2013), with the thesis "Between Project and Conviviality: being young in the poor outskirts of Mindelo, Cape Verde". He has developed ethnographic research with vulnerable young people in urban contexts in Cape Verde and in Portugal, with a focus on young people's educational trajectories, educational inclusion and civic participation.

ALEXANDRA CARNEIRO. Alexandra Carneiro is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculty of Education and Psychology and a member of the Research Centre for Human Development (CEDH-UCP). Currently, she is also coordinator of the Clínica Universitária de Psicologia (CUP). She holds a PhD in Applied Psychology from School of Psychology, University of Minho, with the thesis Emotional and Behavioral Problems in Preschoolers: Risk Factors and Assessment Issues. In the last years she developed research in the areas of psychological assessment and psychopathology in preschool age children, routine outcome monitoring, and youth social participation. Her main scientific areas of activity are psychological assessment in children and adolescents, psychopathology in preschool age children, attachment, routine outcome monitoring with children and adolescents, and youth social involvement.

LUÍSA CAMPOS. Luísa Campos is Assistant Professor at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculty of Education and Psychology and a member of the Research Centre for Human Development (CEDH-UCP). In the last years has developed several research projects about mental health promotion and has published articles and book chapters.

LUÍSA MOTA RIBEIRO. Luísa Mota Ribeiro, PhD is Assistant Professor in Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculty of Education and Psychology and a member of the Research Centre for Human Development (CEDH-UCP). She teaches psychological intervention in educational settings and community psychology. Her research interests include student involvement and self-regulated learning, classroom questioning, teacher and student's perceptions of teaching and learning, and education of vulnerable children and adolescents.

MARIANA NEGRÃO. Mariana Negrão is Assistant Professor at at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculty of Education and Psychology and a member of the Research Centre for Human Development (CEDH-UCP). She has a degree in Psychology from Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto and a PhD in Clinical Psychology from University of Minho. Her clinical, research and training activity focuses on Parenthood and Risk for child development and Out of Home Care for children and youth. She is a psychologist and is the coordinator of “Aprender a Educar”, FAPsi - Advanced Training in Psychology and University extension.

ISABEL BAPTISTA. Isabel Baptista is an Associate Professor at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculty of Education and Psychology and a Senior Resercher of the Research Centre for Human Development (CEDH-UCP). PhD in Philosophy and Master in Philosophy of Education (University of Porto). Ethics Ombudsman (UCP-Porto). President of the Ethics Committee of the Portuguese Society of Education Sciences (SPCE). Diretor of the journal *A Página da Educação* (www.apagina.pt). Coordinator of Master Courses in Educational Sciences - Social Pedagogy (UCP-Porto).

RAQUEL MATOS. Raquel Matos is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculty of Education and Psychology and a Senior Researcher of the Research Centre for Human Development (CEDH-UCP). She was awarded her PhD in Psychology in 2008 from University of Minho. In the last decades she has developed research projects on gender, crime and punishment and has published articles and book chapters about women in prison as well as about gender and migrations control. More recently she has been coordinating in Portugal several European projects on juvenile delinquency, being particularly interested in exploring young offenders' life pathways and experiences in the justice system. Raquel Matos recently coordinated the Portuguese team of Project PROMISE - “Promoting Youth Involvement and Social Engagement - Opportunities and challenges for ‘conflicted’ young people across Europe”, funded by Horizon 2020.