



Learning About Care and Learning to Care in Continuing Education

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Abstract. Caring for one another and growing together, fostering and building just, equitable learning environments that are livable in all dimensions and enable success, must be the fundamental purpose of teacher training programmes. Our experience as the Network of Educators for Global Citizenship shows how necessary collaborative and networked reflective processes are for teachers, through action research, grounded in their own practice. In this sense, rethinking the world, fighting against inequalities, and facing the ecological crisis requires teachers who view education as a participatory, reflective, and transformative practice. This implies a change of perspective in the design of initial and continuous teacher training based on the pedagogy of care, human interdependence and eco-dependence. It is essential to develop a profile of the educator for sustainable development and global citizenship that interweaves being, being with others, knowing, and knowing how to act. This paradigm shift translates into results such as the strengthening of networking through collaboration; the exchange of experiences; the creation of innovative educational materials; and greater influence within the educational sphere. Educators with this profile promote active learners and protagonists who lead social and environmental change. This focus on care, trust, and love builds resilient educational communities in the face of global challenges. In conclusion, it is not enough to teach technical knowledge about ecology; care and hope must be integrated as fundamental pillars of education. Sustainability can only exist if there is care. The self-awareness, commitment, and creativity of educators can bring about profound change in future generations.

Keywords: care, global citizenship education, teacher training, sustainability.

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to highlight some key elements for teacher training based on networking and the pedagogy of care. This approach can help us move towards a new educational model for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) based on interdependence and ethical responsibility.

Both Gilligan (2023) and Noddings (2009) are helping to refocus concerns about sustainability from an educational perspective of care. From this approach, the core question will be: Do you

care about this planet and its inhabitants? Because if you truly care, you cannot continue acting in the same way. The opposite of caring is neglecting: How are we neglecting others? Why? We all know the answer: we are being negligent because of our lack of care. We must be more caring.

Teacher training is key to overcoming this systemic lack of care and consequently achieving goal 4.7 (UNESCO, 2022). In this context, it is vital to recognize that education is essential for the success of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, as it is the primary tool for designing the future. Furthermore, education for sustainability must be understood as indissolubly linked to education for democracy, aiming to develop creative and transformative skills within collective processes of responsibility.

Mulà and Tilbury (2025) have highlighted the difficulties teachers face in bringing education for sustainable development into the classroom: the lack of transformative experiences during their own education, the fragmentation of the curriculum and lack of interdisciplinarity, and the isolation of these teachers within their teaching staff.

In this regard, this author identifies how the Network of Educators for Global Citizenship (RECG) was born out of overcoming the loneliness of teachers known as ‘Quixote-Teacher’. It was a collaborative response that led to the forging of relationships, learning and complicity among teachers committed to ESD, but who found themselves isolated in their schools, advancing step by step until they had established a common space that was open, diverse and based on mutual trust as described by Jara (2008).

Mulà and Tilbury (2025) also point out other relevant issues that often go unnoticed: findings from various reviews show that the cognitive dimension of sustainability receives more attention than the socio-emotional and action dimensions, but that this is not effective in engaging students. Furthermore, studies indicate that problem-oriented learning can have negative psychological impacts on students, such as eco-anxiety or apathy towards change. Even teachers who have long championed this agenda are now considering more transformative learning approaches that engage students in action and emotional learning.

Barahona et al. (2013) have already indicated the transformative potential of our schools when teachers work together in networks with students taking a leading role from a critical perspective, prioritising socio-affective and reflective methodologies with the aim of co-transforming the school to change the world.

If caring is learned in the relationships we experience, then schools need to regain their socialising role and be capable of generating knowledge and awareness through active learning based on all human dimensions (emotional, cognitive, relational, spiritual, etc.). A humanising concept of education that promotes the comprehensive development of individuals is proposed.

The RECG, in its concern for others, for all disadvantaged people and for the planet, promotes education for global citizenship based on justice, and is enriching its analysis and proposals with Gilligan’s ethics of care (Gilligan, 2023) and Noddings’ pedagogy of care (Noddings, 2009). This is a relational, non-individualistic ethic and pedagogy based on radical listening to the needs of those participating in the educational encounter. Caring is what human beings do when they take care of themselves, others and the planet. It is their natural human capacity.

The RECG is a space for meeting and continuous self-training through collaboration to achieve shared goals on education for justice, care and sustainability of life. Teachers in the network take care of themselves by designing educational practices that help them work in transformative schools to create a sustainable society, environment and surroundings. They take care of each other by listening to the needs and strengths of the people who form it, sharing and creating

educational proposals based on their own experience. They also disseminate them in training processes for younger people and other teachers through face-to-face workshops and the website².

The RECG believes that the basic purpose of initial and continuing teacher training programmes should be to care for one another and grow together, to contribute to and build learning environments that are fair, equitable, liveable in all dimensions, and conducive to success. For this reason, the pedagogy and ethics of care are fundamental pillars of teacher training at EDSCG.

Delors (1996) emphasises that education should provide each person with the ability to understand themselves and others through greater knowledge of the world. Although ESD is a priority in various educational legislations, both international (UNESCO, 2003, 2022, 2023) and the European framework of sustainability competences GreenComp (Bianchi et al., 2022), as in the national laws of each country, the difficulty of transposing the law into everyday school life is evident (Mulà & Tilbury, 2025).

There are teacher training programmes involving various educational institutions and civil society organisations. Our analysis should highlight the Movimiento 4.7 organisation in Spain, which, driven by four NGOs, is bringing together different civil society groups to promote sustainable and transformative education for global citizenship (Movimiento 4.7, 2023, 2024).

In conclusion, we believe that in order to integrate ethics and pedagogy of care into continuing education, programmes must go beyond a theoretical and isolated approach. This involves promoting networking, creating communities of teachers with peer mentoring, and partnerships with eco-social education entities.

2 Ethical Foundations in Care and Sustainability for Teacher Training

Challenged by reality, educating in care is imperative in the world we live in. Therefore, our goal is to place care at the centre of the training and work of those who teach, in their relationships with themselves and their peers, with their students, their families and with the planet they inhabit.

We live on Earth and nature constitutes us: we live the air that our lungs breathe and we live the water that also makes up our bodies. Bauman (2004) reminded us of Kant's prophecy for the world to come: Nature's supreme design: a perfect unification of the human species through common citizenship. The Earth surface is our common property; there will be no other option but to live together and help each other.

However, economic development has reached such levels of excess, recklessness and neglect that it is jeopardising our "being" in nature, benefiting only a few and undermining sustainability. From this model of development, a paradigm of instrumental rationality according to Habermas (1987), where does shared prosperity and care for life fit in? In response to this instrumental rationality, we must recover the focus on the Common Good as the ultimate goal of both education and democracy. This requires a clear distinction between 'soft sustainability', which focuses on efficiency without questioning current economic systems, and 'strong sustainability'. The latter, based on sufficiency and planetary boundaries, demands a cultural change where universities act as spaces for renewal, introducing students to the world as it is—including its crises—rather than a romanticized version of the past.

As never before in history, our common destiny calls us to a new beginning (...) that will require a change of minds and hearts, and a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility (UNESCO, 2003).

According to Boff (2012), care is the central category of an emerging civilizational paradigm that establishes a new relationship with nature and a transformative way of being and producing. While care and justice follow different logics, they are complementary and essential for building a fruitful human coexistence rooted in solidarity. This ethics of care highlights human vulnerability and the fragility of nature, inspiring an active compassion that—as Gilligan (2013, 2023) also concludes—effectively balances and completes the ethics of justice.

Gilligan (1982) had already emphasised empathy and interdependence as fundamental values alongside justice. For both this author and Noddings (2009), who took the ethics of care to a pedagogical proposal of care, the relevant moral question, “What is fair?”, must be complemented with “How should I respond to this person’s need?”. Both argue that moral judgement cannot be reduced to instrumental rationality. Noddings specifies that it is necessary to avoid emotivism by seeking a balance between heart and reason.

Noddings (2009) advocates for a comprehensive education based on dialogue and practice that connects with Freire’s popular pedagogy (1989, 1999, 2000), and even with Habermas’s communicative action (1987): the power of dialogue to bring people together. While Freire focuses more on the dimension of oppression and political liberation, Noddings focuses on the relational and interpersonal dimension. A truly liberating pedagogy is also a pedagogy of care, which addresses both injustice, harm and emotional wounds.

Bauman (2009) wing Emmanuel Lévinas, offered us an ethical foundation in caring for and concern for others, and in the happiness of “being for”. It is in ethics understood as responsibility that the essential structure of my subjectivity, of myself, resides. “I am because I am for others”. For all practical purposes, “being” and “being for others” are synonymous. Somehow, this is the basis of the ethical imperative for teachers when they see themselves as agents, that is, enablers and creators of caring environments.

Ecofeminism has proposed a further step in ethical responsibility in response to social and ecological suffering: understanding the interdependence and eco-dependence of all life on the planet, which implies human dependence and responsibility towards the rest of life, towards Mother Earth (Mies & Shiva, 2016).

This is the basic requirement that should shape the paradigm of care in teacher training: It means knowing how to teach care for people and the environment, respect for the limits of nature and social justice.

If we think of education as an engine of change, it is essential that pedagogy be guided by global social and environmental justice from a care-based approach. That allows us to contextualise the everyday needs of children and young people within the framework of learning about global issues and Mother Earth, because it recognises that the very texture of their lives is inscribed in the way we produce and exist. The new paradigm of sustainable development and global care requires teachers to make a dual commitment: global awareness and sensitivity to the context of personal stories. Greater sensitivity to the context of personal stories would help teachers towards greater global awareness and vice versa (Van Manen, 1991; Postman, 1995; De Paz Abril, 2011).

Hence, awakening a deep curiosity about the things that surround us must be at the heart of teacher training; curiosity, rooted in creativity and hope, guided by critical deliberative reflection. Freire (1999) reminded us that interpreting the world must be carried out by critical teachers and must necessarily be accompanied by hope, dreams and utopia. Education needs technical, scien-

tific and professional training, but it also needs dreams and utopia. Without the dream of collective improvement, transformative activity is not possible, Freire warned. Liberating education frees human beings to become new human beings: there is no education without love (Freire, 1989, 2000). Those who do not love do not understand their neighbours as education does not change the world, it changes the people who will change the world.

The participation of a global citizen requires reflective practice that invites teachers to rethink their way of seeing the world and others, from a horizon of hope. It can turn that process of searching and hope into a shared experience with the work of discovery, understanding, and action of their own learners.

‘The progress of a civilisation is measured by the increase in sensitivity towards others,’ proclaimed Teilhard de Chardin (as cited in Boff, 2012, p. 51). We need to rescue another type of reason, to overcome instrumental rationality at the service of economic interests and domination, in favour of one more in line with the nature of care. Since existing and possible beings, and nature itself, are interconnected, we need to recover sensitive reason (Boff, 2012; Maffesoli, 1996; Cortina, 2007) in teacher training. Sensitive reason allows us to listen to the messages that come to us from nature and from everywhere else, to practise renunciation for the common good and to perceive the loving and powerful energy of Mother Earth, following Boff (2012).

Therefore, care must permeate teacher training as a way of humanising education and life in the ways proposed by Boff (2012): care as a loving, non-aggressive relationship with reality; care as concern for that or those to whom we feel emotionally attached; care as concern and prevention in the face of a future that may bring unpleasant surprises and harmful effects; care as ‘holding’. And it is not with arguments, said Boff (2012), that we will convince people to live according to ethics, but by developing the skills, attitudes and desire to care for others, for relationships and to be cared for.

Teachers must bear in mind as a guiding principle, the five ‘C’s’ expressed by S.S. Roach (as cited in Boff, 2012, p.76): ‘compassion, competence, confidence, conscience and commitment’. As Arendt (1968) so aptly explained, the role of the educator is to convey to the learner what we must preserve and what we must eradicate from our world.

Education must be transformed around the principles of cooperation and solidarity, replacing the old ways of exclusion and individualistic competition, and must foster empathy and compassion, as well as develop individuals’ abilities to work together to transform themselves and the world. Learning is shaped through relationships between teachers, students, and knowledge that go beyond the limitations of classroom rules and codes of conduct and broaden students’ relationships with the ethics and care necessary to take responsibility for our common and shared world. Pedagogy consists of creating transformative encounters based on what we inherit and what can be built. (UNESCO, 2022, p. 151)

The RECG has embraced the convergence of the ethics of justice and that of care in the sense that it has understood that it is a matter of bringing responsibility for others and all life into everyday life and educational encounters. By doing so, the instrumental-rational approach can be overcome by merging reason and emotion, mind and body, the self and relationships with others and with the planet.

Teacher training should put into practice what Noddings (2009) says: “People who are well cared for and happy do not usually commit acts of violence, deception or neglect” (Nodding,

2009, p. 269). And this can only be achieved when a perfect balance between heart and brain is sought.

3 Experience and Some Key Points for Continuing Teacher Training from the Perspective of Care and Sustainability

The RECG emerged in response to the fragmentation and isolation of teachers committed to ESDGC. This transition from Quixote-teacher to collaborative network seeks to overcome the limitations of individual training, allowing “sensitivity to the context of personal stories” to transform into a collective global awareness.

The RECG model is not a hierarchical structure for transmitting content, but rather a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) based on distributed intelligence. This ‘knot-to-knot’ process (Jara, 2008) was chosen over “top-down” teacher training models because it allows knowledge to be co-constructed from classroom practice and not just from external academic theory.

The RECG practises the ‘distributed intelligence’ so aptly identified by Perkins (2003) and Bruner (2000): intelligence and knowledge are distributed among the minds of all members. Teachers cultivate an environment of ‘resonant relationships’, in the words of Rosa (2019). Faced with acceleration, accumulation, alienation and a sense of worldliness due to the loss of bonds and affections (emotional misery and environmental destruction), RECG teachers generate a resonant alternative response: they create meaning and guide their profession in a meaningful way, spreading curiosity, emotion and a critical and creative spirit.

For RECG, ongoing teacher training in sustainability from a care-based and networked approach is an urgent necessity due to the impact it will have on future generations. The key elements of this training must be aligned with the three competency blocks of the European GreenComp framework (Bianchi et al., 2022):

A) Cognitive and critical skills: These include systemic thinking (analysing interconnected socio-environmental problems), ecological literacy (understanding the climate crisis and planetary boundaries from a scientific perspective) and critical thinking (evaluating contradictory discourses, such as greenwashing).

B) Pedagogical skills: These include active methodologies (project-based learning, service learning, etc.), emotional and ethical education (addressing eco-anxiety, active hope and collective responsibility) and competency based assessment (creating rubrics that assess knowledge, attitudes and transformative actions).

C) Social and action skills: They encourage citizen participation (influencing school and community policies), networking (collaborating with teachers, NGOs and local agents) and sustainable leadership (co-promoting changes in the educational centre).

This framework invites us to persist in a fundamental inquiry throughout teacher training: How can we connect students with their responsibility to the planet if we do not first create ways for them to care for themselves, their peers, and their own schools? Do I truly believe that educational practices rooted in care and sustainability are necessary for our shared future?

4 Some Examples of Network Activities

The theoretical foundation for this networking is based on a process of critical reflection and cooperative research that has resulted in the following productions: *Pistas para cambiar la escuela* (Intermón Oxfam, 2009); *Centros educativos transformadores* (Barahona et al., 2013) and *La Educación para la Ciudadanía Global como propuesta metodológica transformadora* (García et al., 2019).

Different actions resulting from this action research, which has forged the identity of the RECG, are:

‘Connecting Worlds’ is an online educational initiative that combines classroom activities with networking among students aged 6 to 17 from diverse cultural, economic, and social backgrounds, involving schools across several continents. Organized into teams of the same age range and sharing a virtual platform, the initiative allowed them to interact, discuss, reflect, and collaboratively research topics such as climate crisis, poverty, labor rights, food insecurity, gender equality, and sustainability.

Various resources developed in recent years by the RECG on care and sustainability: *Life at the heart of the centre* (Red de Educadoras y Educadores para una Ciudadanía Global, 2020), *A school that cares* (García et al., 2025), *Our ecological footprint* [], and *Let’s take care of each other* (Soto et al., 2023), winner of the DICOLED award from Pompeu Fabra University 2024, *Taking care of myself, taking care of each other, taking care of the Earth* (Afonso et al., 2026). These tools aim to help teachers build positive coexistence in schools based on mutual care and care for the environment.

In addition, since 2022, the RECG has been conducting training activities on the Pedagogy of Care in continuing teacher training through the Institute for Professional Development (IDP) at the University of Barcelona. This initiative is the result of collaborative work among teachers within the Network itself, as part of the IDP’s Inclusion and Care working group. It is also worth noting, in the initial training of teachers, participation in workshops within the Faculty of Education or tutoring university students on work placements.

The dissemination of lessons learned, as well as the work and materials generated, is carried out through a quarterly newsletter, various webinars, and other collaborative spaces and networks, such as the aforementioned *Movimiento 4.7*, the *University of Good Living*, and various platforms dedicated to social solidarity economy and artificial intelligence.

The learning situation developed by the IDP’s Participation and Democracy working group: *From Participatory School to Democratic Society*, was presented at the International Conference of the University of Tallinn (Estonia) within the Democrat Education for Responsible Democratic Citizenship Project in 2024 and at the ANGEL Conference in Berlin (June 2025)

The proposals, both theoretical and practical, are freely available on Kaidara, a resource portal for those working in formal and non-formal education. These resources are evidence of a collective construction of knowledge, the result of an action-research process that validates the effectiveness of networking.

5 Conclusion

This entire collaborative training experience seeks to inspire meaningful learning in global citizenship, sustainability, and care. The Pedagogy of Care invites us to recognise that we are interdependent beings and that caring for ourselves, others, and the planet is fundamental to sustainable living. Incorporating it means equipping educators with tools to cultivate eco-social empathy; promoting self-care and teacher resilience; fostering interpersonal relationships based on care; developing an ethic of global responsibility; and promoting pedagogical methodologies that nurture the connection with the environment.

This approach ensures that teachers not only ‘know’ about sustainability, but also embody ‘being and knowing how to care’, becoming active and compassionate agents of change in the classroom and in society, driving true eco-social transformation.

The analysis of the networked training experience has the limitation that it has been carried out by active members of the RECG from an internal perspective which, although it has been validated in some forums, would require more systematic and exhaustive research with objective parameters to evaluate the impact of this educational trend.

Likewise, despite the strength of the bonds that have been forged, the RECG faces challenges such as the sustainability of the voluntary commitment of teachers, generational renewal enabling the integration of new voices, and the challenge of influencing public policies on teacher training beyond the spaces created by the network itself.

Within the RECG, a shared vision transforms individual effort into collective action. By weaving a network rooted in personal commitment and Freirean principles, members embrace education as a pedagogical, ethical, and political process. This collaborative horizon generates transformative possibilities, extending from the daily classroom to the most influential spaces of educational debate.

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