The embeddedness of the learning of transversal competences in initial and continuous training is central to the necessary and always updated preparation of the professional in several fields. Transversal competences are a current topic in the present worldwide educational arena and within the European Union itself. These competences have the particularity of being transferable to any area of knowledge and are central to success in the labour market.

Following Sá & Serpa (2018), Rychen and Salganik (2003) define competence as “the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of psychological prerequisites including both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects” (p. 43). According to this definition, this concept takes on a holistic nature, since: (i) there is a direct link between competence and performance, insofar as competence relates to the successful fulfilment of challenges and requirements; (ii) competence presupposes not one but a vast set of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities; and (iii) competence refers to an “orchestration”, that is, to the ability of using various abilities in a deliberate way. It is possible to differentiate two basic types of competences according to their applicability in the labour market: (i) general or transversal competences, which can be defined as a set of competences that can be applied in any professional situation or task, regardless of where they were attained. Thus, general competences are required for all types of jobs and are the basis for the attainment of more specific or technical competences. These competences are transversal and transferable to different contexts. Some examples of transversal competences are leadership, communication, problem-solving, teamwork and creativity competences, among others; (ii) specific or technical competences, which are applicable only in the environment for which they were developed. Hence, specific competences are devalued when the environment changes, as they do not apply in other professional contexts (Balcar, Janickova, & Filipova, 2014).

Digital competences may, thus, be considered as the combination of specific, cognitive and non-cognitive skills and attitudes, whose mobilisation enables the ability to accomplish a given complex task. Among these transversal competences, the following stand out: autonomy, responsibility, proactivity, adaptability, resilience and competences transfer, digital competences, social interaction, creativity and leadership, to mention just a few.

Although transversal competences are informally embedded in pedagogical practices, it is necessary to consolidate this aspect of training and use to intentionally. This new pedagogical stance will allow future graduates to respond more accurately to the current evolution of the work organisation and the required competences. This methodology allows the development of several transversal competences, such as teamwork, problem-solving, acceptance of different perspectives, critical analysis, self-training, the ability to permanently learn and the ability to select, from the plethora of information available, the one that is relevant in each specific situation. It is critical to foster these functions. In addition to these, the communication competences and personal and professional development, which can be applied in any professional situation or task, regardless of where they have been attained, are also highly relevant.
According to the Bruxelles Formation (2013), transversal competences have a complementary nature in relation to the technical competences needed to carry out a profession. For this organisation, transversal competences may be grouped into three dimensions: (i) methodological transversal competences, connected with the notions of adaptability and autonomy; (ii) social transversal competences, related to the notion of sociability; and (iii) constitutional transversal competences, which refer to notions of responsibility and participation.

These transversal competences can be developed through learning processes in which their development is intentionally fostered, in technical and scientific training that will add to the success in professional terms.

For this process to succeed, it is critical to engage all the stakeholders involved in the educational process (students, alumni, academics, institutional leaders and employers), with the purpose of assessing which transversal competences are really valued for each of them and thus optimise the design of the curriculum so as to integrate those that are more valued.

For example, project-based learning has the advantage of creating in students an awareness of the interrelationships of knowledge, allowing the development of several transversal competences, such as teamwork, problem-solving, acceptance of different perspectives and the ability for critical analysis.

Note: Text based on Sá, M. J., & Serpa, S. (2018b). For further development, see Sá & Serpa (2018) and the references.


**Authors:**

**Maria José Sá** - CIPES – Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies;

**Sandro Serpa** - Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, University of the Azores, Portugal; Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences – CICS.UAc/ CICS.NOVA.UAc, Interdisciplinary Centre for Childhood and Adolescence – NICA – UAc

**Keywords**

Transversal competences; training; education

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