

# How students' positioning dynamics affects engagement with service-learning in public relations

Conference: *University as an epicentre for social responsibility: commitment to people and the planet*

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## Background

Service-Learning (SL) is a pedagogy that involves students in a structured community service activity. These educational experiences facilitate University Social Responsibility within the scope of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda. SL experiences can be conceptualized and practiced as an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) strategy that is one of the fundamental pillars to achieve impactful social changes. SL has been recognized as a fundamental tool in the teaching of public relations, allowing theoretical and practical articulations appropriate to each context and situation.

## Objectives

- ✓ Support the project "Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating UCP Refugee Students" with advice on communication management that allows 1) Establish partnerships to raise material and socio-cultural support and 2) Engage the academic community with the initiative and the promotion of intercultural dialogue.
- ✓ Apply positioning theory with the aim to better understand how students' positioning dynamics affects engagement with service-learning in public relations.

## Research Questions

- 1) How did the students' position towards the service-learning project affect their engagement?
- 2) What kinds of positioning issues arise from service learning applied to a public relations course?

## Methods

Analytical and critical autoethnographic carried out by the teacher, to examine group interactions of a public relations class with 62 students during a semester (three hours a week plus support activities and research, between February 6 and May 26, 2023).

## Preliminary Findings

### Students' position towards the service-learning project

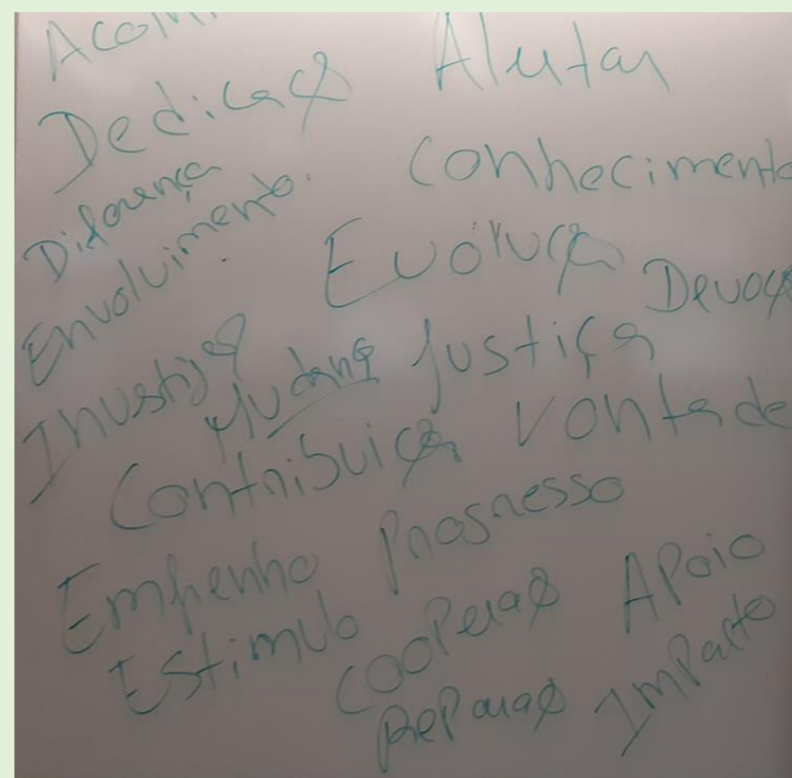
- Individual motivation assessment in a class brainstorming led to a gradual increase in engagement with the project.
- Contact with the personal stories of the served communities increases curiosity/problem solving and sense of responsibility towards others.

### Kinds of positioning issues – Students' Feedback

- *Group*: "This project has made us more human"; *Self*: "I had never done such a big work before and with so much weight. I felt an enormous responsibility". *Others*: "They want to live a normal life in Portugal, and therefore they don't want to be seen as 'poor people' or 'different'".

## References

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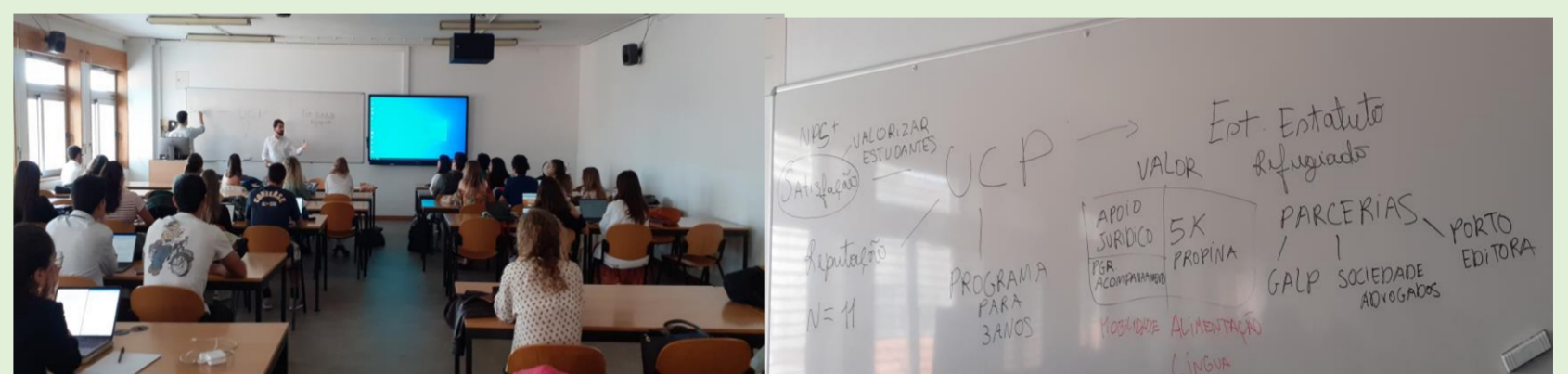
"I'm not interested in how people move but what moves them."

Pina Bausch (1940-2009)

Topic for motivation assessment in class (February 27, 2023)



Public Relations students and students with refugee status - Catholic University (Lisbon, March 8, 2023)



Planning group work in class with a guest communication professional (March 29, 2023)

## Discussion topics

- a) Intentionally position itself or others in a certain way (human; responsible; equal) is a process of meaning creation with an active role in the predisposition for engagement in SL projects.
- b) The capacity to position self and others can inform decision making in a communication/PR program design.



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