

# Impact Analysis of a Service-Learning University Program From the Student Perspective

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## Abstract

Service-learning has become increasingly prevalent in higher education in recent years. Within this context, this article presents and analyzes some data regarding the perception of students who participated in a program developed by the Service-Learning Office of the Faculty of Education at the University of Barcelona during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 academic years. In particular, by means of a survey method, the article analyzes university students' perception of the impact of service-learning projects in terms of their participation, development of competencies, service performed, and experience gained. The results indicate that students value their participation positively, although they point out the need to further improve the link between learning and service. Finally, the article highlights the need to delve into and further develop reflective practice as a means to strengthen the academic link with the service performed by the students.

*Keywords: service-learning, higher education, reflection, social responsibility*



In recent years university education in Europe has experienced a significant sequence of changes that have fundamentally altered university learning. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has spearheaded a considerable shift in the paradigm of knowledge within the continent, moving focus from academic disciplines to the development of professional competencies that are linked to the real world, to the natural environment in which the student will actually develop, both professionally and as a citizen.

This paradigm shift has taken place at a time when Europe has been experiencing a deep economic crisis that has caused, in turn, profound changes in the ethical and moral values of European society. As social institutions, universities have felt challenged and have thus developed various forms of social engagement to respond to these changes. At a pedagogical level, one of the ways in which this social engage-

ment has materialized is through service-learning.

Service-learning is a pedagogical philosophy that seeks to promote students' learning through their participation in community service experiences. Along these lines, Puig, Batlle, Bosch, and Palos (2007, p. 18) posited that:

Service-learning, while still a programme, is also a philosophy. That is to say, service learning is a way of understanding human development, a way of explaining the formation of social bonds and a way of building human communities that are fairer and are better at managing coexistence.

In other words, referring to service-learning as a philosophy implies understanding that it is much more than a teaching methodology or a program or a way of organizing work with various agents in a context,

emphasizing its value within the framework of university social responsibility.

Over the years, various research has looked into the positive effects of service-learning. A review of these effects was conducted by Gelmon, Holland, and Spring (2018), differentiating between the impact of service-learning projects on students, faculties, the community, and the institution. In relation to the impact of service-learning projects on student learning, the most prominent studies conclude that service-learning allows students to connect theory and practice, develop critical thinking, improve the ability to solve problems, learn more about the resources available in the community, and develop their professional and citizenship skills (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 2015; Martínez Vivot & Folgueiras, 2012; Moely & Ilustre, 2014; Tapia, 2006; Warren, 2012). The undeniable educational richness generated by service-learning practices—added to the fact that an increasing number of initiatives are being implemented in higher education—makes it necessary to investigate the impact that service-learning has on university students.

Students' perceptions as a key element to justify the development of service-learning projects have been the focus of study in various research conducted in different contexts and disciplines (Bassi, 2011; Bender & Jordaan, 2007; Lee, Wilder, & Yu, 2018; Tande, 2013). Most of these studies report that students perceive improvements in their learning, in direct correlation with their involvement with the environment. In this framework, the study presented here aims to delve deeper into students' perception of their participation in service-learning projects, the skills acquired, and the types of service performed.

### Conceptual and Contextual Framework

Over the past few decades, the practice of service-learning has been growing significantly worldwide and also at the university level. Service-learning first began in the United States and Argentina and, since then, different initiatives have been emerging, nearly simultaneously, in multiple countries.

Many studies have highlighted the key elements in the development of service-learning projects. Referring to the federal program *Educación Solidaria* of the

Argentinian Ministry of Education, Rial (2010) highlighted the importance of curricular links, the relationship between activities and learning, service analysis, participation, and instances of transfer and/or dissemination toward the community. For its part, a rubric used at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (Casas-Cordero, 2009) identifies three key phases, which in turn are divided into different subdimensions and levels: the design phase (identification of community needs, design of objectives, planning, monitoring and evaluation, familiarization with students, balance between promotion and attendance); the implementation phase (fulfillment of commitments, coping with unforeseen situations, ethical aspects of the relationship); and the results phase (fulfillment of objectives, technical quality, usefulness and level of satisfaction of the community partner). Also, the Research Group on Moral Education (GREM by its acronym in Catalan) at the University of Barcelona highlighted twelve categories of dynamics, which they grouped into three different types: basic dynamics (social needs, learning, service, and social sense); pedagogical dynamics (participation, teamwork, reflection, recognition, and evaluation); and organizational dynamics (partnership, consolidation within the center and within the entity; Puig et al., 2014). Finally, the Service-Learning Quality Assessment Tool (2018)—SLQAT—identifies up to 28 items grouped into various dimensions: learning, service, students, faculty, community, and course design.

As pointed out by Annette (2005), all these initiatives have one element in common: service-learning is seen as a means to promote young people's involvement in community service. At the same time, service-learning also strengthens the link between important dichotomies in educational institutions that aim to improve training geared toward the development of competencies: namely, the link between theory and practice, classroom and "reality" (pointing to other possible contexts), training and commitment, and cognition and emotion (Rodríguez, 2014). These benefits only result from true service-learning practices, that is to say, from practices that include academic learning, an aim toward social transformation, horizontal dialogue with the community, and protagonism of the student body (Manzano, 2012). Service-learning is, therefore, an effective pedagog-

ical strategy with benefits that go beyond the academic curriculum (Cho, 2006; Furco, 2005; Robinson & Meyer, 2012). In addition to their potential to foster interdisciplinary learning and knowledge, service-learning experiences promote students' citizenship by directly involving them in service tasks through projects of a social nature, empowering them to analyze the social, ethical, and civic impact of their professional practice (Naval, García, Puig, & Santos-Rego, 2012).

The research presented in this article is part of the work carried out in recent years at the Service-Learning Office of the Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona (Spain). Therefore, this section includes an overview of service-learning in Spain, in the Catalan region, and, finally, at the University of Barcelona, focusing particularly on the meaning and structure of service-learning at the Faculty of Education.

In Spain, it has only been over the past decade that universities have been incorporating service-learning (Martínez, 2008), informed by research and contributions made in other countries. Thus, service-learning took hold in Spanish universities through concrete experiences that aimed to reinforce the value of practical learning, interaction with the environment, and a sense of engagement with the community.

The development of service-learning in Spanish universities has thus been promoted mainly by the teaching staff directly involved in these experiences, as they have become increasingly aware of its methodological benefits and of the importance of the university's social responsibility (Folgueiras, 2014). In addition, service-learning has opened new lines of research, not only on its implementation but on ways to achieve its institutionalization.

It is in this context that the Spanish University Service-Learning Network emerged. This association currently brings together teachers from over 40 universities in Spain who, in one way or another, have introduced service-learning in their teaching and research. The University Network of Service-Learning was created to achieve three main purposes: (1) to gather members at an annual conference, which, in its latest editions, has already had wider European and international participation (Barcelona 2010, 2011, and 2012; Bilbao, 2013; Madrid, 2014; Granada, 2015; Santiago de Compostela, 2016; Seville, 2017; and

Madrid, 2018); (2) to promote publication of the works and experiences that are being developed in this context (Aramburuzabala, Opazo, & García-Gutiérrez, 2015; Carrillo, Arco, & Fernández Martín, 2017; Rubio, Prats, & Gómez, 2013; Santos-Rego, Sotelino, & Lorenzo, 2016); and (3) to promote research on service-learning, both within single institutions and interinstitutionally, whenever possible.

Furthermore, service-learning was officially recognized in 2010 in the Statute of University Students as follows: "Universities . . . will promote social and civic responsibility practices that combine academic learning, within various degree programmes, with the provision of services to the community aimed at improving quality of life and social inclusion" (Royal Decree 1791/2010, 30th December). Subsequently, a white paper titled *Institutionalisation of Service-Learning as a Teaching Strategy Within the Framework of University Social Responsibility for the Promotion of Sustainability at University* was approved in 2015 by the Executive Committee and the Plenary of the Sustainability Commission (CADEP Group) of the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE in Spanish).

Along the same lines and taking advantage of their territorial proximity and joint work spaces, in 2015 seven of the nine universities in Catalonia joined forces and founded the Catalan University Network of Service-Learning—ApS(U)CAT (see <http://www.acup.cat/ca/projecte/xarxa-daprenentatge-servei-de-les-universitats-catalanes>). The aim of this association is to share teaching experiences and research, as well as to address challenges linked to the expansion and improvement of university service-learning. So far, exchange and work meetings have been held at Pompeu Fabra University (2015), the Autonomous University of Barcelona (2016), the Rovira and Virgili University (2017), and the University of Girona (2018).

At the University of Barcelona, service-learning is the main focus of the Service-Learning Group ApS(UB) (see <http://www.ub.edu/grupapsub/en/blog/aps-ub-group>). This is an interdisciplinary team, comprised of lecturers from different faculties and areas of knowledge. Currently, the group has representation from most of the university faculties: Fine Arts, Librarianship and Documentation, Biology, Earth Sciences, Law, Economics and Business, Education,

Nursing, Pharmacy and Food Sciences, Philology, Philosophy, Geography and History, Medicine, Psychology, Chemistry, and Social Work. Since its inception, this group has sought to disseminate and extend service-learning throughout the University of Barcelona.

One of the leading faculties in the promotion of service-learning at the University of Barcelona is the Faculty of Education, which since 2010 has had a Service-Learning Office (see <https://www.ub.edu/portal/web/educacio/aps>) to coordinate this type of projects. Although service-learning is a valuable formative proposal in any discipline, it is undoubtedly even more important for future educational professionals, both as a methodology and as content. Service-learning is an effective methodology because it allows students to construct knowledge from practice, helping them to become professionals who are more competent and more committed to the social environment. And it is effective as content because students learn and analyze the potential of service-learning projects so that they can later implement this formative experience in their professional future, involving their future students in their immediate environment.

In this framework, the Service-Learning Office is responsible for (a) promoting service-learning among teachers and students within the faculty; (b) coordinating, managing, and evaluating the service-learning projects offered to the students; (c) supporting academic staff in the introduction of service-learning in their modules; (d) building a network of partners with social and educational entities; (e) ensuring the quality of the service-learning programs; and (f) conducting research on topics related to service-learning and its development in the faculty.

Currently, the Office of Service-Learning of the Faculty of Education is coordinating a total of 26 projects and entities, involving students from various degree programs in the Faculty of Education.

### Methodology

As previously stated, the objective of this research was to learn about the perceptions of university students involved in service-learning projects in terms of their participation, the competencies developed, and the service performed in the projects. The

study method used was the survey, which is the suitable method when the objective is to elicit the opinions, beliefs, or attitudes of a group of people (Buendía, Colás, & Hernández, 1998). The instrument used for gathering information was an adapted questionnaire (Folgueiras et al., 2013) that had been designed and validated in previous research (Escofet, Folgueiras, Luna, & Palou, 2016).

First, participation was assessed based on the taxonomy proposed by Trilla and Novella (2001), who distinguished four types or levels: *simple participation*: taking part in a process as a spectator without having intervened in it; *consultative participation*: being heard on issues of concern; *projective participation*, feeling the project as their own and participating in it all throughout; and *metaparticipation*: generating new participation mechanisms and spaces based on the demands expressed by the participants themselves. If we correlate these participation levels to the way students take part in service-learning projects, we can conclude that simple participation would imply that students carry out the service without having been involved in decision-making throughout the project, nor in identifying needs, nor in choosing activities, nor in evaluating the project. Consultative participation would imply that students are consulted when identifying a need, elaborating activities, or evaluating the project; their voice would be taken into account but would not have much bearing on the development of the experience. With projective participation, students would participate actively and make decisions throughout the project; that is, they would identify needs, create activities, apply themselves, and evaluate the project. With metaparticipation, students would generate new activities within the project or possibly even create a new project; they might also reflect on their participation and the right to participate.

Second, competencies were measured based on students' perceptions on the extent to which they believed they had acquired transversal competencies through participating in a service-learning project. That is, competencies are seen as the dynamic combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and responsibilities that students acquire throughout the educational process that takes place at a university. In order to determine what transversal competencies are involved at university level and

assess which ones are developed through service-learning projects, we first conducted a review of various proposals made by international universities through the Tuning Project. In addition to promoting transversal competencies, service-learning projects also foster the development of specific competencies that are relevant to different degree programs. Through these, students are required to apply knowledge and concrete procedures of professional practice for which they are being trained in a specific and real context.

Third, the instrument used (questionnaire) focused on the students' description and assessment of the usefulness of the service completed. We understand service in service-learning projects as the set of tasks that students carry out altruistically and that produce a result that contributes to mitigating a social need that had been previously identified. During the service, the work that is carried out is not the only significant issue; equally important is the impact the work has, either because of the social benefits it provides, or because of the civic awareness it instills in the participants (Puig et al., 2014). Service tasks can be conducted in different areas: health promotion, promotion of people's rights, citizen participation, cultural heritage, generational exchange, educational support, solidarity and cooperation, and the environment. In turn, services can be classified into types according to whether they involve people (whether individuals, institutions, entities, or associations), a geographical area (neighborhood, city, etc.), or a specific sustainability issue (for example, water quality or forest maintenance). Whatever the case, choosing what type of service students should complete depends on the specific topics or curricular content of the discipline they are studying. It is therefore important to envisage the learning outcomes that can or should be achieved by the students through their participation in service-learning projects.

Finally, a transversal fourth dimension was added, referring to students' general satisfaction with their participation in the project. Through open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire, students were asked to discuss the impact that participating in a service-learning project had on them, both at a personal and at a professional level.

The questionnaire was administered to all students participating in service-learning

projects in the Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona (Spain), during the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 academic years. Administration of the questionnaire observed ethical research principles outlined by the Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives (2012), the Spanish Ethics Committee of the Superior Council for Scientific Research (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2011), and the Bioethics Commission of the University of Barcelona (2010).

Participants were selected through accidental sampling, which consisted of the selection of easily accessible subjects out of a population of 162 students participating in service-learning projects during this period. The sample obtained totaled 65 students. The sample calculation was carried out a posteriori considering a confidence level of 95.5% for finite populations ( $p$  and  $q = 0.5$ ), which entails a margin of error of  $\pm 0.081$  for the extracted sample.

## Results

The results below show, first of all, the sociodemographic features of the sample. The participating students were men ( $N = 12$ ; 19%) and women ( $N = 53$ ; 81%). They were in the following degree programs: Social Education ( $N = 14$ ; 21%), Pedagogy ( $N = 19$ ; 30%), Social Work ( $N = 15$ ; 23%), and Early Years and Primary Education Teaching ( $N = 17$ ; 27%). In terms of participation, 100% of students participated in a simple type, taking part directly in service-learning projects aimed at people or groups in the areas of health promotion ( $N = 18$ , 28%), educational support ( $N = 42$ , 65%), and solidarity and cooperation ( $N = 5$ , 7%).

Regarding competencies, it is worth noting, on the one hand, the students' assessment of the correlation between the activities carried out throughout the service-learning project and the achievement of learning outcomes related to their studies. Marking on a scale from 5 (a lot) to 1 (little), the students state that this relationship is high, as shown in Table 1.

On the other hand, it is also worth noting the perception that students have about the extent to which they have acquired transversal skills, as shown in Table 2.

As Table 2 shows, the competencies that students consider to have acquired to a greater extent are those linked to social

**Table 1. Correlation Between the Activities Carried out Throughout the Service-Learning Project and the Perception of Achievement of Learning Outcomes Related to University Studies**

Correlation between learning and service	5	4	3	2	1
% Answers	29%	34%	24%	10%	3%

**Table 2. Correlation Between Activities Carried out in the Service-Learning Project and Transversal Competencies**

Competencies	5	4	3	2	1
Learning and understanding ideas, concepts	6%	70%	18%	6%	0
Organizing and planning	18%	50%	32%	0	0
Analyzing and summarizing	12%	40%	24%	12%	12%
Making decisions	12%	50%	38%	0	0
Solving problems	24%	64%	12%	0	0
Mastering digital technologies	0	10%	15%	50%	25%
Searching and managing information	6%	12%	39%	31%	12%
Being able to communicate well orally and in writing	27%	39%	20%	14%	0
Learning foreign languages	6%	12%	18%	6%	58%
Expressing feelings	26%	39%	14%	14%	7%
Working in teams	46%	24%	18%	12%	0
Looking for improvement and quality	50%	32%	12%	6%	0
Acknowledging diversity and multiculturality	48%	45%	7%	0	0
Demonstrating ethical commitment	48%	43%	9%	0	0
Reasoning critically	60%	26%	8%	6%	0

commitment, problem solving, content knowledge, and teamwork. The competencies that scored lowest were those linked to searching for information, learning languages, and mastering digital technologies. It is worth highlighting, however, that students expressed that they put into practice most of the transversal competencies.

Table 3 shows results in relation to students' evaluation of the usefulness of the service. Results show that students highly rate all the service activities carried out throughout the various projects. All activities scored values of 4 and 5. Among the highest ranked benefits again were those linked to student commitment, self-knowledge, and also their motivation toward their university studies. Those that scored slightly lower were linked to the promotion of knowledge

acquisition and the link between theory and practice.

Students were also asked about their satisfaction with the different elements that make their participation possible in service-learning projects. These results are also shown in Table 4.

Overall, student evaluation of their participation in service-learning projects was highly positive. Nonetheless, results highlight the need to achieve a stronger link between learning and service and to improve the coordination and monitoring functions carried out by the Service-Learning Office.

Last, and by means of open-ended questions, students were asked to discuss the impact that participating in a service-learning project had on them, both at a per-

**Table 3. Students' Evaluation of the Service Performed**

Usefulness attributed to service	5	4	3	2	1
The service-learning activities performed were useful for working through curricular content.	29%	37%	21%	11%	2%
The service-learning activities performed addressed a real need.	48%	45%	7%	0	0
The service-learning activities performed enabled me to understand social needs.	48%	45%	7%	0	0
The service-learning activities performed allowed me to collaborate within an institution, association, etc.	46%	38%	13%	3%	0
The service-learning activities performed motivated me to get more involved with the faculty, town, neighborhood, etc.	46%	38%	13%	3%	0
The service-learning activities performed made me become more interested in social issues.	48%	43%	9%	0	0
The service-learning activities performed gave me more motivation toward my studies.	38%	43%	17%	2%	0
The service-learning activities performed made it easier for me to learn curricular content.	29%	37%	22%	11%	1%
The service-learning activities performed made me act according to my principles.	60%	26%	8%	6%	0
The service-learning activities performed enabled me to contribute toward the betterment of society.	46%	38%	12%	3%	1%
The service-learning activities performed allowed me to link theory to practice.	26%	38%	26%	8%	2%
The service-learning activities performed allowed me to learn about the professional context of my discipline.	29%	45%	12%	14%	0
The service-learning activities performed made me reflect on the content I learn at university.	31%	34%	18%	12%	5%
The service-learning activities performed helped to instill values in me.	68%	28%	2%	2%	0

sonal and at a professional level. Students expressed mostly positive perceptions at both levels.

The impacts that are described at a professional level can be divided between statements related to professional identity and those related to the learning acquired in relation to their professions. Thus, in terms of professional identity, students state:

Being part of this group has helped me to open up my eyes, to realise how easy it would be to become a "bad teacher," one that would close his eyes when facing students who are confrontational or have issues or challenges that the teachers must help overcome. Because we all know that it is easier to work with those who listen to you and behave well.

**Table 4. Satisfaction With Participation in the Project**

Enablers to participation	5	4	3	2	1
Project approach	36%	47.5%	9%	6%	1.5%
Involvement of the social entity	32%	41.5%	18.5%	5%	3%
Self-involvement	14%	55%	28%	1.5%	1.5%
Learning outcomes achieved	45%	35%	15%	5%	0
Link between theory and practice	24%	44%	20%	9%	3%
Evaluation performed	34%	46%	17%	1.5%	1.5%
Learning tasks performed	35%	43.5%	15%	5%	1.5%
Resources to complete tasks	28%	37%	23%	9%	3%
Project timing	35%	39%	23%	3%	0
Project participants	45%	41.5%	9%	3%	1.5%
Coordination between the Service-Learning Office and the social entity	25%	32%	32%	5%	6%
Monitoring by the Service-Learning Office	40%	25%	24%	6%	5%
Service performed	52.5%	37%	9%	0	1.5%

But we also know how satisfying it is to help a student with difficulties to overcome them. (Student 2)

One of the things I like the most about this experience are those moments when you realise that you are actually helping a young boy or girl, and that he or she also appreciates it. They let you know it and they thank you, although often they do not know how to say it with words. All these feelings make me realise that I am studying in the right degree programme, and they give me the strength to keep going, to keep working hard in each module to continue learning more, making the most of each class to soak up all the knowledge and internalize it, so that I never stop learning and can continue thinking that I will always teach something new to my students. (Student 4)

Since I was little I have always wanted to be a teacher. In fact, I'm studying to become a teacher. If at any time I have questioned whether I really wanted to devote myself to teaching, now I know that I do, that I am doing the right thing. I'm in the right path. Although sometimes children make you angry, or you

may find it hard to get them to do the work or you're feeling tired, they still always make you smile. I do not know how or why, but after each session I've always, absolutely always, left the class smiling from ear to ear. Although I've felt angry at times, I always had a great time during the sessions. Maybe I have helped them with reading, but they have helped me even more. (Student 5)

Comments regarding learning acquired in relation to their professions include the following:

I would like to express my great satisfaction with the Friends of Reading project, as it has been an intense experience in which I have been able to learn reading comprehension techniques and strategies to redirect and adapt myself when facing different situations. (Student 6)

In the professional field I have learned to be patient and try to explain things in the best possible way, without losing my nerve (something I have never lost). I have learned that I have to explain things providing the reasons behind

them, and to try to get the other person, in this case Gerard, to understand it and that this is important for him. (Student 1)

Regarding the impacts described at a personal level, they focus mainly on the students' verification of any improvement they have experienced:

That initial fear of being mistaken and that insecurity of mine in the first few days are slowly disappearing. (Student 7)

I would like to talk about the personal learning that I have been slowly experiencing. I am absolutely convinced that this year has been very useful and it has offered me many valuable experiences, even more than I could have imagined. Being a *Friend of Reading* has helped me improve my organisational skills—scheduling sessions, managing time, respecting established schedules, etc. On the other hand, it has helped me to develop some habits and to not lose my enthusiasm, to get really involved in the responsibility I have taken on. (Student 8)

And on a personal level, [I have learned] to have more patience and that there are times that no matter how good other people's intentions are, if you have to set limits, you'd better set them. (Student 1)

This has made me reflect on my insecurity. Maybe it's because of my young age, but I still do not know how to face certain situations on my own, although every time I try harder. I always rush to someone who can solve a problem for me, instead of making myself face it. (Student 3)

### Conclusions

To summarize, the data obtained highlight some of the positive effects of student service-learning projects, chief among which is the positive perception that university students have regarding the impact of service-learning projects in terms of participation, competence development, service, and

experience.

In terms of participation, the study shows that students get directly involved in service-learning projects aimed at people or groups in the fields of health promotion, educational support, and solidarity and cooperation. Students participate in service tasks that are directly related to their university studies in the Faculty of Education.

Regarding the development of competencies, it is evident, on the one hand, that students highly value the link between the activities carried out in the service-learning project and the achievement of learning goals related to their studies. On the other hand, students report that they put into practice most competencies and they consider that the competencies acquired to a higher degree are those linked to social commitment, problem solving, content knowledge, and teamwork. The competencies with the lowest scores are those related to searching for information, knowledge of languages, and knowledge of digital technologies.

In terms of their evaluation of the usefulness of the service, students considered all service activities carried out in the different projects to be highly beneficial, highlighting in particular their increased commitment, self-knowledge, and motivation toward their university studies. Scoring slightly lower in terms of benefits are facilitation of the acquisition of knowledge and the link between theory and practice.

Finally, students' evaluation of their participation in service-learning projects was highly positive, although they pointed out the need to achieve stronger links between learning and service and to improve the way that the Service-Learning Office coordinates and monitors the projects.

### Discussion of Implications of the Findings

University service-learning enables us to contextualize knowledge socially. Quality academic education is much more than learning new knowledge and developing skills. Such education is also concerned with training students in their future profession, placing them in the real, social context in which they will eventually practice their profession, and training them to analyze the social, ethical, and civic impact that their professional practice entails. Service-

learning enables students to live in, act in, and analyze real situations, which are similar to those that will shape their future professional practice; it helps them to do so with sufficient theoretical background and knowledge, so that their practice is not an occasional contact with reality but an active and engaged learning opportunity.

The results of our research show that students greatly value what this kind of projects offer in this regard. Student evaluation of their participation in service-learning projects is highly positive. Nonetheless, their answers also highlight certain issues that can be improved and explored in depth in terms of experiences lived, especially in relation to the need to achieve a stronger link between learning and service and, therefore, between theory and practice.

That is why it is essential to accompany service-learning projects with reflective practice. Participation in these types of projects must be accompanied by reflective practices that foster deep learning, so that the experience can be rethought and reconstructed by the students and integrated into the set of knowledge and competencies that are part of their academic formation.

Reflection becomes even more important in service-learning since it allows for the integration of the service with the academic learning by promoting the construction of knowledge and the development of cognitive abilities and capacity (Eyler, 2002). But also, “reflection plays a vital role in raising awareness and, therefore, it reinforces the notion that service learning can be perceived as a critical pedagogy” (Deeley, 2016, p. 83).

The value of reflection in university learning processes has been widely described by various authors (Barnett, 1997; Brockbank & McGill, 2008). In summary, it is considered that moving away from a traditional university teaching model and toward a model focused on student learning involves the incorporation of reflective practices, among other issues. Furthermore, it is argued that reflection is also necessary to stimulate and promote learning of a critical and transformative nature (Harvey & Knight, 1996) in the sense that “the student is encouraged to become a critical thinker, depending on the norms and requirements of his/her discipline” (Brockbank & McGill, 2008, p. 69).

Improving quality in service-learning projects and confirming the need to do

so through tangible research results have become the focus of the work undertaken by the Service-Learning Office of the Faculty of Education at the University of Barcelona over the past 2 years. The reflective practice model developed by the Service-Learning Office is based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model. This model uses a journal as a reflective tool and details activities at various times following Eyler's (2001) reflection map.

Kolb's proposal emphasizes the value of reflection as one of the key elements for optimizing learning, as a dynamic mechanism that is intertwined with experience, examining it carefully and paying special attention to various important issues, such as the questions emerging from reality, the search for effective actions, the participants' experiences, the civic sense of their intervention, and the critical vision that is fostered by reality (Páez & Puig, 2013). In short, no matter how motivating a service-learning experience on its own may be, it will be rendered meaningless if it is not accompanied by spaces and moments for reflection that would allow us to overcome our emotions and advance in possible learning (Zabalza, 2011). It is, therefore, worth highlighting the value of systematic reflection as an organized process through which the challenges posed by the experience can be addressed with the aim of enhancing new learning (Páez & Puig, 2013).

Figure 1 specifies the tools and moments of the reflective process that are proposed by the Service-Learning Office of the Faculty of Education at the University of Barcelona. The training tools that are used to enhance the students' learning and their evaluation are the personal journal, the group sharing sessions, and a final reflective session.

A personal journal begins with the signing of a document that serves as a contract between each student and the Service-Learning Office. The document formalizes the learning and service objectives of the course, as well as outlining the tasks that are expected to be completed during the service experience. Students are then asked to identify a particular experience at the service site and to analyze that experience within a broader context in order to make recommendations for change and improvement. To do this, students are asked leading questions, and three to five relevant readings are suggested.

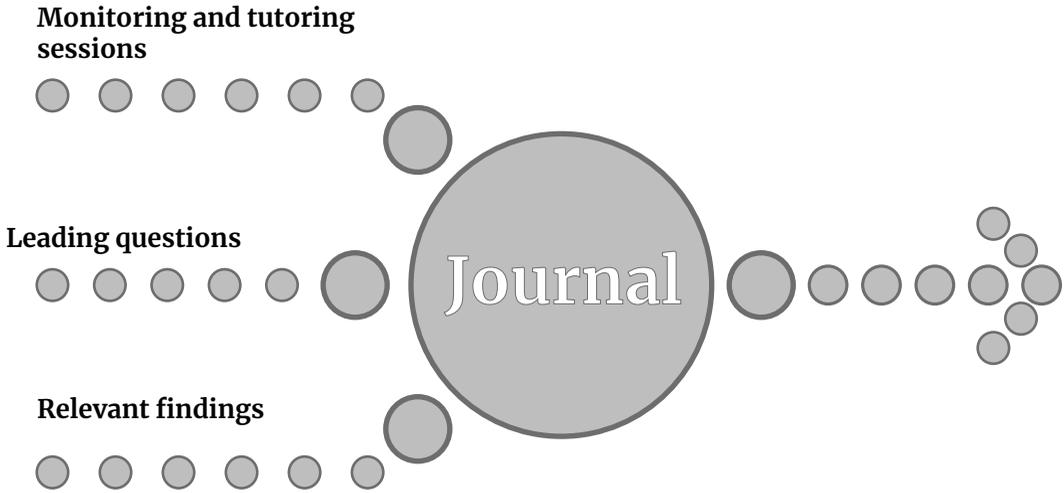


Figure 1. Reflective Tools and Moments  
Source: Service-Learning Office, Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona.

In addition, at the beginning of the project, students are provided with a suggested index (see Table 5) and a series of reflective exercises on some points that are believed to be key in the training of a future professional of socioeducational intervention in order to guide them and enhance their reflections throughout the service-learning. The aim is to help students to go beyond a merely descriptive vision of the experience in which they are living and delve deep into it instead. This is why it is essential for the journal to differentiate between the diary or log (that is, the section devoted to writing entries with a brief description of their day-to-day activities) and other moments and spaces devoted to exploring the learning derived from participating in the project.

The journal is a living document that is supervised throughout the project. Via tutorials and their involvement in the whole reflective process, tutors play a key role in designing diverse and rich opportunities for reflection and in helping students to achieve the goals set, in facilitating the creation of spaces for analysis and synthesis of the activity based on the objectives, and in supporting students emotionally. All of this is done through listening actively, critically questioning everything that is being done, and providing quiet spaces for reflection.

In addition to personal spaces, group sharing sessions take place throughout the entire service—which can last a single term or the whole academic year—under the supervision of a member of the Service-Learning Office. These meetings enable students to share experiences and feelings

and also to link the service to academic content; students are able to hear about each other's success stories and can offer advice and collaborate to identify solutions to the problems found in the service site. Finally, the experience ends with a reflective session that serves both as a conclusion to the service and as a celebration of the whole experience. This space aims to systematize the most relevant learning outcomes that have been achieved through the experience.

Finally, a rubric was created with a double objective: to facilitate guidance during the reflective process and the tutoring of reflective journals, and also to show students the key elements of the reflection processes promoted in the service-learning projects in which they were participating. The elaboration and validation of the rubric has enabled us to identify the various dimensions of reflection, as well as the evaluation items for the teaching staff and the didactic guidelines for the student.

To conclude, the reflective tools and moments above indicated are intended to lead to an improvement of service-learning projects as a training process. Even though educational benefits entailed by service-learning practices are not under question and a growing number of initiatives are undeniably being developed in this direction, to further advance service-learning, it is still worth highlighting the need to produce a body of knowledge on the success of service-learning that has been sufficiently proven and empirically tested, especially in the European context and at the university level.

<b>Table 5. Index and Summary of Activities in the Reflective Journal</b>	
<b>ABOUT ME</b>	
	Describe your personal and academic background.
	Detail your expectations in relation to the Service-Learning Project.
<b>ABOUT MY SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT</b>	
	Context
	Institution
	Group
	People involved
<b>MY FIRST DAYS. CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS</b>	
	Describe, in three words, what the beginning of the service was like for you.
	Identify the initial challenges that you will seek to overcome with the person you are working with and within yourself.
	Describe an initial situation that stood out for you from among the rest.
<b>POSITIVE DESCRIPTION.</b> Various issues are raised so that students can identify the best features of the socioeducational situation they are experiencing so that the educational link is enhanced.	
	Thinking about your supervision work, describe the most positive aspects in 10 lines.
	Identify any issues related to your mentees' attitude that you believe need improving.
	Explain how you will go about motivating your mentees in order to improve the above issues.
<b>EDUCATIONAL LINK.</b> Various questions are asked so that students can describe and explain the positive link to their education and the development of emotional attachment throughout the project.	
	Identify the key moments in the development of your attachment.
	Discuss the main learning gains you are making.
<b>CRITICAL INCIDENTS.</b> A reflective activity is proposed with the aim of addressing problems, queries, or difficulties that may have arisen during the experience, and discussing feelings that were generated.	
	Think of a problematic situation and describe it in detail.
	Explain how you went about solving it at the time and how you would do it now.
<b>CONCLUSION AND FINAL REFLECTIONS.</b> Suggestions and guidelines are put forward regarding the conclusion of each service-learning project.	
	Together with your mentees, write a list with the best moments you've shared.
	Identify 10 key final ideas or reflections you've had about the project.
<b>DIARY/LOG</b>	

Source: Service-Learning Office, Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona.



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