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Toward a Civically Engaged Teacher Identity: Qualitative Analysis of a Service Learning Project in Educators Training

Abstract: The aim of this chapter is to analyse the effect of implementing the Service Learning methodology in developing civic skills in university students that are in the process of becoming educators. More specifically, we focus on the following specific aims: 1) Identify the degree of social responsibility developed by the students; 2) analyse the disposition developed towards civic participation; 3) evaluate the bonds established with the education community; 4) discover the sense of belonging generated with regard to the community in which they collaborate, and; 5) understand the influence of these factors on the creation of their teacher identity. A descriptive qualitative methodology based on an ethnographic study was used, and convenience sample was undertaken, which comprises 20 students on the degrees in pre-school education, primary school education, pedagogy and social education at the Faculty of Education, Complutense University of Madrid (Spain).

Keywords: Service Learning, teacher training, teacher identity, civic commitment, social responsibility.

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that identity is a complicated, multidimensional and dynamic concept that refers to different facets of human life.^{1,2} As such, defining it is

1 A. Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, London: Penguin, 2007.

2 A. Maalouf, *In the Name Of Identity*, New York: Arcade Pub, 2012.

no mean feat and the outcomes are often controversial.^{3,4} In recent decades, a combination of factors, which include the development of the welfare state and social rights, a new digital dimension in exercising citizenship⁵ and the all-encompassing effects of globalisation, with the reactive emergence of diverse nationalisms in different parts of the world,^{6,7} has led to a renewed focus on cultural and civic dimensions.⁸ In the strictly education-related area, intense debate has also arisen that has several derivations linked to education regarding the identity of students, especially due to recognition of multiculturalism, although more specifically on the identity of teachers, which involves different derivations that are also not free of controversy.⁹

One of them refers to the specific delimitation of the responsibilities of teachers, whose professionalisation process has fostered a precise description of their duties and tasks, both in the classroom and in the education centre. This description has also been incentivised by a growing demand on the educational institution, which goes beyond what has traditionally been considered as educational or to be within the competences of schools and also includes the social issues of students and of the environment of the education centre itself.¹⁰ As part of this diversification trend of the responsibilities of educational institutions, it is

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- 3 K. A. Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*, London: Profile Books, 2019.
 - 4 D. T. Hansen, "Chasing Butterflies Without a Net: Interpreting Cosmopolitanism," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29.2/2010.
 - 5 N. C. Burbules, "Like a Version: playing with online identities," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 34.4/2002.
 - 6 J. Conroy, "El Brexit y la alteridad: una modesta reflexión asistemática," in J. A. Ibáñez-Martín y J. L. Fuentes (eds.), *Educación y capacidades. Hacia un nuevo enfoque del desarrollo humano*, Madrid, Dykinson, 2017.
 - 7 M. Hand, "Patriotism in Schools," *Impact. Philosophical Perspectives on Education Policy* 19/2011.
 - 8 M. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998.
 - 9 D. Carr, "Professional and personal values and virtues in education and teaching," *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2006. C. Day, *A passion for teaching*, London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004. C. Higgings, *The Good Life of Teaching*, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.
 - 10 K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2015. F. Esteban, J. L. Fuentes, "Swimming against the tide in current educational practice: thoughts and proposals," *The Educational Forum* 85.2/2021. K. Osterman, "Teacher Practice and Students' Sense of Belonging," in: *International Research Handbook on Values Education and Student Wellbeing*, T. Lovat, R. Toomey, and N. Clement (eds.), Dordrecht: Springer, 2010.

worth considering the emergence of the Service Learning methodology, understood as an educational approach that combines academic learning and service to a social need, through an integrated project that enriches both aspects.^{11,12} This conception has several implications. One of the goals of Service Learning is the undertaking of curricular learning in real, more meaningful and contextualised environments that provide a necessary connection between theory and practice.¹³ Additionally, it also enables the promotion of students' civic engagement by establishing bonds with the local community, which enhances the feeling of belonging to it, strengthens the sense of social responsibility, incentivises social entrepreneurship and fosters the civic participation of students.¹⁴ Therefore, this methodology has gradually been incorporated into different stages of the education system, from basic education up to university.

Some authors find grounds to affirm that in recent decades an ethic-civic shift has taken place in education, which makes educators more aware of the important moral dimension of their actions.¹⁵ Said ethical shift in a European context has its roots in the post-1945 moral recovery, in which the old Europe rose from the ashes and on its ruins contributed to the universal recognition of a set of human rights conceived at the same time as being democratic and based on the European identity. Despite the crises that ensued in the final decades of the 20th century, this civic morality appears to have held on to its resilient heritage into the 21st century and, in recent years, it has been given new impetus, a new narrative of civic morality focused more on the present than on the past, with a view towards Europe's relationship with the rest of the world as regards general, ethical and environmental matters, as well as not tolerating racism and xenophobia.¹⁶ In this context, the resurgence of educational concepts like character education is

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- 11 J. M. Puig, M. Gijón, X. Martín, L. Rubio, "Aprendizaje-Servicio y Educación para la Ciudadanía," *Revista de Educación*, No. Extraordinario, 2011.
 - 12 M. N. Tapia, *La solidaridad como pedagogía. El "aprendizaje-servicio" en la escuela*, Buenos Aires: Ciudad Nueva, 2001.
 - 13 S. Gaston, M. Kruger, "Students perceptions of volunteering during the first two years of studying a Social Work degree," *International Journal for the Scholarships of Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2014.
 - 14 A. Furco, S. H. Billig, *Service Learning: The Essence of the Pedagogy*, Greenwich: Information Age Publishing, 2002.
 - 15 J. A. Ibáñez-Martín, *Horizontes para los educadores*, Madrid: Dykinson, 2017. K. Kristjánsson, "Moral education today: Ascendancy and fragmentation," *Journal of Moral Education* 46.4/2017.
 - 16 M. Conway, "The legacies of 1945: The evolutions of European civic morality," *Journal of Moral Education* 50.1/2021.

significant,¹⁷ which, in its current neo-Aristotelian version, has several links to Service Learning.¹⁸ Likewise, it is worth highlighting the recent initiative of the OECD,¹⁹ that introduces among the competences to be evaluated by PISA -along with language, science and mathematics-, a civic capacity as creative thinking, in which, moreover, OECD considers a relevant dimension as the resolution of social problems. As a result, in the educational system of different countries, content has been introduced, both specifically and across the board, relating to the exercising of citizenship, which through mixed results and methodologies, has put the role of schools in current democracies at the centre of debate).²⁰

Furthermore, in the university field, we have also witnessed a process of change linked to the emergence of a third university mission, adding to the traditional ones of teaching and research,²¹ intermixing with them.²² This new goal focuses on the social transfer of knowledge created by higher education institutions, which cannot be of an exclusively self-referential nature, but rather must meet and be geared towards current social demands and in collaboration with social agents.^{23,24}

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- 17 D. I. Walker, M. P. Roberts, K. Kristjánsson, "Towards a new era of character education in theory and in practice," *Educational Review*, Vol. 67, No. 1, 2015.
 - 18 B. Boston, *Their best selves: Building character education and service learning together in the lives of young people*, Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, 1997. J. L. Fuentes, E. López-Gómez, "El aprendizaje servicio como estrategia metodológica de la educación del carácter: posibilidades y complementariedades," in: *Hacer la universidad en el espacio social*, C. Naval y E. Arbués (coords.), Pamplona: EUNSA, 2018. R. Shumer, C. Lam, N. Laabs, "Ensuring good character and civic education: connecting through service learning," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 32.4/2012.
 - 19 OECD, *Creative thinking framework*, PISA: 2021, 2019.
 - 20 E. Arbués, C. Repáraz, C. Naval, "Los alumnos y la educación para la ciudadanía. Primeros resultados," *Revista Española de Pedagogía* 70.253/2012. I. Davie, E. Chong, "Current challenges for citizenship education in England," *Asian Education and Development Studies* 5.1/2016. L. Johnson, P. Morris, "Critical citizenship education in England and France: a comparative analysis," *Comparative Education* 48.3/2012. A. Peterson, "The common good and citizenship education in England: a moral enterprise?," *Journal of Moral Education* 40.1/2011. M. C. Moreno-Gutiérrez, S. Frisancho, "Transitions to democracy: the role of moral and citizenship education in Latin America," *Journal of Moral Education* 38.4/2009.
 - 21 European Commission, *White Paper on education and training teaching and learning. Towards the learning society*, Commission of the European Communities, 1995.
 - 22 Carrion et al., *Green Paper, Fostering and Measuring 'Third Mission' in Higher Education Institutions*, European Commission, 2012.
 - 23 OECD, *Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance*, OECE publishing, 2019.
 - 24 T. Farnell, *Community engagement in higher education: trends, practices and policies. NESET report*, Office of the European Union, 2020.

Up to such point, that is the case, as the term “civic universities”²⁵ is starting to be mentioned, giving a renewed ethical dimension to university training²⁶ and overcoming, at the same time, both the classical perspective that perceives universities only as ivory towers centred on themselves as a condition of the possibility of advancing knowledge, and the reductionist perspective that places higher education at the comprehensive service of the market or dominant financial interests.²⁷

Service Learning, albeit not exclusively, but rather in conjunction with other initiatives, constitutes a reference that makes possible this opening up of universities towards society, while also training their students in character-related civic skills and traits.²⁸ Its growth in Europe is notable and it has taken on an increasingly important role in education faculties, focused on the training of educators.²⁹ As such, it is hoped that future teachers and other professionals in the education field acquire during their university training a concept of civic engagement that has three dimensions: the first refers to the essential condition of university students, members of a community that sees itself as being civically engaged and that recognises a series of inherent responsibilities to its surrounding environment, which calls on them to act. It should be mentioned that this responsibility is not the same for all citizens, but rather entails a greater degree for those who have studied at university, given the higher training received. The second is social responsibility as future teachers, whose task implicates a personal commitment that goes beyond the notion of profession and is placed in the sphere of vocation, with higher levels of delivery, service and care of others, similar to

25 European Commission, *Communication on a renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education*, Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2017.

26 C. Caro Samada, J. Ahedo Ruiz, F. Esteban Bara, “Kohlberg’s moral education proposal and its legacy at university: present and future,” *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, Vol. 76, No. 269, 2018.

27 R. Pring, *Philosophy of Education: Aims, Theory, Common Sense and Research*, London: Continuum, 2004.

28 T. Farnell, *Community engagement in higher education: trends, practices and policies. NESET report*, Office of the European Union, 2020.

29 P. Redondo-Corcobado y J. L. Fuentes, “La investigación sobre el aprendizaje-servicio en la producción científica española: una revisión sistemática,” *Revista Complutense de Educación* 31.1/2020. A. Sotelino, E. Arbués, L. García, J. L. González-Geraldo, “Service-Learning in Europe. Dimensions and Understanding from Academic Publication,” *Frontiers in Education* 2021.

other vocations, like nursing and social work, etc.³⁰ The third, insofar as an innovative teaching methodology, is that Service Learning constitutes disciplinary content for future teachers, which trains them to put it into practice with their own students in the course of their profession, thereby instilling once again the civic characteristic into education.

However, the acquisition of civic skills has some significant issues, especially deriving from the ethical dimension, that lie in very different matters of both a theoretic and practical nature. In the latter group, we find those regarding its assessment. Although the curriculum learning of instrumental disciplines has contrasted assessment methods, those relating to training of an ethic-civic nature are still scarcely developed. These methods are fundamentally quantitative or the classical dilemmas arising from the Kohlberg paradigm of moral education. The problems of this kind of assessment lie fundamentally in the self-referential and cognitive nature,³¹ which neither ensures the veracity of the answers due to extensive social desirability³² –which is compounded in cases where teachers have the power to grade said learning–, nor predicts the correspondence between cognition and conduct, leading to the possibility that students sufficiently internalise the civic theoretical content and even recognise the skills required to it into practice, but are unable to develop it in real contexts.³³ In this regard, MacIntyre³⁴ suggests that:

So in calling some particular person brave or generous or just, I will always, if I am giving expression to some tolerably systematic and coherent conception of the virtues, be committed to a particular type of answers to the question: for what reasons did he or she act as he or she did?

As such, it is necessary to develop mixed assessment methods that require a greater level of student implication in the processes of reflecting on and putting

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- 30 D. Carr, “Professional and personal values and virtues in education and teaching,” *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2006.
- 31 C. Peterson, M. E. P. Seligman, *Character strengths and virtues: a handbook and classification*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 32 P. D. Crowne, D. Marlowe, *The approval motive: studies in evaluative dependence*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1964.
- 33 J. García-Gutiérrez, J. L. Fuentes, del Pozo (2018), “La promoción de la competencia ética y el compromiso cívico y su evaluación en los proyectos universitarios de aprendizaje-servicio,” in: *Aprendizaje-Servicio: los retos de la evaluación*, M. Ruiz Corbella y J. García-Gutiérrez (eds.), Madrid: Narcea, 2018.
- 34 A. C. MacIntyre, “How to appear virtuous without actually being so,” in: *Education in Morality*, J. M. Halstead and T. H. McLaughlin (eds.), London: Routledge, 1999, p. 3.

into practice the civic behaviour fostered by the Service Learning methodology, as well as on the influence that the social action has on shaping their character.³⁵

In said scenario, the aim of this chapter is to analyse the effect of implementing the Service Learning methodology in developing civic skills in university students that are in the process of becoming educators. More specifically, we will focus on the following specific aims that develop the foregoing: 1) Identify the degree of social responsibility developed by the students; 2) analyse the disposition developed towards civic participation; 3) evaluate the bonds established with the education community; 4) discover the sense of belonging generated with regard to the community in which they collaborate, and; 5) understand the influence of these factors on the creation of their teacher identity, as well as other different factors among them.

2. Method

A descriptive qualitative methodology based on an ethnographic study has been used. A convenience sample was undertaken, given the accessibility of university students participating in the project, which comprises 20 students on the degrees in pre-school education, primary school education, pedagogy and social education at the Faculty of Education – Teacher Training Centre of the Complutense University of Madrid (Spain). The participants were all women, aged 19 to 28 (average age=21.7), that were in the first or second year of their degree studies (72–28 %). They participated voluntarily in the project and in the study, the undertaking of which adhered to the principles of research ethics in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

The Service Learning project was conducted during the 2018/19 academic year as part of another more extensive research project in which interdisciplinary teams formed by 20 researchers and from the following three faculties participated: Education, Social Work and Nursing, and Physiotherapy and Podiatry of the Complutense University. In parallel, another five Service Learning projects were conducted in which 80 students collaborated, together with different education and social entities in the fields of infancy and adolescence, women in situations of social exclusion, drug dependency, mental health and disability.

Specifically, the project, the results of which are herein analysed, was conducted with a private subsidised education centre located in a neighbourhood in the

35 J. Arthur, T. Harrison, E. Taylor, *Building Character Through Youth Social Action: Research Report*, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015.

outskirts of Madrid with an ideology based on the Roman Catholic religion. At said centre, all levels of education are taught, from pre-school to further education (*bachillerato*) and it has certain defining characteristics that largely condition the school ethos and the educational action undertaken. Furthermore, 90 % of the families of the students receive social assistance and, in some cases, this is the only family income. The school population is highly diverse, corresponding, at the time of the study, to 27.76 % immigrant pupils, 18.98 % children of immigrant parents, and 15.64 % belong to the gypsy ethnicity. What is more, school performance rates are very low and there is a high level of disruptive behaviour and absenteeism, which coincides with a lack of complementary education, cultural and sporting options in the surrounding area.

The management team of the education centre requested collaboration with the Complutense University to develop an innovative methodology called Learning Communities,³⁶ which aims to involve the educational community in the school centre, with particular focus on schools located in areas of social vulnerability. This methodology involves diverse actions, such as interactive groups, which entails organising the classroom in a different way by putting students in teams of four to five. In these teams, they carry out an activity in a short period of time, around 10–15 minutes. They are supported in each activity by a person unrelated to the centre, fundamentally family, neighbours or members of local entities, who voluntarily collaborate. Their role is to foster the participation of all the students in their team to undertake the activity, enabling positive interaction between them, galvanising the group and helping those finding it more difficult, thereby making it possible to provide more personalised help in an environment of fewer people. After the activity, the students change group, which they do several times throughout the class.

Amid the shortfall of sufficient support received by the education centre, it requested the collaboration of students at the Faculty of Education, which was established through a Service Learning project that entailed weekly attendance to the centre in order to carry out the interactive groups, usually lasting two hours, and participation in monthly seminars at the university. The first part of these seminars was of an informative nature, where the teachers presented the content relating to the activity undertaken at the school centre, according to the study programme of the different degree courses, on subject matters like the reasoning and development of Service Learning, the organisation of Learning

36 C. Elboj, I. Puigdemívol, M. Soler, R. Valls, *Comunidades de aprendizaje. Transformar la educación*, Barcelona: Graó, 2005.

Communities and the ethnographic observation methodology. The second part took place on a quarterly basis and entailed the undertaking of group interviews and semi-structured discussion groups, in which 8–12 students participated, on the undertaking of the service in the school centre and addressing the emerging and problematic needs found, which aimed to promote a collaborative inquiry into authentic and real pedagogical problems.³⁷

Furthermore, together with the discussion groups, the students wrote in a field notebook with the aim of enhancing their learning of the service by reflecting on the practice. According to Dewey,³⁸ “No experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought.” As such, Service Learning is not only deemed as an experimental activity, but rather that its significance also lies in reflecting on one’s own experience, on its interpretation, reconstruction and organisation, in order to give it meaning, as well as connection with the university training process itself.³⁹ Furthermore, the field notebook was the tool that accompanied the participant observation, which aimed to understand the cultural meanings within the school setting,⁴⁰ via two sections relating to the description of that observed and the interpretation of its meaning,⁴¹ and a third focused on the undertaking of the education action approaches to improve that seen. The first was open to considering general aspects of the context, such as the physical space, the interpersonal relations that took place in them and the work dynamic established. In turn, considering in this first part a more specific description of the aspects related to the participation of the members of the project, the conversations that turned out to be significant, the roles and the problems identified, as well as the solutions applied to them, was also recommended. The second part, of the field notebooks regarded the personal interpretation of that observed in said situation. It was proposed that the interpretation included a critical reflection on the problems found, an evaluation of the solutions considered by the school centre and the degree of attainment of the objectives of the activity.

37 J. Conroy, M. Hulme, I. Menter, “Developing a “clinical” model for teacher education,” *Journal of Education for Teaching* 39.5/2013.

38 J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, Project Gutenberg, 1916, p. 112.

39 J. Annette, “Character, Civic Renewal and Service Learning for Democratic Citizenship in Higher Education,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 53.3/2005.

40 B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London: Routledge, 2014.

41 C. Cerri, “La importancia de la metodología etnográfica para la investigación antropológica. El caso de las relaciones de valores en un espacio asociativo juvenil, Perifèria,” *Revista de Recerca i Formació en Antropologia* 13/2010.

Together with it, other supplementary evaluation instruments were used, the results of which are not provided herein due to a lack of space, which consisted in conducting a quantitative analysis through a questionnaire created and validated ad hoc,⁴² the undertaking of interviews with the teachers at the education centre and an evaluation of the design of the project itself through the category of Service Learning projects.⁴³ As such, progress was sought towards an integrated evaluation model⁴⁴ that would allow for the convergence of multiple and supplementary perspectives on the development of the character traits of the students.⁴⁵

Specifically, the information analysed in this study has been extracted from a total of 142 documents. Additionally, a participant observation was conducted in the school centre by one of the members responsible for the research that allowed the realisation of the activity to be closely monitored. Said documentation was obtained from three different sources:

- *126 field notebooks* used by the students participating in the project.
- *Transcriptions of 4 discussion groups* undertaken on a quarterly basis.
- *Transcriptions of 12 individual interviews* carried out with students who have participated in the project. These interviews were undertaken a month after attendance at the school centre had ended and they entailed 22 questions grouped into 3 categories: curriculum area, personal and social development, and general evaluation of the Service Learning experience.

The triangulation of the information obtained and the analysis of its content has followed an inductive thematic strategy.⁴⁶ The data obtained has been codified and analysed according to the following categories: (1) social responsibility, (2) civic participation, (3) bond with the local community, (4) sense of belonging, and (5) teacher identity, using the Atlas.ti version 8 software.

42 V. León-Carrascosa, S. Sánchez-Serrano, M. Belando-Montoro, "Diseño y validación de un cuestionario para evaluar la metodología Aprendizaje-Servicio," *Estudios sobre educación* 39/2020, pp. 247–266.

43 Grem, *Rúbrica para la autoevaluación y la mejora de los proyectos de APS*, 2014.

44 H. A. Alexander, "Assessing virtue: measurement in moral education at home and abroad," *Ethics and Education* 11.3/2016.

45 T. Harrison, J. Arthur, E. Burn, *Character Education. Evaluation Handbook for Schools*, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2016.

46 V. Braun, V. Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3.2/2006.

Furthermore, the research process has been structured into 4 phases, as per figure 1:

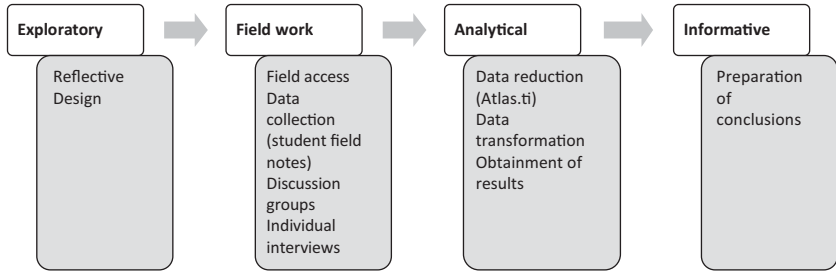


Figure 1. Research process phase

Source: own elaboration.

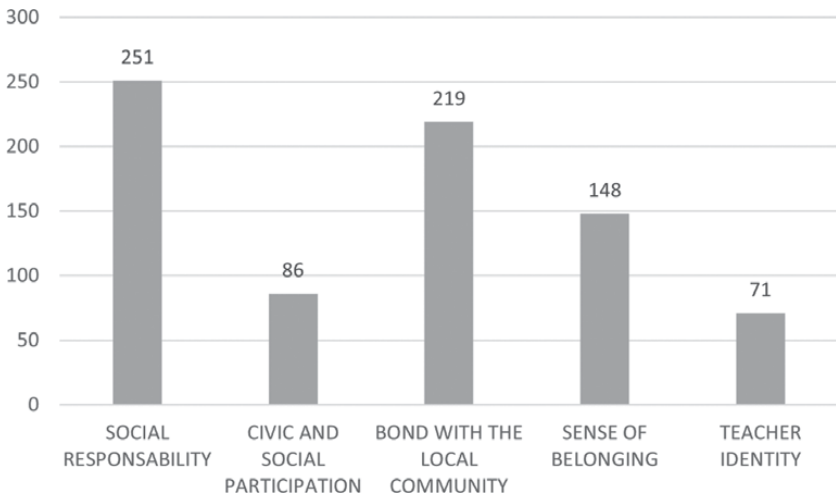


Figure 2. Categories of citation groups

Source: own elaboration.

3. Results

The texts analysed have been segmented into 775 citations grouped into five categories, as per figure 2:

A) Social Responsibility

The results analysed show that the participation of university students in the Service Learning project favours awareness on the need to help others and the social benefit generated. Furthermore, the students see themselves as possible agents of change and as being responsible for the undertaking of actions that enable social transformation. The persons involved stated not only their willingness for it, but also that they gained satisfaction from doing it, expressing their willingness to continue carrying them out and affirming that they generate feelings of well-being in those that undertake it. In this regard, one of the students said: “With this experience, I have learned that I like to help people. It has helped me to realise that we need change and that I want to do my bit. I have realised that I can help more people.”

Furthermore, knowledge of the environment and its needs enables participants on the Service Learning project to be more aware of and more engaged with such needs, helping them to develop the intellectual habits of critical thinking and reflection, as well as the ability to make decisions amid situations of inequality and injustice. The project participants, as observed in the field notebooks and in the individual and group interviews, put into practice values and attitudes of respect, cooperation, justice and fairness, increasing the capacity to act in situations that generate social discontent, while also teaching others to develop them, transmitting and instilling respect among colleagues.

In this way, the responsibility that individuals assume by merely forming part of society adds to the responsibility inherent to their role as a teacher and, therefore, as a member of an education institution, which assumes the possibility of constructing and instigating social changes towards the search of equality and well-being, not just individual, but also social. Students, as future professionals, thereby start to think that their own actions will have an impact on the social environment, not just as an individual belonging to said environment, but also as a professional in the education field, taking on a teaching role and the tasks entrenched in such vocation.

Together with that, being participants in situations of vulnerability, inequality and diversity inside classrooms, allows those participating on the Service Learning project to reflect on and propose action measures to improve inclusion within the education system, such as specific help classrooms, increasing the number of teachers per classroom, language support measures, methodologies adapted to student type, modification of the arrangement of groups, etc., increasing in this way the capacity to analyse and critically review what happens

in today's society and in their professional area in particular. In this regard, one of the students strongly asserted that:

I would consider undertaking a sensitisation project throughout the whole school period. A methodology worked on in such a way that all would be at the same level. It would be interesting for the children with learning difficulties to receive extra support to improve their performance.

B) Civic and Social Participation

The students participating on the Service Learning project show a high disposition towards undertaking actions of civic and social participation within social entities of the relevant context. Even though some of them had previously undertaken such actions, there is a high percentage that express interest, once ended, in continuing to participate in the same project, as well as in other similar actions with highly vulnerable people in situations of inequality.

Participation in the space fosters the development of active participation skills and behaviours, implicitly conveying values of collaboration, respect, empathy and conscious attitude, which are required to carry out the participative action. The students are able to think about others, cooperate and “be part of something,” while also fostering participation in the students with whom they undertake the service and they have an attitude of responsibility to make it materialise, like a right of the students in the interactive groups to quality education. In turn, the university students agree on the demand to create flexible spaces in the university context that enable the students to have a greater level of participation and capacity to act, including making decisions in the planning of the actions carried out in the social setting. One of them clearly expresses it as such:

I had a different perception of what university life meant. People often talk of studying and going out partying...it's what us young people do. But, there are things that aren't as well known, like the undertaking of this type of action. Discovering this project has opened my eyes to a world of possibilities, as a student and future teacher, in which I want to participate and be free to choose, applying what we learn in class.

It should also be mentioned that forming part of this Service Learning project generates positive feelings for the participants, sensations of satisfaction and self-efficiency regarding their own actions, which may motivate a more autonomous and ongoing social action. Furthermore, the good acceptance and gratification by the educational community fosters satisfaction regarding the actions themselves, creating an ongoing cycle and encouraging future social actions to continue. One of the future educators said: “On finishing the activities, almost all the

children in the class thank you and ask you to return. That is very satisfying and you're left wanting more."

C) Bond with the Local Community

The bond established with the local community in the Service Learning project fosters in the participants a sense of specific responsibility with the community, as well as awareness of the needs and problems that surround said community. As such, an additional search for actions to improve the environment arises in the participants. "In the next academic year, I would like to participate in something related to disability. I would like to sign up to a voluntary service in Guzmán el Bueno [an entity close to the university] that works with abused children."

On occasions, said bond provides extensive knowledge on other realities and experiences outside the culture or context of origin of the participants, which helps to break down social prejudices and stereotypes. This increase in knowledge allows views to be changed regarding the social diversity of the community towards a more positive and realistic paradigm. As such, the capacity that social and cultural diversity has to enrich all persons, related or unrelated to a certain culture, that share everyday realities in a close environment, start to be recognised. In this regard, two students said:

I have always lived in a very different neighbourhood to the one the school we collaborated at is in and my own education centre was completely different to what I've seen and experienced here. I come from a comfortable area where the problems are very different to those that the students at this school have. In fact, I find it incredible that that can occur only a few kilometres from my house and the university. It has enabled me to face up to a new and unknown reality that I will most likely experience when I'm a teacher. As such, it has given me the opportunity to discover something very important for my training, which I didn't expect to discover at university.

I have always had the opinion, based on own experience, that people of gypsy ethnicity don't do things because they don't want to, but I have seen at this school that many of those girls have really tried and were putting a lot of work into it. I no longer hold that prejudice.

D) Sense of Belonging

The bond that participating in the Service Learning project has created with the local community implies the development of a sense of belonging to it. Both concepts, although related, do not necessary appear at the same time. The bond supposes an emotional link between people or groups that does not necessarily require the recognition of belonging to that group, but it can occur precisely with the recognition of the differences between one and the other and the affiliation

to different groups. The participants gradually move away from the perception that they are outside the context in which they undertake the service and adopt a sense of belonging to it, becoming aware of the very space that they have to, and in fact, already, occupy within it, taking shared ownership of it in order to make it evolve through their actions of change. That has two important outcomes: firstly, that the sense of belonging ends up generating in the participants greater personal engagement both in the Service Learning project, particularly, and in their close surroundings in general. Secondly, it avoids patronising attitudes that are susceptible to arise through external intervention from a privileged standpoint, like university, that could change the sense of reciprocal Service Learning in terms of action *in* the community, *from* the community, *for* the community and *with* the community.⁴⁷

The acknowledgement received by the community with which the bond is established, including the management team, families of students, the students themselves, etc., is a key element for the emergence of this sense of belonging. Thus, an example of its development is the school students' identification of the university students as being integrated into their education community, as well as the constant reference in a collective sense of the university students towards the education communication in which they undertake the project. That can be seen in the following statement, which was extensively echoed in different ways by the university students: "They called me "teacher," which is an indication that they saw me as being part of the community."

In fact, the results show the positives of the relationships created, the core elements of which are affection and trust, which arise through regular contact and joint action between the participants and those who initially comprise the community, strengthening and fostering actions of support, collaboration, mediation and dispute resolution, focus on different needs, and implication in the group and in the project, among other aspects.

E) Teacher Identity

The students that participate in the Service Learning project state a confirmation of their choice of university studies and future profession, in other words, their teacher vocation is vindicated. Contact with activities directly related to their future profession, enables the university students to take ownership of their profession, starting to feel like teachers and educators from the first few academic

47 R. Shumer, C. Lam & N. Laabs, "Ensuring good character and civic education: connecting through service learning," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 32.4/2012.

years of the degree course. Said ownership allows them to clearly recognise the pedagogical knowledge, tools and skills required to undertake the profession, which favours the initiative to continue lifelong learning. Two of the students clearly expressed that as follows:

It has helped me to see if it is really a profession I want to dedicate the rest of my life to. Before, I came to the faculty to study and my fundamental aim was to pass exams. But now I know that there is something a lot more important. Now I feel like a teacher and that, to a certain extent, is overwhelming. However, my experience in the education centre has helped me to realise my responsibility when I go to university to train as a teacher, as that will influence my future and that of my students-to-be, not only in a few years' time when I have my degree, but here and now.

In addition, the development of a teacher identity seems to provide the participants with sufficient confidence to propose improvements in the environment and in their own training, to increase motivation, enhance self-confidence, stimulate the development of the values inherent to professional practice and to give them the opportunity to experience the satisfaction that the profession gives.

The development of a teacher identity allows for reflection on the professional practice itself as regards matters like the stage of education in which they want to undertake their activity, the capacity of self-regulating their own role as teacher between authoritarianism, authority and awareness raising of the need for close collaboration between the school and family. Two students said the following:

I am more critical about my university training, the subjects, teachers and content they teach us, as I am more aware of what I need as a teacher, of when I need to organise the activity and of getting my students' attention in the centre by being direct but not aggressive.

I have always wanted to be a teacher, but I hadn't previously had any experience like this that helped me to confirm what I wanted to be, but at the same time, it isn't as difficult as I thought. Furthermore, it has helped me to discover what I do well and what I need to work on to improve. For example, one thing I know I'll find difficult is having contact with families. I never thought that being a teacher would also entail that task, but it's now something I see as being very important.

However, it is worth mentioning that the contribution of Service Learning goes beyond the identification of the teacher vocation, which could also arise through undertaking normal external practice placement in an education centre. Beyond the importance of this identification, students start to acknowledge the civic commitment of the teacher, not as a theoretical dimension, but rather as a real one, which connects the content of the subjects that comprise the study programme of the university degree course –particularly those referring to the theory and philosophy of education–, with direct and contextualised action,

which is current and needed by the education centre close to the university institution. There are many references as to this regard in the field notebooks and the student interviews. Here are some of the most significant:

When you study in class, in theory and in other subjects, and you ask yourself the question “what does it mean to be a teacher?” A lot of things go through your head. You discuss it with your colleagues, you discuss your experiences, and we analyse texts from different authors and we reach conclusions. But here [in the centre], is where it all seems to make more sense. Here is where you really experience it, not only understanding it, but also feeling it.

The theory is necessary; we have to learn a lot of things, and that’s why we’re here. I believe that activities like this should be compulsory, because they really bring you face to face with the reality we as educators are going to experience and in situations you can’t ignore. Ultimately, it’s our responsibility.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study shows the contributions that Service Learning provides university students on education-related degrees and, more specifically, in relation to their civic engagement as citizens, in general, and as educators, in particular. As such, this pedagogical methodology, should be considered as a tool at the service of change and social transformation⁴⁸ for building a fair society and, at the same time, for the character training of young people.⁴⁹ Some of the main results obtained, deriving from the study and the documentation analysed, which may guide future lines of research, are as follows:

- Service Learning favours the development of social responsibility in university students, it prepares them to perceive their environment from a critical and reflective perspective, to implicate themselves and identify problems in it, and to recognise themselves as potential agents of change and improvement. It thereby provides a two-fold connection between theory and practice, thinking and systematic action regarding social issues and the role that their own profession has in a reality that is neither abstract nor simulated, but rather tangible and real. Furthermore, it favours decision making geared towards the search for alternatives of change, which denotes an increase in their social

48 M. García, M. Cotrina, “El Aprendizaje y Servicio en la formación inicial del profesorado: de las prácticas educativas críticas a la institucionalización curricular,” *Revista de currículum y formación del profesorado* 19.1/2015.

49 J. Arthur, T. Harrison, E. Taylor, *Building Character Through Youth Social Action. Research Report*, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015.

engagement.⁵⁰ Our research finds similar results than,⁵¹ who claims times and spaces for ethical deliberation on dilemmas that future teachers face in their early experiences in classrooms, aimed to develop thinking habits in which the artificial distinction between teaching and learning will disappear. In her proposal, students from different universities from UK, Hong Kong and South Africa reorganize their ideas, reflect on their personal experience, and identify “hidden knowledge and feelings that might not otherwise be expressed.”

- Participation in the Service Learning project enables contact with social and cultural diversity, contributes to reducing prejudices and social stereotypes, and allows for greater knowledge to be gained on the needs of the community, fostering a bond and sense of joint responsibility with regard to it. In this regard, the positive two-way relationships established between the university students and the school-centre students, the reciprocal feeling and the personal acknowledgement by the education-centre students towards the university participants, strengthen bonds with the educational community, reaffirm the vocation, increase intrinsic motivation and favour the development of values, abilities, skills and competencies inherent to the holistic development as teachers. These results coincide with other similar studies, such as that of Gaston & Kruger,⁵² conducted in Australia with students of other professions considered to be care-related or vocational, such as social work. Furthermore, in this study, the importance of the undertaking of the service during the first two years of university training is highlighted as a determining factor for self-knowledge and the identification of the preferential professional areas of each student. They are also in line with that found by Arthur, Harrison & Taylor⁵³ in the United Kingdom, in which youths aged 12 to 20 and heads of 21 social institutions participated, as well as research conducted in Singapore with university students focused on personal and academic development.⁵⁴

50 C. Reparaz, E. Arbués, C. Naval, C. Ugarte, “El índice Cívico de los universitarios: sus conocimientos, actitudes y habilidades de participación social,” *Revista Española de Pedagogía* 73.260/2015.

51 J. Orchard, “Moral education and the challenge of pre-service professional formation for teachers,” *Journal of Moral Education* 50.1/2021, p. 110.

52 S. Gaston, M. Kruger, “Students perceptions of volunteering during the first two years of studying a Social Work degree,” *International Journal for the Scholarships of Teaching and Learning* 8.2/2014.

53 J. Arthur, T. Harrison, E. Taylor, *Building Character Through Youth Social Action. Research Report*, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2015.

54 R. Shumer, C. Lam, N. Laabs, “Ensuring good character and civic education: connecting through service learning,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 32.4/2012.

- The participation of future educators in Service Learning implies a high degree of satisfaction with the activity, which also coincides with the results obtained by Gaston & Kruger⁵⁵ and Orchard.⁵⁶ In turn, its undertaking fosters actions of social support following the collaboration in the projects, through other social entities largely connected to highly vulnerable contexts. In this regard, we could say that the snowball effect is produced insofar as it enables recognition of the need to engage with the surrounding area, not only on occasions or linked to university recognition, but as the acquisition of a habit of the specific character of the educator. This impulse can be fostered by a sense of belonging with different dimensions, related to the specific community in which the students are engaged and their own profession. Osterman's⁵⁷ analysis (2010) on several quantitative and qualitative studies about sense of belonging in the school, points out some key aspects as: promoting student autonomy, interaction between peers, interpersonal support of teachers, provision of encouragement and feedback to enable them to succeed or high expectations and express confidence in student ability to meet those expectations, which makes they become active members of the school community and the developing of a feeling of we-ness. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the central place that these principles have occupied in our Service Learning project, which may have contributed to the generation of this sense of belonging. Indeed, the trust placed in the students to carry out the service in an environment of special vulnerability, the support provided in seminars by the team of teachers, the moments for discussion and interaction with fellow students, or the creation of spaces for initiative and autonomy, seem to have been important factors in our project as well as in Osterman's work.

Nevertheless, the lack of references to political issues in the analysed texts of the students is also notable. Despite addressing issues related to social participation and even introducing analysis of social problems in some of the seminars, there are few comments on the causes that produce inequalities, the role of the State in them, and student's participation in socio-political

55 S. Gaston, M. Kruger, "Students perceptions of volunteering during the first two years of studying a Social Work degree," *International Journal for the Scholarships of Teaching and Learning* 8.2/2014.

56 J. Orchard, "Moral education and the challenge of pre-service professional formation for teachers," *Journal of Moral Education* 50.1/2021, p. 110.

57 K. Osterman, "Teacher Practice and Students' Sense of Belonging," in: *International Research Handbook on Values Education and Student Wellbeing*, T. Lovat, R. Toomey, and N. Clement (eds.), Dordrecht: Springer, 2010.

movements. These results seem to support what Suissa⁵⁸ raised about the progressive disappearance of the political in educational discourse and are similar to what was found by the study on participation in the community of young Ibero-American adolescents, where the social and the solidarity stand above the political.⁵⁹ A kind of citizenship that points to what Westheimer and Kahne⁶⁰ identify as participatory citizenship, characterized by participation in public issues, but without an explicit critical and political vision of education, democracy and social justice.

- In relation to the education professional profile, in addition to developing in the participants the social responsibility that any citizen must assume as a member of society, they acquire a specific social responsibility as educators, insofar as their professional actions have an impact on social change and improvement through pedagogical actions. The development of this identity is possible not only due to experience, but largely due to the reflection produced on it and its meaning. These results coincide with what Conroy, Hulme & Menter⁶¹ found in an innovative experience at the University of Glasgow, in which factors as professional dialogue on practice, the realization of seminars, the emotional support and the meaningful link between theory and practice made possible a wider development of students' professional identities.
- Lastly, future research should evaluate, on the one hand, the permanency of the capacities developed, and the interests expressed in the interviews and field notebooks of students. Social desirability can be discarded with a new evaluation of the social participation in the following years and during the first years as teachers. Moreover, it would be significant to analyse the effects that the collaboration of university students may have on the expectations of school-centre students and of the educational communities in particular would be appropriate. Awareness of the disposition of university students to participate in Service Learning programmes with vulnerable populations may

58 J. Suissa, "Character education and the disappearance of the political," *Ethics and Education* 10.1/2015.

59 J. L. Fuentes, M. Vázquez, M. Nakano, "La participación de los jóvenes en el entorno social: estudio comparativo entre España, Argentina y Brasil," in: *Participación cívica en espacios socioeducativos. Panorama iberoamericano en un mundo tecnológico*, J. Igelmo y M. R. González (eds.), Madrid: Farenhouse, 2020.

60 J. Westheimer, J. Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," *American Educational Research Journal* 41.2/2004.

61 J. Conroy, M. Hulme, I. Menter, "Developing a "clinical" model for teacher education," *Journal of Education for Teaching* 39.5/2013.

entail a change in the social perception of young people and of the university, which results in the fostering of inter-institutional collaboration and social cohesion.⁶² Additionally, and most importantly, it may contribute to opening a new and encouraging horizon for children and young people in situations of social vulnerability and for their families, in which school success and university training are simultaneously real possibilities and perspectives committed to their environment.

Notes

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62 R. Pring, “The Common School,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41.4/2007.

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