

Potenziale del metodo Service-Learning per la promozione della cittadinanza e l'educazione del carattere

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Sommario

Promuovere la cittadinanza nelle società odierne significa rafforzare quegli aspetti del carattere delle persone che consentiranno loro di comportarsi in modo responsabile e attivo e di essere coinvolti nel raggiungimento del bene comune. Riteniamo che la principale difficoltà che si trova oggi nell'educazione civica sia la mancanza di etica. Imparare ad essere un buon cittadino è un compito che dura tutta la vita e una saggezza pratica che non richiede solo intelligenza per riconoscere quali tratti migliorano la nostra vita nella società, ma anche la volontà di praticarli. L'educazione del carattere è un modo di comprendere e identificare l'educazione morale. Mira a riaffermare la dimensione etica inevitabile dell'educazione.

L'idea di poter educare il carattere delle persone è antica e risale ai tempi della Grecia classica. Ma anche nella nostra società più attuale abbiamo dei punti di riferimento validi. Negli anni Ottanta e Novanta, ad esempio, il concetto di etica della virtù ha ricevuto un grande impulso ed è diventato la base per una buona educazione del carattere contemporaneo. Non è un caso che l'educazione del carattere sia diventata così importante negli ultimi anni, specialmente nel mondo di lingua inglese, parallelamente a una diffusione del metodo Service-Learning.

Parole chiave

Educazione civica, metodo Service-Learning, educazione morale.

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Service-Learning Potential in Citizenship and Character Education

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Abstract

Promoting citizenship in present-day societies means reinforcing those aspects of people's characters which will allow them to behave responsibly and actively and be involved in achieving the common good. We believe that the main difficulty to be found in civic education nowadays is a lack of ethics. Learning to be a good citizen is a lifelong task and practical wisdom which not only demands intelligence to recognize which traits improve our life in society but also the will to practice them. Character education is a way of understanding and identifying moral education. It aims to reaffirm the inescapable ethical dimension of education. This proposal has its origins in classical Greece, but it was not until the 1980s and 90s that the ethics of virtue received a great boost and became the basis for a good deal of contemporary character education. It is not by chance that character education has grown so much in importance over the last few years, especially in the English-speaking world, in parallel with an increase in Service-Learning methodology.

Keywords

Citizenship Education, Character Education, Service-learning.

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Introduction

Promoting citizenship in present-day societies means reinforcing those aspects of people's characters which will allow them to behave responsibly and actively and be involved in achieving the common good. The changes in society over the last few years show a clear need to strengthen our approach to civics as an effective way of confronting the challenges we face. Globalization leads us to reflect on our beliefs and convictions and to accept that it is fair and just for other people to live in a different way. The phenomenon of migration allows us to discover a wealth of diversity while simultaneously and respectfully understanding the importance of one's own roots (Fuentes, 2014). The news of humanitarian crises spreads rapidly due to the media and social networks which make us aware of the importance of solidarity and its major development pathways in a world which is more interconnected than ever before. Likewise, responsible care for the planet, culture and local traditions, for social communities are key elements for the sustainability of society (Naval, Arbués and Sádaba, 2016).

We believe that the main difficulty to be found in civic education nowadays is something that was born of our welfare societies and is at the root of the 21st century economic crisis: a lack of ethics. This deficiency varies at different levels in every contexts: politics, business, banking organizations, but also in civil society. The effects of the financial crisis which began in 2007 and the resulting global recession have had a major impact on many societies. The consequences of this ethical crisis were tough and continue to be so for those who have lost their jobs and for the young people who have seen their chances of getting a job slashed. But perhaps we have learned that the quest for a better society does not merely imply an increase in the gross domestic product or in social benefits, but also has other demands will allow everyone to fulfil their potential. The UNESCO document *Rethinking education: Towards a global common good?* reflects on the education we need for the 21st century: «Regarding education and learning, it means going beyond narrow utilitarianism and economism to integrate the multiple dimensions of human existence» (UNESCO, 2015, p. 11).

Great historical crises oblige mankind to reflect on the significance of what is done and the actions that must be taken for a better future. In the 20th century, the greatest crisis, caused by Nazism, led precisely to reflections which concluded with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights together with the introduction of civic education in a European country for the first time. It is no coincidence that this was first done in Germany; it was followed by many other countries in the next few years at different rates with diverse perspectives. Among the contributions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the conceptualization of education as a right. The achievement of this is indispensable for dignified human life and to reach the full development of the personality (Ibáñez-Martín, 2017).

Points 1 and 2 of Article 26 of said declaration draw attention to two questions of interest for our subject:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Everyone has the right to an education which shall permit the full development of their personality and contribute to the consolidation of human rights, freedom and peace. The conceptualization of this kind of education offers those of us who work to achieve it the target of assisting our pupils to live with full human dignity (Ibáñez-Martín, 2017). Morin (1999), in his book *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future*, published by UNESCO as a contribution to the international debate on how education should be directed, presents seven key principles which should be dealt with in any and every society and culture. Among these are: teaching the human condition, understanding each other, and teaching democracy. For Morin the human condition must be the essential object of all education, and must integrate into various disciplines not only its complexity (physical, biological, psychological, cultural, social, historical), but also its ethics, based on the fact that a person is simultaneously an individual and part of society. Although we may be far from achieving these objectives, they are not erroneous proposals. They are a call to responsibility and to a constant desire to achieve them.

Once developed societies have achieved the spread of schooling to virtually the entire population, we face the challenge of improving the quality of education (Fuentes and Albertos, 2017). The concept of quality education is relatively new in the pedagogical literature; however, since the 18th century improvements in education have occurred uninterruptedly, mainly due to the educational policies introduced and the pedagogical methods used. We can say that quality education means education with contents that respond appropriately to what the individual needs for his/her development as a physical, intellectual, affective and moral being so as to properly succeed in the multiple areas of society: the political, economic and social worlds. Unfortunately, there are more than a few historical examples showing the catastrophic consequences of giving precedence to one aspect of a person over others, causing grave personal and social imbalance. We see that,

with nuances, we must return to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the integral development of the individual including the social dimension.

We must hope, for the sake of improving quality, that educational research will offer elements of educational practice which will allow us to reach new horizons in human development. To do so we must overcome merely economic proposals and determine, firstly, what type of society we wish to foster, what characteristics it shall have, and, subsequently, which educational actions should be undertaken to facilitate its growth. Undoubtedly, a system of education will be high quality in as far as it contributes to social enhancement and the integral education of all its members.

Citizenship and character for an integral quality education

Learning to be a good citizen is a lifelong task and practical wisdom which not only demands intelligence to recognize which traits improve our life in society but also the will to practice them. The Delors Report (1996) proposed an integrated vision of education based on two key concepts, «learning throughout life» and the four pillars of education: learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. The report considers, as we have said, that holistic education is essential in the aim of education, which clearly means that quality education cannot be the result of achieving excellence in only one of these areas.

The Delors Report has inspired educational policy in many countries. However, the truth is that the global environment has undergone a major transformation since its publication. At an international level of education, one of the effects of globalization is the importance of the comparative reports between countries, such as PISA or TALIS, published by the OECD (López Rupérez, García and Expósito, 2019; Fernández Díaz, Rodríguez Mantilla and Martínez Zarzuelo, 2015). Everyone is aware of the limits of an assessment system based exclusively on linguistic, mathematical and scientific skills. Although the value of these skills is clear, considering them exclusively shows a reductive view of education (Fuentes and Albertos, 2017). Another of the current circumstances, directly linked to the former, is that it is ever more necessary to accommodate the contributions and demands of the three regulators of social behavior: society, the state and the market.

In the last few years, we have also seen a growing concern in Western democracies regarding the lack of citizens' civic commitment. This is evident, amongst other examples, in a low level of social participation and a dearth of interest in formal politics (Forbrig, 2005; Fraile, Ferrer and Martín, 2007; Duke, 2008; Print and Milner, 2009). In many countries there is concern about the impact of social questions regarding participation in politics, national identity and democratic

citizenship (Crick, 2004; Stoker, 2006). Thus, there has been a return to the civic dimensional of education in an attempt to find a solution to the social problems.

In this context, there has recently been noteworthy growth in proposals addressing the moral dimension of education, which, in short, means recognizing the shortfalls of an exclusively instructivist perspective. In many countries the systems of education have been reformed, opting for the inclusion of civics amongst their objectives. In the practice of education, we see the need to promote not only knowledge and skills in students, but also learning to live together and to be. This means inspiring the formation of good citizens, with firm social and personal virtues and with enough initiative to commit themselves to the demands of their social environment. It goes beyond the framework of one subject, therefore civic education must be strategized within a comprehensive education which covers the intellectual, social, affective, aesthetic and moral aspects of the human being (Naval and Arbués, 2008). It is crucial to assist pupils to become people who can live in society and not merely to transmit knowledge (Peters, 1982).

This is no simple task considering, as pointed out by Deneen in his book *Why liberalism failed* (2018), the problems of the liberal democracies and the disillusionment felt about this system. The author proposes the development of lifestyles which renew the culture from top to bottom: this begins at home with children, and develops in and through family communities and associations. This cultural transmission demands awareness and reflection so as not to uncritically accept the dominant mentality. It also encourages rediscovery of local political ways, which lead to greater self-government for communities, as the local environment is precisely where people with different views of the world can more easily learn to join together and to work hand-in-hand to resolve common problems. Deneen believes that the experience and practice of these communities will, with time, lead to a better theory of politics and society. A theory of politics and society based on an innate capacity for connection and socialization, and a learned capacity to sacrifice oneself for others.

In addition to family and local associations, the system of education can also motivate this civic culture. On this point, for over a decade the European Union has indicated that an objective of the systems of education should be to ensure that the school community promotes the learning of democratic values and participation in order to prepare people for active citizenship (European Commission, 2005a). And it points out that, as schools are in a privileged position regarding socialization, there should be analysis of how the educational policies in different countries foster responsible citizenship through their systems of education (European Commission, 2005b). In this way, European governments have tried, with more or less commitment, to apply the recommendations of the European Commission, and have undertaken reforms in order to educate youth in democratic citizenship (Naval, Print and Veldhuis, 2002). But although there

is agreement on the introduction of this aspect of education in classrooms, there is still no unanimity on its position in the curriculum (Kristjánsson, 2015). Both specific civics courses and cross-curricular approaches which in theory involve the whole school have pros and cons (McCowan, 2009). Whatever the case, the influence of schools and universities must be acknowledged as the appropriate spaces to foster a more just society and the moral, civic and political commitment of citizens (Hansen, 1998).

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) recognizes the need to carry out continuing international research to apply evidence regarding questions of civic education and citizenship. Since 1971, it has been studying this area, and among its most outstanding research are the *Civic Education Study* (1999) and the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* (2009), the results of which showed that pupils between the ages of 13 and 14 tend to have little inclination to being involved in conventional forms of political or civic participation. Consequently, the 2016 ICCS places greater emphasis on points which are of more interest to young people and their potential commitment and so has included three new areas: environmental sustainability, social interaction in the school and the use of social networks for civic participation. The objective of this study is to set out what preparation is needed for young people to assume their roles as 21st century citizens, considering their level of learning on civic issues and their commitment and attitude regarding social issues. 24 countries participated in the most recent addition: 16 from Europe, 5 from Latin America and 3 from Asia (Schulz et al., 2016).

The conclusions state that, for example, 93% of the European students agree that migrant children should have the same educational opportunities as other children. 88% believe that migrants should have the same rights as those enjoyed by the citizens of the country. And 94% of the students consider that men and women should have absolutely the same rights. Civic knowledge, attitudes and commitment have, in general, increased since the first phase of the international study was carried out in 2009.

Another of the highlighted conclusions is that, in 20 countries, the existence of an open climate in classrooms for the debate of political issues is a good indication of the civic knowledge and commitment of the students. To make this possible, the teachers must have knowledge of civic and citizenship issues and be able to promote an inclusive and familiar atmosphere that responds to the multiple needs of the students. Thus, teachers are an essential element for the satisfactory implementation of civic and citizenship education, and so teacher training is a prime area for the analysis and understanding of civic principles and the most effective diffusion strategies.

The results look promising. There is no doubt that the efforts made will have a positive result on citizen education. The hard work is carried out in the prac-

tice of education with the encouragement of the theory. We could, broadly and possibly too simply, say that in the western world over the last 40 years, we have witnessed two major changes in the theory of education. The first, as we have said, began in the 1980s and the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the weakening and disappearance of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. These events, together with other political, cultural and social circumstances — individualism, loss of social links, etc. — led to reconsideration of the need to underline the social elements of education, to re-claim the civic dimension of human life and of education. At that time there were also voices suggesting the need to underline other aesthetic, humanistic and ethical dimensions of education, but in the search for social consensus there seemed to be a greater basis for agreement focusing on the civic-social coordinates, not the ethical-moral ones, and so it was decided (Naval, Fuentes and Quintanilla, 2017).

However, some years later, from the early 21st century and in parallel with citizen reemergence and citizenship education, we find some approaches to education which impact on its indispensable ethical aspect if we do not wish citizenship education to be a tyrannical instrument. This is what some authors have called the *ethical shift in educational action* (Ibáñez-Martín, 2017). Within this framework ethics and moral education must have a place in the practice of education if we wish to inspire social responsibility.

Character education is a way of understanding and identifying moral education. It aims to reaffirm the inescapable ethical dimension of education, which appears to have been neglected in contemporary education. We cannot say that this is an inoperative proposal as it has its origins in classical Greece. However, during the second half of the 20th century the preeminence of Kohlberg's cognitivist approach left character education in the background. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the ethics of virtue received a great boost and became the basis for a good deal of contemporary character education (Fuentes and López, 2018).

Although in some cases *civic education* and *character education* have been taken as synonyms (Berkowitz and Bustamante, 2013) due to the elements they have in common, the truth is they deal with different questions (Davies, Gorard and McGuinn, 2005); it might be said that the latter is in essence more general than the former (Fuentes and Albertos, 2017) and may even include it. Aristotle emphasized the harmony between the two, when he suggested that civic education was a continuation of character education (Bernal and Naval, 2001). It seems advisable that, as part of civics, schooling should be taken as an opportunity to educate in the virtues in order to form students' good character.

In this situation we find that, for example, in the United States civics is considered part of character education (Ruby and Doolittle, 2010); in the United Kingdom governmental policies seek to form young people's characters mainly through citizenship education (Arthur, 2010), and there has been an important

change from the citizenship education of the 1998 Crick Report, to the new education inspection framework promoted in 2019 by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), in which the school initiatives for the character education of their students are a fundamental pillar for the positive of assessment of the centers. In one way or another, it is undeniable that educating good citizens means, in short, offering them a good moral structure and contributes to good character formation.

Having said that, we can now ask ourselves what skills nourish character. For Lickona (2000), character is a set of habits in the mind, the heart and conduct. He states that good character means knowing what is good, loving what is good and doing what is good. From this concept stems the consideration of character education as a deliberate effort to teach virtues, which means helping people to understand, care and act in accordance with a set of ethical values, the most important of which are justice, equality, respect for all and democratic life (Bernal, González-Torres and Naval, 2015). As Lickona points out, it is «the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue in its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. It does so intentionally through every phase of school life» (2000, p. 146).

In this sense the role of the educator, according to Vilchez (2016), lies in assisting the students to develop their personality and integrate into the community to which they belong, and in a broader sense, into society and the world. That is to say, it includes learning the moral principles regarding civic conduct and responsibilities. We are referring to education in social virtues, taken as those virtues which not only make the student a better person but also play an enabling role in the service of others, in the service of society (Isaacs, 2000). It could be said that they contribute to the common good. There is no doubt, but that character education prepares students for participation in a society which expects them to be independent and to be involved in social improvement (Shepard Salls, 2007).

We cannot ignore the fact that character education has traditionally been associated with conservative pedagogical proposals (Kristjánsson, 2016; Suissa, 2015), particularly in the US area, but also in other areas like Spain, where central concepts of character education such as virtue have, since the late 1970s, been viewed with a certain amount of distrust, leading to the substitution of the term *virtue* for others such as, for example, *courage* (Esteve, 1979).

It seems advisable to overcome this ideological antagonism, which reduces the effectiveness of the mission of any system of education, if we truly wish to improve the quality of education. To do so, we must work within a broader and more integrating paradigm in educational practice. Indeed, it is incoherent for educators to demand a more stable, consensual and cross-curricular educational policy from governments, if our practices continue to show ideological bias and sectarian positions. This means a paradigm for community education, in which personal development cannot be disconnected from social progress (Naval and

Arbués, 2017). In this sense we must consider how to better prepare young people for the challenges to which they must respond, how to make the most of the advantages of the shrinking distances in the contemporary world, and how to avoid the negative dimensions of the new scenarios of humanity (Ibáñez-Martín, 2017). Without a doubt this is a call for dialogue among those of us who have a commitment to teaching so as to bring about a humanist vision of education based on human dignity, equal rights, social justice, respect for cultural diversity, international solidarity and shared responsibility.

The potential of Service-Learning in fostering character virtues

Innovation in this or any other field means the introduction of practices which imply quality improvement. Character education pedagogical practices based on the theoretical area are needed, with space for the development of ethical action. The teaching staff at all educational levels should seek new ways of designing their subjects so that, apart from learning specific contents, the students can develop civic-social values and incorporate skill-based learning (Naval and Arbués, 2017). It is not by chance that character education has grown so much in importance over the last few years, especially in the English-speaking world, in parallel with an increase in Service-Learning methodology. Service-Learning had its origins in the United States (Naval, 2008), from where it is spread to Latin America firstly and, later, to Europe. However, the connections between Service-Learning and education do not yet seem to be completely clear but are two realities which frequently coexist in parallel nowadays, with several elements in common.

Therefore, it is advisable to analyze what kind of virtues are promoted by Service-Learning and to what extent these virtues strengthen the student character. Although the production of research on Service-Learning has greatly increased over the last few years, there are few studies focusing on its ethical dimension (Opazo, Ramírez, García-Peinado and Lorite, 2015). This is not a simple task and, as will be outlined below, it implies multiple challenges which must be tackled. Despite this, a review of the current bibliography on the subject allows us to identify at least two general categories of virtues in Service-Learning. On the one hand, those which form the basis of the methodology itself. They stem from its essential characteristics and are shared by most Service-Learning projects. These could be called the *essential virtues of S-L*. On the other, considering the great variety of actions in subjects on which Service-Learning is based, we can also set out a second category of virtues that could be defined as the *specific virtues of S-L*.

To build a preliminary picture of the *essential virtues of S-L* we can resort to its most elementary definition. So, in this category we find another two subca-

tegies in which the virtues may be placed; these correspond to *Learning* and *Service*. Table 1 shows some proposals for virtues linked to the subcategories:

Table 1

Essential virtues of S-L

Linked to <i>Learning</i>	Linked to <i>Service</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Global vision of reality ● Critical and reflective thinking ● Knowledge of democratic principles and processes ● Responsibility ● Teamwork ● Team spirit (Friendship) ● Perseverance ● Curiosity ● Autonomy ● Awareness of interdependence ● Desire to overcome and improve ● Work systematization and organization ● Digital competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social justice ● Civic participation ● Solidarity ● Generosity ● Care ● Empathy ● Resilience ● Sense of belonging to the community ● Socialization ● Prudence in decision-making

Obviously, as Service-Learning is distinguished precisely by the connection between both subcategories and their relational dimension, the virtues fostered in the subcategories are not totally limited to moments of learning or service but are addressed and strengthened in both cases. Nevertheless, there is a certain tendency to work more on some virtues in the classroom, on preceding tasks of need analysis, on research into the media and local news, on organizing work teams, etc., and to work more on other values in the space for the services carried out, when in direct contact with the media, people, etc. In addition, we must say that the time sequence is not unidirectional or fixed but can work in both directions in a dynamic way, as occurs in the processes of research-action. For example, critical thinking or responsibility are not exclusively developed in the classroom, where the motivation is created to collaborate with other people outside the center to attend to their needs. We can, in fact, better understand social problems, their causes and our responsibility towards them as citizens, when we fully confront their reality and dialogue with the people affected, by sharing their concerns, hopes and desires.

Secondly, the existence of multiple experiences of S-L projects implies that the *specific virtues* linked to this methodology are very varied, therefore it would be an almost impossible task to include them all here. To mention some of the most habitual ones, we will here classify them into the four types of S-L projects

which can be identified, in accordance with the Puig, Battle, Bosh and Palos (2007) criterion for order depending on the type of service carried out:

Table 2

Specific virtues of S-L

Environmental improvement	Caring for people	Improvement of the general quality of life	Far-reaching solidarity and humanitarian causes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental awareness • Responsible consumption • Recycling • Cleaning up the environment • Energy-saving • Healthy habits • Respect for the environment • Intergenerational responsibility • Care for local communities • Lifestyle coherence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral sensitivity • Attention to diversity • Inclusion • Respect for human dignity • Intergenerational support • Empathy • Solidarity • Care • Cooperation with others • Interculturality • Social justice • Humility • Emotional self-control • Kindness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artistic sensibility • Happiness • Optimism • Coexistence • Tolerance • Commitment • Healthy leisure habits • Resistant to frustration • Belonging to the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global citizenship • Courage • Social responsibility • Activism • Critical citizenship • Digital competence • The sociopolitical commitment

It is not a question of making a strict list of virtues, or a closed bag which educators must accept uncritically, as Kohlberg warned, because, in fact, this list will always be incomplete due both to the appearance of new values for new problems and social situations, and because of the creativity of teachers whose innovative proposals give rise to new ways of educating within the multiple possibilities offered by Service-Learning. In addition, not all the virtues gathered here, together with others which could be added, are necessarily shared by everyone. However, identifying the different formation possibilities offered by Service-Learning in an open and flexible way may be of great assistance for a center of learning at whatever level which proposes to develop projects of this type and wishes to make a responsible and coherent decision on the type of action to be carried out. In order to do so, the center must consider many predefined variables such as the school curriculum, social needs, the maturity and interests of the students who will be involved in the project or the frame of mind of the teaching staff

involved, but also other relevant variables on the orientation of the training to be offered to the students, which will, to a great extent, be conditioned by the virtues from which this stems.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the transversity which is proper to Service-Learning projects also implies transversity in the promoted virtues, which is why some virtues may be found in different categories and subcategories, although — like all virtues — they may be defined in a different way. Moreover, a third table referring to the virtues which might be promoted in each subject may be added to the two tables described. Although there is no space to develop this here, we might include, for example, logical-deductive thinking as an intellectual character value in mathematics, and this might also be included in subjects linked to the study of history and the time sequences of events. Here we may also find others such as historical responsibility and intergenerational relationships, among others. In physical education we would clearly find virtues linked to the promotion of healthy habits and care for physical health, while in more artistic disciplines it is a relatively simple to develop sociocultural actions that show ways to improve the quality of life of the general population or of specific collectives.

To sum up, focusing on the virtues within Service-Learning brings us closer to one of its fundamental pillars and simultaneously shows its connections with some contemporary civic-moral proposals such as character education, which emphasizes the all-inclusive dimension inherent in all educational initiatives.

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