

## Innovar en la docencia universitaria: una experiencia de aps en la facultad de educación de Zaragoza

*Innovating in university teaching: An experience of APS in Zaragoza Faculty of  
Education*

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### Resumen

Dentro del plan de estudio de Magisterio de la Especialidad de Educación Física y de la Especialidad de Educación Musical de la Universidad de Zaragoza, se imparte una asignatura denominada Bases Pedagógicas de la Educación Especial, la cual, resulta, inicialmente, bastante desmotivante para los alumnos de dicha especialidad. Esto se debe en gran medida a las creencias erróneas, a la percepción por parte de los mismos de una desvinculación profesional con el área de la educación especial y a la desinformación al respecto. Cuando realmente la labor del profesor de educación física y de educación musical en un colegio es fundamental en muchos sentidos, por ejemplo, en lo que respecta a la socialización, a la salud, a la comunicación, a la catarsis, a los aspectos lúdicos, a las

capacidades motrices básicas<sup>1</sup>, en definitiva, son áreas que contribuyen a la autonomía tan necesaria, desea y buscada de las personas con discapacidad.

Partiendo de esta coyuntura, la idea fundamental era innovar, creando vínculos entre teoría y práctica pero desde la aplicabilidad de los contenidos y satisfacción de las necesidades comunitarias. En definitiva, se trataba de mejorar la calidad del aprendizaje. Así, decidimos asumir como enfoque pedagógico: el aprendizaje –servicio, y poner en marcha dos proyectos: “si tu aprendes, yo aprendo” y, “aprender siendo, aprender haciendo”.

**Palabras clave:** magisterio, asignatura obligatoria, metodología, aprendizaje-servicio (ApS), proyecto.

### Abstract

Within the curriculum of the Specialty Teaching Physical Education and Music Education from the University of Zaragoza, is taught a course called Educational Basis of Special Education, which, it is initially quite demotivating for students of this specialty. This is due largely to the erroneous beliefs, the perception of the same in a professional detachment with the area of special education and misinformation about it. When really the work of the physical education teacher and music education in a school is essential in many ways, for example in regard to socialization, health, communication, catharsis, to play activities, básicas<sup>1</sup> to motor skills, in short, are areas that contribute to the need for autonomy, desires and sought for people with disabilities. From this juncture, the main idea was to innovate, creating links between theory and practice but since the applicability of content and meeting community needs. In short, it was improving the quality of learning. So, we decided to take as a pedagogical approach: service-learning, and implementing two projects: "If you learn, I learn" and "learning to be, learning by doing".

**Key words:** teaching, compulsory subject, methodology, service-learning (ApS), project.

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<sup>1</sup> Con capacidades motrices básicas nos estamos refiriendo a condicionales y coordinativas, relacionales, perceptivo-motriz, cognitivo-motriz del alumno.

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## Introduction

Teaching innovation constitutes a process of constant renewal, cognitive flexibility and creativity, essentially when considering the development of a subject. As a teaching team we are sensitive to this premise and we try to bring it to our classrooms. Our last innovative experience carried out in the academic year (2010-2011) takes the form of an ApS experience in the Faculty of Education of Zaragoza (Spain) of which we are teachers, and which we have thought interesting to share.

The subject Pedagogical Bases of Education is a subject that is taught in the second quarter of the second year of the teaching diploma in all specialties, with a mandatory character composed of 4 credits. It had been detected in previous courses, that in the specialties of music education and physical education, the students felt the content of the same distant from their professional future, considering that music or physical education had little to do with special education, something quite far from reality, since these two areas are priorities in integration. As a result of this scenario and, on the other hand, the need of certain special education centers in Zaragoza to obtain specific materials and resources, it has been decided to innovate by approaching the subject from the vision of service-learning. We have opted for this methodology because different international research on service-learning has revealed positive impacts in six areas: academic and cognitive development, civic development, vocational and professional development, ethical and moral development, personal development and social development, as Furco ( 2003). In addition, this methodology manages to significantly increase the levels of retention and application of the contents of the courses that apply it versus those that do not (Astin, Alexander, et al; 2000).

Succinctly, the fundamental objectives pursued were to contribute to the comprehensive training of students. Likewise, connecting theory and practice, bringing students closer to reality and involving them in its needs. At the same time to increase the motivation and involvement of university students.

To do this, we propose two projects: "if you learn, I learn" for the specialty of physical education and "learn by being, learn by doing" for the specialty of music education. We contacted and proposed the projects to two specific Special Education schools, belonging to the public network, located in Zaragoza capital. Both reaffirmed the deficit of adapted materials in the area of special education in relation to both specialties.

### **What is Service-Learning?**

Service-learning consists of an educational proposal that combines learning and community service processes in a single well-articulated project, where participants learn by working on real needs of the environment in order to improve it. Learning brings quality to the service and the service brings meaning and application to learning (Nieves Tapia, 2008). It is a way of understanding three concepts: citizenship, learning and education in values. Citizenship, based on active participation and contribution to improving the quality of life of society. Learning, based on exploration, action, reflection and social responsibility. And the education in values justified in the experience, in the experience and in the construction of habits. In the words of Tapia (2000):

*"It is a teaching and learning methodology through which young people develop their knowledge and skills through a practice of community service"*

With the service-learning approach, the four pillars of education for the 21st century are reinforced:

- Learn to know
- To learn to do
- Learn to be
- To learn to live together

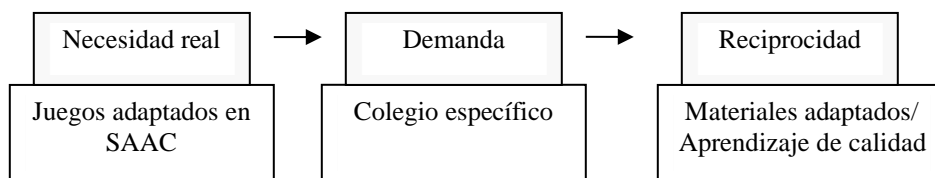
Likewise, service-learning projects allow the development of curricular content, that is, academic learning, but also in a clearer and simpler way than what happens with other methodologies, it facilitates the practice of planning, effort, responsibility, commitment to

solidarity... an endless number of values that would otherwise be difficult to approach from a subject; at the same time, it activates the exercise of all the competences of the curriculum, with emphasis on initiative and personal autonomy and social and civic competence.

### **The service-learning project: a new approach to the subject**

Service-learning should not be confused with fieldwork. The main difference that we find between the two is that, while fieldwork has as its primary objective the learning that it provides, service-learning has as its objective, together with the previous one, the service to the community that it reports. This service to the community must be based on the detection of a real need in the environment, in this specific case, we find two needs. On the one hand, the need for materials from the area of Physical Education applied to special education, specifically games adapted and translated into SAAC. And the need to create materials from the Music Education area to work with people with hearing disabilities. This situation was evident, fundamentally, due to the non-existence of materials –since the materials have to respond to the needs of the group, individual and disability, they have to be created- and due to the demand made by the schools for this type of material.

To carry out SL, networking with community associations and institutions is required. But in addition, it is inspired by a sense of reciprocity, not paternalism or segregation. That is to say, the reward is mutual, on the one hand, the materials adapted by the are made available to the center and even more so to the entire community thanks to new technologies – the creation of a web page<sup>2</sup> where all the materials produced are posted. And on the other hand, the benefit it brings to the students in a fourfold sense: a) development of strategies and professional skills that until now were totally unknown and demotivating for the group; b) obtain contact with a reality that otherwise would be impossible for them until the moment of their labor incorporation; c) carry out a more significant learning, more motivating and with an applicative sense –utility- and; d) development of values of solidarity and altruism.



Furco (2004) emphasizes that the programmatic features must be well defined, especially with regard to student protagonism -a service led by students-, effective service -meeting, in a limited and effective way, real and effectively felt needs of a community -and curricular integration -planning based on student learning-. A quality service-learning project is explicitly and plannedly oriented towards offering an effective supportive service and improving student learning. Taking into account how fundamental programming is for the project, we systematized the process in various phases that are presented below and that have allowed us to operationalize it:

- Phase 1. Teacher preparation.
- Phase 2. Planning with the group.
- Phase 3. Execution.
- Phase 4. Group evaluation.
- Phase 5. Teacher evaluation.

In this way, we started working on two projects. We contacted and proposed the projects to two specific Special Education schools, belonging to the public network, located in Zaragoza capital. And we started working together. The projects that were forged were the following

On the one hand, **“If you learn, I learn”**. To carry out the project, aimed at the group that was studying physical education, we worked with the Alborada Special Education College. This center highlighted the lack of Physical Education materials applied to special education translated into SAAC, and the project focused on this. The students had to

create materials through ARASAAC, specifically adapted games translated into SAAC for students with multiple disabilities.

Secondly, **“Learn by being, learn by doing”**. This project aimed at the group that was studying the specialty of musical education, was carried out in collaboration with the La Purísima School for the deaf. In this project, the creation and elaboration of materials in the music area aimed at people with hearing disabilities is proposed. The materials should be aimed at infant, primary and secondary school students, and should be based on the verbotonal methodology, with which the school works.

The fundamental steps that were carried out in both projects and that define them, are specified in:

- Detection of needs. Dialogue between the center and the teacher, where a demand arises in the face of a real need. A series of agreements and a link -work commitment- are reached.
- General planning of the project (improvement of the initial project).
- Search for institutional support (for spaces, materials, approval...)
- Information session by the teacher in charge of the subject about the project to the students. The project is proposed as a compulsory part for those students who are inclined towards continuous evaluation, and its weight in the final grade (35%) is specified.
- Session whose objective is to engage the students, that is, to motivate them. The physical education and music education teachers of the specific center approach the Faculty, the corresponding group and tell their experience to the students. What is intended is to make students see the connection between both areas. The objective is to increase the motivation and involvement of students in the teaching-learning process -make them protagonists, active-.

-Training session on the work methodology. Once again, they go from the specific center to the Faculty, specifically, in the case of the Alborada school, the head of studies, to give a training session on ARASAAC, a basic work tool. And in the case of the La Purísima school, two teachers, tutors of infant and primary, and secondary, are in charge in a theoretical session of exposing the verbotonal methodology on which they base their work.

-The work that each group of students must carry out in the practical sessions is organized and planned (chronogram, methodology, script, tutoring...). Groups are organized: the number of members per group is three people. Each group makes its work proposal and work begins. But, we must point out that in the case of the project "learn by being, learn by doing", the proposal was made after the visit to the La Purisima school.

-Two/three sessions are intended to bring the students closer to the real context, that is, to the school. In this way, and counting on a great availability of the centers, the students move together with the teacher in charge of the subject to the center in groups of around 25 people.

In the case of the physical education group, the students visited the center for two hours – one day half of the group and another day the rest-, of which, more than half, were spent actively collaborating in a class of physical education with people with multiple disabilities. We were very lucky that the Alborada school's teacher of this specialty prepares a session for the students and then teaches them materials. This was very motivating and enriching for them.

For its part, the music education group traveled to the La Purisima school for three days - groups of approximately 25 people-, where they accommodated us as observers in a session for infants, another for primary and another for secondary school. The opening of the center was extraordinary, there are no words for it.



The objectives of these sessions, essentially, are to raise awareness, reaffirm commitment and make them aware of the impact that their work will have. In short, it is about giving them a new dose of motivation.

-Systematized and tutored work two hours a week for 5 weeks. Where a tablet pc is made available to each group. Likewise, small temporary spaces are allocated within the work sessions for self-regulation, where reflection is made on the learning and the work carried out. In addition, to be in continuous contact via email school, students and teachers in charge of the subject.

Finally, we must not forget that without the collaboration and great reception that the schools have given, these projects could not have gone ahead.

### **Project evaluation**

The last phases of the project, which are those dedicated to evaluation, seem fundamental to us, since as it is our first experience of a service-learning project, it is necessary to carry out a good and complete evaluation to, ultimately, decide what to do in the course. Next. It has been especially complicated for us to approach this evaluation so that it would be consistent with the type of education that it is intended to promote. This difficulty is not ours alone, since the Service-Learning Meeting at the University held in Barcelona in June 2010 already reflected the existence of different visions on how to evaluate SL projects at the University and the need to reflect on the relationship between the type of learning that is sought and the evaluation that is carried out.

The main results achieved are summarized in

- Highly motivated and involved students.
- High and continuous attendance.
- Greater transferability of knowledge (verified in the works).

- Increased reflection and inquiry.
- First labor orientation.
- High number of approved.

In addition, we have found two other very interesting evaluation indicators. On the one hand, it is in the interest of the centers to continue working along these lines, and therefore to establish new relationships and create new projects. And on the other, the very positive student-teacher feedback -messages of thanks for being part of this experience-, where projects of this nature are demanded by university students.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, SL as indicated by Furco (2004) is explicitly and plannedly oriented towards offering an effective supportive service and improving student learning. Therefore, we must work in this direction, since the reward is mutual, on the one hand, the materials created are made available to the center and even more so to the entire community thanks to new technologies. And on the other hand, the benefit it brings to students in a fourfold sense:

- a) development of strategies and professional skills that until now were distant, unknown and therefore not very motivating for the group;
- b) obtain contact with a reality that otherwise would be impossible for them until the moment of their labor incorporation –a first labor orientation-;
- c) carry out a more significant learning, more motivating and with an applicative sense – utility- and;
- d) develop values of solidarity and altruism.

Therefore, the approach that the subject took based on ApS, was very stimulating and enriching for the students and beyond for society, since it ultimately contributes to their comprehensive training.

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