

Mentoring and Service Learning in the University: An Experience Organised by the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Barcelona

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Abstract We present in this article the documentation and analysis of a Service Learning (SL) experience conducted in the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Barcelona and entitled *Els amics i amigues de la lectura [Reading Friends]*. This is a training proposal in which first-year students on the pedagogy, social education, social work, and early childhood and primary education bachelor's degree courses help the city's children and adolescents to enjoy reading and improve their reading skills. The project sets out to achieve two essential goals. The first, to offer a response to a need which is crucial to pupils' academic and personal success: raising their levels of reading competence. The second, to contribute to the improvement in university students' initial training, offering a challenge which enables them to link theoretical knowledge and practical experience, develop basic professional skills and exercise social responsibility and civic engagement, while at the same time building an affective relationship with the pupils involved, with all that this represents. The article consists of five basic sections. In the first two we set out a brief overview of service learning and of the project itself, addressing some of the fundamental questions regarding its history and evolution. An overall vision of the experience architecture is presented in the third point, with a description of how its main phases develop. We go on to focus on analysis of one of the project's key issues: the pedagogical relationship established between students and pupils. We close the article by offering a number of final conclusions, together with the consulted bibliography.

Keywords: *mentoring, service learning, values education, peer assistance, teaching innovation*

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1. Introduction: Service Learning as the Methodological Basis of the Project

We are, without doubt, living in an era marked by change and uncertainty. In recent times, certain political and economic events coupled with advances and discoveries in the fields of science and technology have had great influence on our lives. In relation to the subject in hand, namely *how the initial training of future education professionals should be approached*, we would highlight as the most significant variations the new ways of relating, communicating, learning and, ultimately, of finding, understanding, behaving in and occupying a place in the world. All of which is occurring in a context of a painful and paradoxical reality which drives us and makes us question our role both as citizens and as persons. We see more information, progress, and scientific and technological development but, however, increasingly greater inequalities and emerging primary needs, at the human, social and environmental levels.

In the light of this complex panorama, with our study centred in the bachelor's degrees offered in the UB

faculties of Pedagogy and Teacher Training and considering that the university cannot simply ignore the demands and circumstances of the day, a few basic questions arise. *What methodological proposals are most appropriate to produce education professionals with the relevant theoretical and practical skills to address the new social and educational challenges? Given the current context, how can we strengthen students' awareness of reality and a real and active commitment with it? How can we promote skill-based learning and help pupils become the true centre of attention and principal agents of the education process?* Questions that lead us to rethink some of today's common teaching practices – and even the university model to which the current trend seems to be pointing – in seeking and applying updated methodologies in keeping with current requirements.

We need new methods, resources and strategies that will enable us all – teachers, students and the wider community – to conduct a critical analysis of the reality and existing needs, by generating true spaces of cooperation, participation, transformation and exchange. Spaces that offer coherent interventions, that make change possible and foster environmental improvements. Practices that facilitate the link between real experience

and the theoretical knowledge developed and contents provided to students in the university. Such opening-up and coordination would benefit students' meaningful learning, acquisition of basic skills and active participation, while advancing the civic engagement and exercise of social responsibility on the part of the university and its stakeholders. Without being a final solution, in these difficult times the service learning (SL) methodology appears to be a powerful and extremely pragmatic educational proposal in the preparation of university students.

When we speak of service learning [1] we refer to "an educational activity that combines learning processes and service to the community in one, well-structured project in which participants learn by working on the real needs in society, with the aim of improving that society [2]". SL becomes a reality in socially useful educational projects which bring together educational intentionality and the intentionality of exercising solidarity. This combination enables learning to improve service – what is learned can be transferred to reality in the form of action – and allows students to participate in offering a quality service to the community. Moreover, the service is directly beneficial to others, lending sense to the learning by making it relevant and allowing for new questions and new knowledge. In short, it could be said that SL presents a multiple educational and transformational impact: improvements can be observed in the students who take part, the quality of services provided and the well-being of their recipients, as well as in the climate of the educational institutions. Finally, service learning also contributes to strengthening social fabric and human capital [3].

Following this line of work and with the aim of helping develop a university education which offers knowledge, skills and values to its students while representing the development and exercise of active, responsible and committed citizenship, we present the *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* [4]¹ project. An educational proposal which offers students the chance to participate in an experience that combines processes of reflection, learning and service to the community, with a clear educational and transformational spirit. A complex educational practice but one which is open and flexible, and which encompasses two fundamental components, the civic and the educational, in one sole coherent activity. With all the benefits that, as we shall see, are inherent in this combination.

2. Contextualisation: History and Evolution of the Project

Before presenting the process and analysis of the *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* programme, this first section will briefly outline its history. The forerunner to the experience was a project entitled *Una altra lectura* [Another Reading] [5], an initiative carried out over four consecutive years within the compulsory subject *Contemporary Theories and Institutions in Education* and which involved the participation of students on the Teacher in Primary Education course of the UB Faculty of Teacher Training. Through networking with the *Adsis*

Foundation operating in the Carmel district of Barcelona a fundamental need was detected: to encourage primary school pupils to read with a view to consolidating the reading habit and improving the development and acquisition of reading skills. The Foundation helped establish a collaboration project with a local school and throughout the 2006-2007 academic year students from the faculty attended the centre once a week to work on reading mechanics and comprehension with third- and fourth-year² pupils. The experience was integrated into the subject by means of classes in the faculty and its assessment was made through autobiographical writing exercises and the drafting of reports.

The initiative proved highly positive for both parties. The students had an opportunity to access reality with the intention of improving it, to obtain significant practical experience and to acquire knowledge linked to the theory and development of essential professional skills and competences. The school pupils benefitted from an hour a week of intensive reading with the aid and support of an extremely close and positive educational reference. Given the excellent results, the 2007-2008 year was the initiation of the *Els amics i amigues de la lectura*, closely connected and in parallel to *Una altra lectura*. A project which also set out to contribute to improving young people's reading skills, but with students from the Faculty of Pedagogy and pupils at secondary education schools participating in the *Programa Èxit* [Success Programme] organised by the Barcelona Education Consortium.

The *Èxit* project is a space aimed at school reinforcement outside class hours with pupils of the upper cycle of primary³ and the first cycle of secondary⁴ education who showed certain learning difficulties. Thanks to the support and continued monitoring they received, these pupils are able to improve their academic level while at the same time learning fundamental strategies and acquiring resources related to organising work, planning and essential study habits. Those responsible for this mentoring are the *Big Friends*, former pupils of the schools who become their younger schoolmates' tutors, helping them to do homework and to study. The project is currently being implemented in a total of 34 schools in the city of Barcelona, with the participation of some 1450 pupils. Each school has a team made up of *Big Friends* together with the coordinator from the institution, under the supervision of the zone contact person in charge of coordinating the different work groups.

The *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* project [6] was initiated sharing this essential goal of raising levels of educational attainment and involving students from the Faculty of Pedagogy in some of the centres where the *Programa Èxit* was being implemented. These students focussed their attention on reading comprehension, with the aim of increasing pupils' academic results by improving this basic skill. In the following section we present relevant data to give an overall idea of how the project unfolded.

² In the Spanish education system, third- and fourth-year primary school pupils are 8 and 9 years old, respectively.

³ In the Spanish education system, upper-primary school pupils are from 10 to 12 years of age.

⁴ In the Spanish education system, first-cycle secondary school pupils are from 12 to 14 years of age.

¹ In addition to the author, Josep Puig, Xus Mart í, Mariona Graell, Mireia P áez and F áima Avil é also took part in the experience, offering valuable assistance, suggestions and opinions.

The *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* experience has been running for seven years and although the basics of the project have remained stable, enabling it to become consolidated and acquire its current format, certain necessary modifications have been made during the successive applications to adapt and improve it. The most

significant changes respond to two key questions: the number of participants and centres, and the placement of the activity in the faculty. The following table summarises the former, also specifying volunteer students' previous studies and placement of the activity in the curriculum.

Table 1. Data showing evolution of the project

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Previous studies	Pedagogy	Pedagogy	Pedagogy	Pedagogy Social education Social Work	Pedagogy Social education Social Work	Pedagogy Social education Social Work Early childhood and primary education	Pedagogy Social education Social Work Early childhood and primary education
Placement of the activity	Subject of Theory of Education	Subject of Theory of Education	Subject of Theory of Education	Cross-curricular SL Programme	Cross-curricular SL Programme	Cross-curricular SL Programme	Cross-curricular SL Programme
Participating students	34	31	37	44	37	76	87
Schools involved	8	8	9	10	7	26	25

As can be seen, placement of the proposal in the faculty curricula has been subject to various formulas. Initially, in Pedagogy, it was included in the subject of *Theory of Education*. Subsequently and also included in the same subject within the bachelor's degree it was offered as an activity eligible for free-elective credits. In both cases assessment was based on the student's attendance record and the preparation of a report or reflective journal. The project has now become an institutional initiative. Thus through the *Service Learning Office*⁵ which forms part of the cross-curricular SL programme, the Faculties of Pedagogy and Teacher Training make the experience available to all first-year students. An activity which earns six credits and can be taken up by all teachers of first-year subjects.

With regard to participants and as Table 1 shows, over the years the number of pupils and schools involved in the Project has steadily increased. In the first year the quantity of places offered in centres was determined by the number of students. For reasons related to organisation and infrastructure and in order to ensure quality monitoring and service, the SL Office coordination team subsequently assumed the task of offering a limited number of places.

3. Main Phases of the Project

In this section we present a brief description of the five main elements that make up the *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* proposal: 1) dissemination, activity offering and distribution of the students; 2) initial session and

presentation of the teams; 3) student intervention; 4) mentoring and monitoring; 5) assessment and closure. These elements form a set of interrelated phases from which we present some of the most notable and significant details with regard to implementation of the experience.

Dissemination, activity offering and distribution of the students. This first phase is conducted at the beginning of the university year, which is when the SL Office circulates information on the proposal to the faculty's first-year students. A number of basic questions related to the project are explained to each group in the lecture room: its aims, purpose and methodology, the tasks to be carried out and the assessment system. Although participation in the project is voluntary, the need for commitment on the part of the students throughout the entire year is underlined in order to ensure pupils' progress and to strengthen the affective bond established with them. During presentation of the programme students are also informed that the activity earns six ECTS credits within the University Institutional Activities Recognition by Grade system.

After the presentation, documents containing a list of schools, their location and timetables are handed out for students to use as a basis for their selection. A deadline is established for the delivery of applications and when these have been collected distribution of the volunteers takes place. The lists of centres and their assigned students are made public in the following days and an adjustment period initiated to facilitate possible changes and specific issues. Finally, once any necessary modifications have been made the groups are closed and implementation of the project begins.

Initial session and presentation of the teams. Once the students have been assigned and the lists published the first joint meeting takes place between representatives from the faculty and the Consortium, the coordinators, the *Big Friends* and the *Els amics i amigues de la lectura*. In the first part of the session the SL Office coordination team provides students with essential information with respect to the project: organisation, logistics and basic operation. The role each of the parties involved will play is explained in detail and a few guidelines offered that will be key to the intervention. Other questions are also made clear, such as the assessment system, channels and means of communication, session dynamics and how reflection

⁵ The SL Office was set up in the 2010-2011 academic year in the Faculty of Pedagogy and is staffed by a teacher from the faculty, two coordinators and several collaborators. Though its functions are complex, we would especially highlight two. In the first place, it manages the Cross-curricular Programme of service learning proposals in the faculty. This consists of 17 projects, which are offered to all students and which focus on a wide range of areas, such as individual mentoring of children and young people at risk of social exclusion, classes with immigrants and addressing with students the subjects of sexuality and drugs in the faculty, to name but a few. In this respect, the Office takes charge of the work carried out jointly with the organisations involved and the monitoring of the university students who take part. In second place, the Office is also there to provide help, support and exchange for faculty teachers who wish to implement or are conducting SL experiences as part of their subjects.

and training will be fostered. In the second part of the session students are grouped together by schools and the appropriate introductions are made among all the members that make up the different work units. This first encounter helps develop the bond between each student and the teams with which they will work, as well as the establishment of a link with the representatives, essential for the project's proper functioning and its daily work. It also enables the specific organisation in each particular school to be established, because although the basics of the project are common it must be adapted and tailored to the individual needs of the context in which it is to take place.

Student intervention. Once the *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* are in place, the service begins: they attend the schools two days a week to work for an hour on strengthening reading skills with primary and secondary school pupils. The way in which volunteers facilitate this help may be modified on the basis of several variables: the school, the work dynamic, the pupils, their characteristics, and so on. Despite this level of variation however, certain constants can be highlighted.

With regard to distribution and organisation, in all cases we try to ensure that the number of young people assigned to each *Reading Friend* is no more than 8 to 12. This allows for individualised teaching work, addressing the specific needs of each pupil. We also seek to maintain stability in the groups throughout the sessions, a decisive factor in establishing affective links and originating a relationship based on trust.

The working methodology employed by faculty students is one of the most variable elements and depends upon each particular situation. Some pairs read material provided by the school teachers, others read things proposed by the pupils themselves, and there are also cases in which the *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* prepare the materials, often sourced in the school or municipal libraries. The SL Office facilitates guidelines on teaching method: positively reinforce pupils' successes and improvements, make the appropriate corrections in a measured way, clarify the meaning of words and introduce comprehension questions. Nonetheless, the basic requirements are flexibility and adaptation to the recipients, which proves beneficial to creativity and to the possibility of the students' putting innovative strategies and resources into practice.

Mentoring and monitoring [7]. As the project progresses the SL Office provides students with constant aid and support through three basic channels: 1) regular visits to the schools where participants are working; 2) routine feed-back on the extracts from their personal journal that students send by email; and 3) contact by email or in person during the SL Office consultation times for any student requiring assistance.

Support offered through the regular visits corresponds to a *tutorial action* conducted by one of the SL Office coordinators and consisting in an aid to reflection which pursues various objectives. These include: ensuring proper development of the project by fostering its adoption by those taking part; enriching the quality of students' reflection and learning; and contributing to the experience being enjoyable and significant, ensuring that it acquires meaning for the pupils. The summary table below sets out the main functions of the tutor.

Table 2. Tutorial functions

Type of function	Main purposes
Relationship-based	To construct and create a warm relationship with the <i>Els amics i amigues de la lectura</i> based on friendship and trust.
Organisational	To provide students with basic information regarding the protocol to be followed.
Guidance	To contribute to the volunteers' continued learning of all that cannot be taught directly and explicitly.
Support	To encourage students' continued reflection on their personal experience.
Regulation	To ensure participants fulfil the responsibilities they have assumed.
Informative	To provide essential details regarding training sessions and facilitate documents aimed at promoting students' reflection.

Additionally, the visits to schools stimulate partnership relations and networking among the university representatives and those of the Consortium, enhancing the experience during its implementation. The effective use of email and direct attention offered by the SL Office also play a significant and useful role in the project. They are the means of communication and interaction regularly employed to provide relevant information, resolve doubts and guide students in both their intervention with pupils as well as in completing academic work.

In short, the monitoring and mentoring of students carried out by the SL Office, be it one-to-one or virtual, in the lecture room or outside it, is essential in enabling students to offer a quality service and benefit from a truly educational and positive experience.

Assessment and closure of the project. In addition to the intervention itself, the work done with pupils and participation in training sessions proposed and motivated by the SL Office team or representatives of the *Èxit* project, to obtain the corresponding credits students must present two differentiated pieces of work: a reflective report and a final, group-based synthesis project.

In the *reflective report*, students describe the most significant details of each session, offering their corresponding thoughts, perceptions and ideas. This helps bring out the maximum educational value of the service and enhances the intervention. *Why do we think that writing a diary improves learning and the service?* [7] First, because it serves as a guide for reflection on practice, which raises awareness of the evolution of the tasks in hand and of the learning models adopted by each participant. Secondly, because it enables significant connections to be made between practical and disciplinary knowledge, as well as with knowledge acquired in other learning processes and contexts. Finally, because it allows us to focus on issues that must be addressed in the everyday activities of teaching practice and to offer the possibility of engaging in a process of self-analysis and conversion of the experience into learning. This is a complex task for first-year students, so they are given support and guidance by the SL Office team who review their work and provide the necessary feedback through the aforementioned channels of communication.

The *final, group-based synthesis project* is a production which has no established pattern. In recent years however it has consisted in a poster or mural based on the experience and produced by groups. In the 2012-2013 year the activity took the form of a workshop, held during study fairs organised in the faculty, in which two differentiated spaces were presented. In the first of these,

students formed groups and dedicated time to reflecting upon their experience on the basis of a few basic questions. These included: What did they think the pupils who received the service had learnt? What had the experience given them at the educational level? And what did they think had characterised the educational relationship? In the second space, they had to create a mural in the classroom which showed and highlighted the different ideas, and then explain it to their classmates. These murals were exhibited for several weeks in the faculty entrance hall.

4. Analysis of the Educational Relationship between Students and Pupils

The *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* proposal is a practice based on peer-assistance which takes the format of mentoring. Thus the project centres on the formation of a pedagogical relationship between people who share the same status – both are students – but who have a fundamental difference in knowledge which enables one to assume the role of educator with respect to the other [7]. The older, more expert university students become mentors, performing functions similar to those of the teacher but from a very special position with high pedagogical potential. An extremely positive model of educational interaction which brings various dynamics and synergies into play that enable the intervention to focus specifically on reading, but also on other elements fundamental to the personal growth and development of both parties. The following paragraphs explain some of the most representative aspects of peer mentoring with respect to two areas: the pedagogical intervention – intensive work on reading – and characteristics of the relationship between the participants.

As regards the *intensive work on reading*, faculty students put a wide range of strategies and resources into practice which develop the acquisition and improvement of reading skills in a way which pupils find enjoyable. In the mechanics of reading, volunteers address such issues as the difficulties associated with pronunciation, development of a steady rhythm – neither too slow nor too fast – and proper delivery and intonation. In the area of comprehension, special attention is paid to the acquisition of new vocabulary, literal understanding of texts, oral expression and the ability to draw inferences, as well as, in certain cases and depending on the reading level, to reflection upon, summarising and making critical analysis of the texts.

Pupils are usually highly motivated; they look forward to seeing their *reading friend* and are always eager to get started. We believe this is due to two basic reasons. On the one hand, the pupils are offered an activity based on their interests in which readings are used from a range of resources – a book, comic, piece of news and so on. They are then set short exercises to improve their reading comprehension, which they find appealing and fun. On the other hand, they are given the opportunity to confront reading in a positive way: in the company of a person they like who will help them in a climate of trust and safety. A combination of factors which doubtless contribute to the project's success.

What becomes evident above all in the experience is that it goes beyond simply reading. In this respect we

would highlight some of the essential educational acquisitions for participants deriving from the affective and educational relationship established between the parties. To do so, we set out below extracts from the reflective journals submitted by students during the 2012-2013 academic year.

In the first place, faculty students taking part in *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* are turned into highly positive educational references for the school pupils. Close contacts who offer them individualised attention and dedication, with whom they build a relationship based on appreciation and trust and who, at the same time, help them acquire and develop a basic competence. Someone who sits with them, guides them supports them and supervises them in the educational process, transmitting and instilling an interest in and passion for reading.

The project is based on a close-proximity relationship, face to face, which is consolidated as a result of regularity and stability. This relationship is gradually developed through the fundamental pillars of warmth, affinity and recognition. And it is precisely this affective bond that enables the transmission of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. As we mentioned earlier, pupils who receive this help feel they are able to successfully overcome the challenges presented by reading. This, in turn, brings about a progressive rise in their self-esteem, confidence and self-assurance and a reduction in their fear of failure. So for the pupils, reading with the faculty students is a gratifying, motivating activity, because they have someone at their side who helps and supports them, while at the same time appreciating and positively reinforcing their efforts and progress

“I can see how they are gradually becoming less shy and beginning to be themselves. Now they look me in the face when they talk to me! (Many didn't do that before.) I also like the fact that often when I arrive in class they are the ones who want to get started reading. I know it may just be an excuse to get some of their homework done, but I think and hope that it's also because they enjoy reading. I like this project and these children more and more every day. I'm satisfied with what I do.”

In second place, the experience offers students a chance to engage with children to carry out a real, specific task. One which is only possible to do if positive ties are created. Students have to get close to the pupils, gain their trust, show they are approachable, be capable of scolding them if necessary and laughing with them when the situation calls for it. They must maintain their authority but be open to liking the pupils and being liked by them. And throughout all this time, teach them to read. Fundamental matters for the profession and for life, which cannot be taught in the classroom but rather are learnt by trial and error, by experimenting.

“I've now established a really good relationship with almost all the pupils, I'm at a great stage, very comfortable. I can be myself with the children, they don't get me annoyed and we can enjoy the time we spend together. It's very gratifying being able to work like this, in such an easy-going atmosphere.”

Finally, we would just like to highlight how the experience is a simple yet brilliant practice for values education, as it brings a dynamic into play which is vital for all human beings: the building of interpersonal

relationships. The project invites participants to form part of a relationship in which affinity and esteem become two basic elements. To work with someone in way which is educationally effective requires the establishment of a positive affective bond. A bond that must be formed from recognition, respect and understanding, and which entails warmth, acceptance of need, mentoring and opening up to the individual sitting in front of us. Someone who has never had the opportunity to look after another person, to establish a friendly relationship on the basis of proximity and recognition, and who has probably missed an important chance to grow as a person. *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* offers this possibility to the students: to work on an academic aspect from a position of proximity and recognition, building and fostering their relationship with the pupils.

5. Final Conclusions

Analysis of the experience implemented during these years, conducted by means of visits to the schools, observation of what happens in the classroom, the dialogue and exchanges with participants and, in particular, reading the journals submitted by the students, enables us to consider the project a highly beneficial initiative in the preparation of future education professionals. The reasons behind this assertion, together with a few journal extracts to illustrate them, are set out below.

The experience is extremely valuable and highly beneficial for students of the faculty. In most cases it represents a first contact with reality, generates significant theory-related learning, facilitates the acquisition of competences, values and skills through their use and, moreover, is an opportunity to offer a socially useful service. We believe that, in addition to being a benefit to the community, reinforcing reading skills also becomes a particularly significant activity for the students. Though complexity of the experience makes it impossible to draw up a precise list of the learning goals that each participant addresses during the activity, we can list some of the most representative acquisitions under three basic headings: professional competences, pedagogical know-how and personal, social and civic skills.

Professional competences. For most of the students, reinforcing reading in the school classroom is the first “professional” responsibility they have taken on in an educational institution. Performing this service requires them to put a range of skills into practice. Some are applied deliberately and with intention, while others are employed without being really aware of the fact, so the learning obtained actually exceeds that which may be anticipated beforehand. Some of the most significant competences acquired include overcoming the fear of dealing with children, gaining respect, learning to adjust the material and methodology to pupils’ reading levels, detecting difficulties and resolving them as they arise, employing techniques and methodologies that motivate reading, empathising with the pupils’ situation, understanding them and knowing how to step into their shoes, and seeking strategies that allow reading reinforcement to be conducted with two children of different reading levels.

“I can safely say I’ve been learning things from day one. First, for instance, to lose my fear, control my nerves

and trust a little more in myself. (...) This opportunity has given me the chance to gain practice and experience, which will help me a lot in the future and above all in my degree. I now know how to manage a class, how to organise it and, above all, that the most important thing is to think of the children, to put them first and do activities that help them learn and become interested in what they’re doing.”

Pedagogical know-how. There is a set of learning skills that are practiced in parallel to the time spent reinforcing pupils’ reading, but which are inextricably linked to the service experience. As we have seen, the SL Office encourages students to carry out two complementary tasks: to reflect upon what they have encountered during the service and to contribute knowledge that enables them to better understand what they have done. To enhance training performance it is essential to devote time to reflection upon what has happened, upon the difficulties that have arisen or the pupils’ reaction to each student intervention. Such deliberation becomes a new source of experience which permits each student to build new knowledge based on direct work in the classroom.

“Today we’ve tried a new activity with Evelin. In the first session we saw that for various reasons she was unable to understand the reading, so in this second session we proposed a different methodology. The first activity we set her was to put jumbled up elements of a story into the right order. This meant she had to understand short paragraphs in order to organise them correctly and then understand the full story. The second activity was based on memorising and looking for information. I asked her a series of questions about a television programme guide taken from a newspaper. At first she had a little difficulty finding the information, but at the end of the two activities I was really pleased with the results.”

Personal, social and civic skills. Though it is still too soon to make an adequate assessment of the impact these service learning activities had on the students, everything seems to indicate that gains are produced at several levels. From their personal point of view, the experience serves to clarify whether the student has made the right choice of course and future profession. It also helps a good number of students understand the nature of the work the teaching profession entails, while boosting their self-esteem and giving them better insight into themselves. From a social perspective, the activity facilitates training in the ability to function as a team member and establish a cooperation relationship with other professionals. Finally, in some cases it awakes a good deal of civic awareness, especially as regards the purpose of the activity, its usefulness and the many needs that are still to be met. In short, the experience helps students develop a certain level of critical thinking and a more discerning political vision.

“Above all, I’ve learnt to work with my pupils on addressing diversity issues. I’ve learnt the significant role played by teachers in cultivating moral values, because the pupils learn these through their actions and gestures and the like. I’ve learnt to put myself in the pupils’ shoes and adapt to their personal and academic situations and so on. And to act as a mediator between pupils, not to be in too much of a hurry to teach.”

Based on all we have explained, we can see how the project we have presented takes the form of a practice into

which two basic components can be integrated, the formative and the civic. And it is precisely this combination that offers the students enormous educational possibilities: they learn by teaching, by teaching they contribute to improving reality, and by reflecting upon all this they better prepare themselves as citizens. Beyond the students however, the proposal has a multiple impact on the environment and the organisations that implement it. The university offers its students a comprehensive training opportunity with social outreach. It gains presence in society, becomes less distanced from reality and shares a project with other social stakeholders. The Barcelona Education Consortium provides an outstanding tool for service, by contributing the know-how, resources and support necessary to properly execute the project. But at the same time, it acquires an extra resource of huge value: the individualised reinforcement of reading skills for school pupils.

To sum up, we consider the *Els amics i amigues de la lectura* experience to be an educational practice which is extremely powerful and positive for all the people who take part in it. It is a proposal that contributes to improving education quality in the university by producing meaningful learning opportunities and facilitating spaces for the joint construction of knowledge; a citizenship education initiative which offers a useful activity in which social outreach is a key component; and an inclusive practice based on reciprocity and networking. In summary, it is a project which enables the multiple stakeholders involved to pursue, propose and work together to offer structured solutions to problems, challenges and real and common needs, with all that this entails.

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