

2nd International Conference on Higher Education Advances, HEAd'16, 21-23 June 2016,  
Valencia, Spain

## Who learns from whom? Building up intergenerational bridges through service learning

Ana Isabel Muñoz Alcón\*

*Department of Humanities, Catholic University of Avila, Canteros s/n, Avila 05005, Spain*

---

### Abstract

One of the challenges faced by university today is how to develop in students the necessary attitudes and competences to become those leaders who will transform their social environment in the short future. An efficient professional qualification is required as well as providing them with scenarios suitable for the acquisition of social and service competences. This paper analyses the results of a project carried out by a group of engineering undergraduate students from the Catholic University of Avila in the University of Experience in Arevalo, a town in the north of Avila (Spain). The interest of this experience lies in its piloting character in our University, together with the multiple learning strategies practiced. The fact that it is the university students that teach the senior citizens offers a valuable pedagogical potential. Besides, it turned out to be a powerful bridge-building experience, strengthening intergenerational relations. Both groups benefited from this service learning project, as it is shown by the results from the surveys, open questions and students' final personal reports.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of HEAd'16

*Keywords:* Service learning; Long life learning; University of Experience

---

### 1. Introduction

The idea of designing a project to relate academic learning with social compromise comes from the desire to respond to our Institution's identity principles and mission (Catholic University of Avila, 2015) in a creative way. The challenge was how to achieve learning objectives in the subject of English and, at the same time, provide a

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34-920-251-020; fax: +34-920-251-030  
*E-mail address:* [ana.munoz@ucavila.es](mailto:ana.munoz@ucavila.es)

specific service to a community of Spanish senior students attending classes at the so called “University of Experience”. The dilemma was solved by means of a service learning (SL) project which perfectly bridged theory and practice and was pedagogically in line with the intended purpose of sharing our knowledge, serving others and also achieving learning goals. We were aware of the risks this involved. On one hand, letting university students be professors for a day and, on the other, promoting mutual empathy in both generations to benefit from the experience, learn and grow.

## **2. Objectives of the project**

### *2.1. Strengthen intergenerational bounds*

The rapid changes and technological development in western societies makes it difficult to bring the youth and the elderly together so as to understand one another and build a peaceful and constructive convivence. Individualism and materialism foster a “throwaway culture” where the weak, and specially senior citizens, are ignored and, very often, despised as useless. We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it. We should not miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship (Francis I, 2015). Intergenerational education programs that bring young people together with older adults to learn from and with one another have been receiving greater attention (Dupuis, 2002). Our SL project turned out to be a powerful means to enhance empathy and sharing between generations.

### *2.2. Promote Long Life Learning*

Due to the extension of life expectancy and the easier access to education, an increasing number of adults and senior citizens demand the participation in programs and courses that keep them intellectually active and let them socialize and continue their personal growth. Apart from the therapeutic potential that intellectual activity has for the prevention of cognitive impairment, Alzheimer, dementia and other disorders associated to aging (Lojo Seoane et al, 2012), the willingness to continue learning and adapting to new changes attracts many retired people. By serving a community of senior citizens, university students also wished to make a contribution to the older adults’ long life learning.

### *2.3. Offer undergraduate students the opportunity of sharing their knowledge on the English speaking countries’ lifestyle and culture*

One of the objectives of English in the area of attitudes is to promote respect and closeness to traditions, lifestyle and culture in the English speaking countries. The university students taking part in the project faced the challenge of teaching different aspects of this culture together with some basic vocabulary and expressions in English.

### *2.4. Develop speaking competence both in English and Spanish*

Presentation of contents in front of an adult audience is a big challenge for young undergraduate students. Even though such presentations were made in Spanish, the fact that teams were also teaching some vocabulary and basic expressions connected to the topics, enhanced the practice of oral English as well.

### *2.5. Develop team work competence*

Working in teams at college is a necessary requirement for students to develop teamwork competence, such an essential part of cooperative learning, which prepares future professionals for their optimal performance at work in the short term. The own nature of service learning involves cooperation, or common work with a group of colleagues and collaboration with the targeted community which receive their help (Puig Rovira et al., 2006). Specifically,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1107182>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1107182>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)