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The project of “Cap Collection”: a PBL in the school and an opportunity of social inclusion for students and adults with intellectual disability

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Abstract

This Case study, which is included in a wider research, gathers the experience, started in the previous academic year, of a community service learning project on the collection of plastic caps done by students of sixth form (11-12 years old) in collaboration with adult people who suffer from an intellectual disability. From a qualitative methodology based on analysis of documents, observation and deep interviewing, we want to investigate its keys to success, including also the benefits which these two collectives obtain. Among the obtained results, we emphasize on the importance of the sense of this project (benefit for a third person), as a motivating element and which generates stability, as well as the collaborative culture between supported entities from an educating city. Also, we notice benefits for the adult people with an intellectual disability, who are introduced as active citizens, as well as on the recognition of diversity on the side of the students.

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1. Introduction

Current society is immersed in a deep process of change which affects school, since it is an educating institution and it is linked to its territory; but also to the community organizations, municipality and state (Bolívar & Escudero, 2008). This educating entity is requested to help students, as they are citizens, to develop a series of functional

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competences for their personal and social growth (Kolmos, 2004; Branda, 2008; Kuiper, Meijer & Moust, 2011; Mendía 2012). This challenge demands changes in the ways of doing of the school. A methodological proposal which helps with this change of paradigm is Project Based Learning (PBL).

Within this methodology and looking for a social bonus, Service Learning (SL) is defined as “an educating proposal which combines processes of learning and community service in a single, well articulated project, in which participants learn at the same time as they work in real necessities of the environment with the aim of improving it” (Puig, Batlle, Bosch & Palos, 2007 p.15). Therefore, LS is an educating model which promotes civic values, favouring the participation of community members, from an associative perspective and with the aims of covering their own necessities from solidarity (Mendía, 2012). This author adds that it is a binomial made up of the words learning and solidarity service. This task can be directed towards the school, for example by having the students of higher forms help children with the reading; as well as towards the community, which is the case we are analysing in this article. This kind of practice, despite being considered interesting since they articulate school, community and social aspects, offering a reflexive learning with beneficial results for the collectiveness, is very rare in schools (Martínez, 2014). In this same sense, Osborne and Dillon (2007) reflect on the great value given to school for the formation of citizens, not realizing the time employed in such an institution is not higher than 20%, adding that learning also takes place in social and cultural contexts. Some authors are starting to get over the concept of *formal and non-formal education* to talk about learnings, and talk about educational contexts (Guisasola & Morentín, 2007).

Towns and cities are places where, paradoxically, the increase of inequality, anonymity or a feeling of lack of safety, as well as the support for the citizens’ rights or spaces for leisure, opportunities and meetings can occur at the same time (Subirats, 2013).

Based on this idea, learning and educating cities came up. In 2012 UNO approved of the establishment of the Global Network of Learning Cities of UNESCO (UNESCO-GLCN), the following year the First International Conference took place in Beijing, where about five hundred mayors and educational institutions from more than one hundred nations took part (García, 2015). This author understands an educating city as “that region, town or city which moves its resources at all levels with the aim of boosting and enriching its human potential, for the encouragement of personal development, the maintenance of social cohesion and the creation of prosperity. This covers and interrelates the different educating processes: formal, non-formal and informal” (García, 2015 p. 59).

The state network of the educating cities of Spain (2016) compiles the three principles in which they are based on: 1. Detection and evaluation of necessities to carry out social proposals; 2.- Presenting the information in a transparent and adequate way; 3.- Citizen participation.

This educative proposal suggests including its members by looking for explicit links of collaboration among all its citizens and the institutions which represent them. At the same time, it facilitates the learning and socialization to those collectives who have been historically marginalized and excluded by the community (Klein & Osborne, 2008).

Among these groups we find adults with intellectual disability, who, historically, have been given some support, but to a lesser extent to generate a feeling of belonging to the community. Amado (2001) defines them as *tourists* in their own neighbourhood, municipality or town, since they are present but not cohabiting or contributing socially to the collective. It seems interesting to change the way of looking at these citizens, not only considering them as mere service recipients but also looking at them as generating ones, for example, through voluntary service (Shoultz & Lakin, 2001). This new kind of proposals, apart from benefitting those people who receive voluntary support, are also useful for this collective to dignify themselves as an active and participating agent towards the others, promoting the search of new social roles (Amado, 2001).

It is a challenge that is materializing bit by bit, like in this project of cap collection where members of two institutions of the same municipality, which is an educating city, take part. One group made up of 12-year-old students of a school and a day care centre of adult people with intellectual disability.

2. Method

Trying to faithfully capture the scope of the experience and the sense of what was lived in the proposal of service learning, this research is based on a case study. The study, in its totality, gathers the analysis of three school

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