Towards a Service-Learning model for the Basic Standards of Citizenship Competencies

Por un modelo de Aprendizaje-Servicio para los Estándares Básicos de Competencias Ciudadanas

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Abstract

The objective was to compare the findings of an investigation found in a public institution in Colombia with seventh grade high school students and the results of a Service-Learning project with second grade high school students from a public school in Mexico. The documentary-type research was developed in two stages: heuristics and hermeneutics. The heuristic stage involved an exhaustive search of physical and digital publications (books, magazines, databases, repositories, articles and doctoral theses) on EBCC and Service-Learning. The hermeneutic stage focused on the interpretation of these sources. The resulting proposal was designed taking as reference the results of a Mexican public school in the second grade of secondary school and the outcomes of a doctoral thesis on citizenship skills in seventh grade. In the results, it was possible to verify the non-existence of Service-Learning projects, such as the lack of knowledge among teachers and directors, and the little knowledge of the students about the Constitution, the code of childhood and adolescence, the coexistence manual, and the armed conflict. It was possible to establish the possibility of bringing Service-Learning closer to the development of competencies within the framework of the Basic Standards of Citizen Competencies in Colombia. It concludes with a proposal in which Service-Learning is linked to the curriculum in the area of citizenship.

Keywords:

Service-Learning;
Civic Competencies;
Basic Standards for
Civic Competencies;
Participate

Resumen

El objetivo de la investigación fue comparar los hallazgos de una investigación encontrados en una institución pública de Colombia con estudiantes de séptimo grado de secundaria y los resultados de un proyecto de Aprendizaje-Servicio con estudiantes de segundo grado de secundaria de una escuela pública de México. La investigación, de tipo documental, se desarrolló en dos fases: heurística y hermenéutica. La fase heurística implicó la búsqueda exhaustiva de publicaciones físicas y digitales (libros, revistas, bases de datos, repositorios, artículos y tesis doctorales) sobre EBCC y Aprendizaje-Servicio. La fase hermenéutica se centró en la interpretación de dichas fuentes. La propuesta resultante se diseñó tomando como referencia los resultados de una escuela pública mexicana de segundo grado de secundaria y los hallazgos de una tesis doctoral sobre competencias ciudadanas en séptimo grado. En los resultados se pudo comprobar la inexistencia de proyectos de Aprendizaje-Servicio, como su desconocimiento entre los docentes y directivos, y el poco conocimiento de los estudiantes sobre la Constitución, el código de infancia y adolescencia, el manual de convivencia, el conflicto armado. Se pudo establecer la posibilidad de acercar el Aprendizaje-Servicio al desarrollo de competencias dentro del marco de los Estándares Básicos de Competencias Ciudadanas en Colombia. Se concluye con una propuesta en la que se vincula el Aprendizaje-Servicio con el currículo en el área de ciudadanía.

Palabras clave:

Aprendizaje-Servicio;
Competencias
Ciudadanas;
Estándares Básicos
de Competencias
Ciudadanas;
Participación

INTRODUCTION

Citizenship and social competencies are a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable people to participate effectively in the social, political and economic life of their community. These competencies are essential for the development of a democratic and fair society, and in particular for people's success in their personal, professional and academic lives.

In the Colombian case, one of the challenges facing education is the formation of participative citizens who are aware of the problems that continue to affect the country's coexistence in the post-conflict era, such as violence, poverty, social imbalances, and population displacement in conflict zones, political polarization, and drug trading.

In the search for meaningful teaching methods that promote the development of civic skills, Service-Learning is selected as a learning model that is recently spreading in Spain and Latin America, not only at the level of higher education, but from the initial levels.

As background, we can consider the series of projects that have emerged in recent years, especially in Spain, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, where it has become part of the educational training processes, but not in Colombia, where one or another proposal has emerged for its implementation in higher education. Therefore, the objective of this article is to bring Service-Learning closer to the Basic Standards of Citizen Competencies (hereinafter, EBCC) as part of the national curricula, as a strategy to promote citizen training in educational establishments, and in this way comply with public policies for the training of critical individuals committed to the social reality of the country.

Considering the legal justification of this project, apart from contributing to the student social formation and the real needs of a community, it fulfills several of the purposes established in the General Law of Education (MEN, 1996): one, which considers this type of projects as a "priority to the cultural improvement and quality of life of the population, to participation in the search for alternative solutions to problems and to social progress" (art. 5); two, as an "integral development of the individual in the cognitive, socio-affective aspects through pedagogical and recreational socialization experiences" (art. 15); three, as a "link to development programs and social and community organization, aimed at solving the social problems of their environment"; and four, as a "fostering of responsible awareness and the student participation in civic actions and social service" (art. 20).

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METHOD

T he research method used for this article is documentary. That is, the outcomes of the author's thesis and the results of an implementation of Service-Learning in a public school were used. Therefore, two stages were defined in the research: heuristic and hermeneutic. The first was based on the search for publications in physical and digital form, whether they were books, magazines, databases, repositories, articles and doctoral theses; while the second was based on the interpretation of the same.

In both cases, the consultation turned around two essential themes: EBCC and Service-Learning. The following proposal was designed based on these themes, taking as a reference the results of a Mexican public school for second grade of secondary school and the outcomes found in the doctoral thesis of the author of this article within the standards of civic competencies for seventh grade of secondary school.

RESULTS

The categories of Service-Learning

From the skills perspective, Marques et al. mention the three categories that make up Service-Learning with their respective properties: 1) Personal Knowledge; 2) Conditions for Learning; and 3) Practical Experience (2021, p. 7):

Table 1. *Properties in the Personal Knowledge category*

Category	Properties
Personal knowledge	Intrapersonal Knowledge
	Interpersonal Knowledge
Conditions for learning	Opportunities
	Pedagogical Mediation
Practical experience	Learning to Learn
	Participant Spaces

Source: Ideas taken from Marques et al. (pp. 8, 10 and 13) and Quintero et al. (2021).

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The Personal Knowledge category refers to the student's prior knowledge about himself and how he should relate to his environment. In this way, this category is associated with two properties that are part of the human personality, such as: intrapersonal knowledge and interpersonal knowledge.

The first is associated with preconceptions and expectations that one has of oneself, while the second is associated with the skills expressed during interaction with the environment (Marques et al., pp. 8-10). The latter are associated with the development of ethical values, motivation, and emotional control (Redondo and Fuentes), while serving as indicators to measure critical and reflective capacity (García and Giménez, 2010, p. 5).

The Learning Conditions category corresponds to the time and characteristics of the context. Opportunities are a property that indicates the duration of an experience and its permanence in the context, while Pedagogical Mediation, "to the meaning given to learning and reflection as a fundamental element in mediation." This means that time is related to the project success, which translates into more time, greater opportunities for students to express their abilities (Marques et al., p. 10).

The Practical Experience category involves the experience that is lived during the performance of a community service. In this sense, two properties emerge: Learning to Learn and Participation Spaces. The first refers to cognitive processes, to thinking; while the second, to metacognitive processes, where the individual learns to have control and self-regulation over planning, monitoring and evaluation (p. 13). Here, teamwork favors the development of skills such as communication between peers and the community, such as empathy and leadership, and the relationship between teachers and their environment becomes closer, which raises the concept of social commitment with a more critical thinking of educational reality (p. 15).

Competence groups in the EBCC

It is known that these standards, apart from being considered by the Ministry of Education as the essential things that every student should know and do in the area of citizenship, are classified into three groups of competencies: 1) Coexistence and peace; 2) Plurality, identity and appreciation of differences; and 3) Participation and democratic responsibility (MEN, 2010, p. 51); on which Pineda materializes them with three lines of work each, as shown in the following table (p. 10):

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Table 2.

The three groups of competencies and their lines of work

Group of competencies	Lines of work
Coexistence and peace	Conflict
	Examining emotions
	I respect
Participation and democratic responsibility	Rights and duties
	Forms of participation
	Rules and institutions
Plurality, identity and appreciation of differences	Identity construction
	Recognition and appreciation of differences
	Manifestations of pluralism

Sources: MEN and Pineda.

For example, if a seventh grade student wants to promote democratic initiatives to reduce discrimination and aggressive behavior, he or she can do so through a forum where he or she can discuss these problems with his or her classmates and propose solutions that involve all members of the educational community. In this case, he or she meets the objectives of the second group of standards, promoting responsible democratic participation, the objectives of the first group of competencies, fostering the construction of a culture of peace and coexistence, and the objectives of the third group of competencies, valuing cultural differences.

Towards a service-learning model with respect to EBCC

The aim is to develop a pedagogical model of Service-Learning that seeks to promote and strengthen civic competencies in accordance with the EBCC and public action policies for peaceful coexistence in the country. It is a model that is composed of a series of theoretical formulations supported by the progression of students' basic competencies as well as mental schemes and relevant learning.

In addition, it is based on the analysis of spatial and social situations in the environment, concepts such as autonomous learning, cooperation between students, emotional support for them, the design of assessments and tutoring of learning.

In general terms, this model promotes knowledge, competencies and skills for the exercise of responsible citizenship, such as values of solidarity and social action to meet the real needs of a community, and is conditioned by the physical, social and cultural characteristics, including economic and political characteristics of the student who learns at the

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school.

According to Hernández et al., this model aims at the development of basic skills (2009, pp. 4-5), not only from the point of view of academic knowledge (learning to learn and learning to do) and social (learning to live with other people), but also personal (learning to be).

It is not only a longitudinal model, but an interdisciplinary model that covers the different disciplines in the educational setting, from peace courses, social sciences, natural sciences, to non-similar subjects such as mathematics, language, foreign language, physical training, etc.

Its function is to facilitate the treatment of categories derived from the results of an investigation, which will allow a better management of concepts established in study plans, curricular projects, didactic tools, teaching methodologies, rubric design, appropriation of technologies, and a closer approach to constructivism according to Piaget's cognitive theory, Ausubel's meaningful learning, Vygotsky's social learning (Ortiz, 2015), among others.

Therefore, the components for the formulation of this pedagogical model are: 1. Use of pedagogical resources; 2. Product; 3. Method and techniques; 4. Scenarios; 5. Relationship between Service-Learning and EBCC; 6. Constitution of the groups of standards; 7. Learning methods that fit into Service-Learning; 8. Teaching methods that fit into Service-Learning; 9. Rubric; 10. Presentation of results; 11. Schedule; 12. Resources; and 13. Budget.

1. Using educational resources

There is no doubt that every educational institution must have at least an IEP on which it can design the necessary strategies for the formation of the individual as a responsible and critical citizen, committed to the country and its communities problems. In addition, it must have teacher training on the use of teaching methodologies, technological resources to carry out this type of project, fluid communication with parents or protectors, and spaces in the neighborhood that allow the development of Service-Learning projects such as, for example, maintaining their plants, cleaning a community area, etc.

2. Product

The product of this proposal is a social constructivist pedagogical model that allows the design of Service-Learning activities for citizen training within the educational and sociocultural context of a school. In addition, it can be implemented in any of the country's educational establishments, and it complies with the proposal of Chantal and Contreras (2013) that it has direct contact with reality, that it provides a solution and that it benefits students in values.

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3. Method and techniques

There is no doubt that among the techniques that will be used here, the first is the consultation of documents, such as the study plans established in the national curriculum and the school. The second is observation, such as the analysis of the physical spaces inside and outside the classroom, recording the results through a notebook or logbook, and focus groups, such as the analysis of the sociocultural context, recording the results through the survey, the interview, applied to students, teachers, directors, parents and members of the community.

4. Service-Learning Scenarios

The scenarios proposed here are adapted to the circumstances of a Service-Learning, such as the proposing scenario, which basically corresponds to the students as the drivers of the program, the surrounding scenario, to the educational establishment itself with all the resources available, and the receiving scenario, to the spaces where the social service will be provided.

These scenarios are not exclusive, which makes them inclusive, interconnecting with each other.

5. Relationship between Service-Learning and EBCC

This relationship is based on the premise that it is possible to link Service-Learning with the Basic Standards of Citizen Competencies, both on a theoretical and practical level, establishing the categories as the cause that drives the formation of citizen competencies whose achievements can be expected as follows:

Table 3. *Relationship between Service-Learning and EBCC*

Categories Service-Learning	Properties	Citizenship Competencies Groups	Lines of work
Personal knowledge	Intrapersonal Knowledge	Coexistence and peace	Understand social, political, economic, cultural and geographical problems
	Interpersonal Knowledge		Understand the basic principles of the Constitution, laws, regulations, structure and functioning of the political system
Conditions for learning	Opportunities	Participation and democratic responsibility	Recognize the diverse opinions, points of view and interests of others
	Pedagogical Mediation		Critically analyze the sources of information and their arguments

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Practical experience	Learning to Learn	Plurality, identity and appreciation of differences	Identify conceptual models that guide social decisions
	Participant Spaces		Establish relationships between the different social dimensions and their possible solution alternatives

Source: Prepared by the authors with information taken from Marques et al. (pp. 10-13), ICFES (n.d.) and MEN (2004, p. 12).

6. Constitution of the standard groups

If we focus on the development of these groups of standard, they are in accordance with the development of competencies, which become the person daily exercise throughout life. It is an exercise that increases in complexity with educational training from the first grades of education to the last, which is known as vertical coherence (MEN, p. 167), since its process starts from a group of standards to a general standard and from this to the specific standards.

To encourage civic action in students, knowledge must be integrated with a series of competencies described by the Ministry of Education, such as: knowledge, when referring to the information that the student must know; cognitive competencies, the ability to carry out mental processes; emotional competencies, the ability to identify and respond constructively to one's own and others' emotions; communicative competencies, the skills necessary to establish a constructive dialogue; and integrative competencies, the ability to articulate all of the above competencies (MEN, 2006, pp. 12-13).
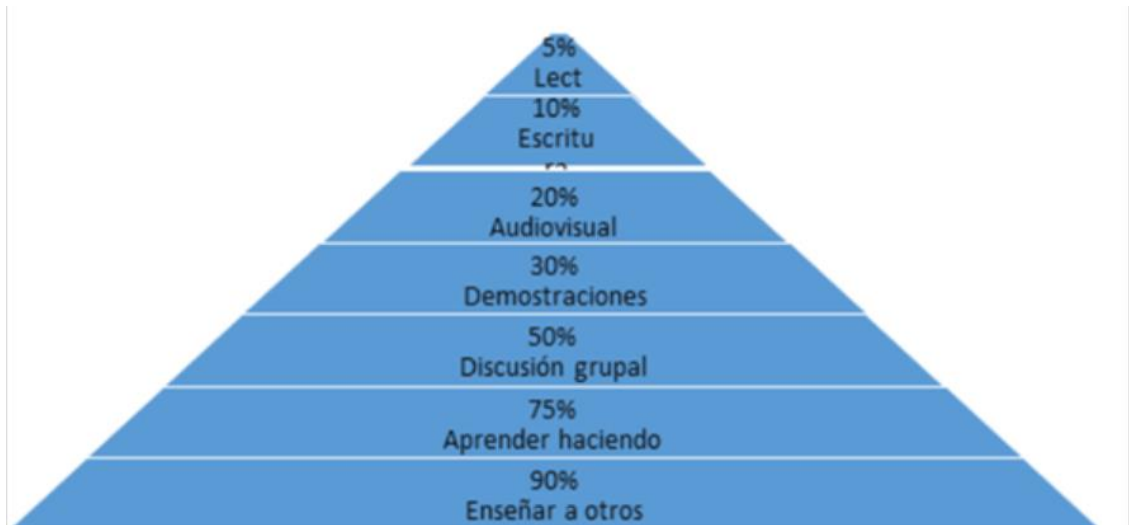
7. Learning methods that fit with Service-Learning

If research is conducted on the most effective teaching methods for the acquisition of knowledge and the provision of a social service, there is no doubt that it is Service-Learning. If we analyze which are the most effectives for teaching in general terms, the answer can be found in the work carried out by Ohio University (UTEM, 2015, p. 21).

In it, it can be seen through a pyramid that group discussion has 50% of effectiveness, while learning by doing and teaching others, 75 and 90% respectively, which indicates that these last three methodologies are those with the greatest impact on the student training as it can be seen in the following figure:

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Figure 1. *Learning pyramid*

Source: UTEM (p. 20).

8. Teaching methods that fit with Service-Learning

If in the previous section an analysis of the learning methods was made, in this section analysis is made of the different teaching methods that can be coupled with Service-Learning. According to Mendía, Service-Learning is an innovative proposal that modifies reality and improves learning, with the advantage that it can be connected with other proposals already established in educational centers. He gives examples such as "education based on competences, learning based on projects or problems, cooperative and collaborative learning, learning to undertake, multiple intelligences, positive coexistence, gamification" (2016, p. 20), among others.

This dynamic reflects the way in which the teacher will implement it from the pedagogical praxis in which he works, to which the following figure is added: action-research and socio-emotional skills:

Figure 2. Service-Learning and its relationship with other methodologies

Source: Mendía, pp. 22-26.

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9. Rubric

For the rubric, we must start from two elements that make a pedagogical proposal in Service-Learning unique: the added value of both parties, since it is not only about acquiring better knowledge and providing a good service to the community, but also the contribution that must be made to each other.

In this way, the strengths and weaknesses that occur in the process can be identified, the pedagogical resources that are managed can be contrasted, the activities can be optimized, the new possibilities that are presented can be shown and they can be implemented for improvements (GREM, 2014, p. 5).

Once the reasons for a service-learning project are clear, all that remains is to evaluate the process. To do so, a rubric is required to help analyze and improve the experiences obtained. GREM defines it in two dimensions: the first is the pedagogical resources that account for the experiences of service-learning, and is known as dynamism. The second is the degree of development of each of the dynamics, and is known as level (p. 6).

As for the dynamics, there are twelve of them and they are grouped into three sections: basic, pedagogical and organizational. The first is made up of four dynamics; the second, five; and the third, three, as it can be seen in the following table, this exposition not being considered as a limitation for the teacher.

Table 4. *The sections of a rubric*

Sections	Dynamics
Basics	**Needs** : these are the deficiencies or difficulties detected in the environment
	Service : the tasks that will be carried out to improve the needs
	Sense of service : the expected impact
	Learning : refers to acquired knowledge, skills, abilities and values
Pedagogical	**Participation** : Type of intervention that students have
	Group work : How to develop the activity
	Reflection : Strategies to improve and achieve new knowledge
	Recognition : Appreciation of the service provided by students
	Evaluation : A way of knowing the performance to generate feedback with the students
Organizational	**Partnership** : Joint implementation between institutions with different performances
	Consolidation center : Process generated in the center
	Consolidation of entities : Result of the complementation

Source: Information adapted from GREM.

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As for the levels, it must be considered that each dynamic has its own degree of pedagogical development. Puig et al. have established four levels from lowest to highest: the first, with occasional presence; the second, minimal; the third, unorganized; and the fourth, with the greatest involvement, the maximum (2017, p. 125). Here we can speak of these levels reflection for each dynamic, since not all have the same interpretation language.

10. Presentation of the results

Regarding the results, these can be presented in different ways, using tables or graphs. An example of this is the spider graph, which helps to present more clearly the level of development achieved by the participants in each dynamic, as well as to improve the critical points. For this case, the data in the following figure are imagined to develop the presentation.

Figure 3. *An imagined experience through the spider graph*

Source: Adapted from Puig et al. (pp. 32-33).

11. Schedule

The timelines for a Service-Learning project are usually four to five weeks. It all depends on the number and type of service to be provided. An example of a timeline could be the one given in the case of the Mexican school, which could correspond to eight weeks, which meets all the stages or sessions of the program.

12. Resources

Of course, the resources can be of different natures: from the institution itself, provided by a governmental or non-governmental organization, from philanthropy, or from the students themselves through activities such as raffles, bingos, bazaars, sales, etc.

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13. Budget

The budget is at the discretion of the teacher and the educational institution. Of course, the development of any Service-Learning activity requires an investment, not manner the quantity. Leaving aside the teacher's fees, there may be costs such as transportation, snacks, teaching materials, printing, graphic designs, surveys, books and technological tools such as the design of a website.

As stated, everything depends on the activity and the conditions of the establishment and the environment.
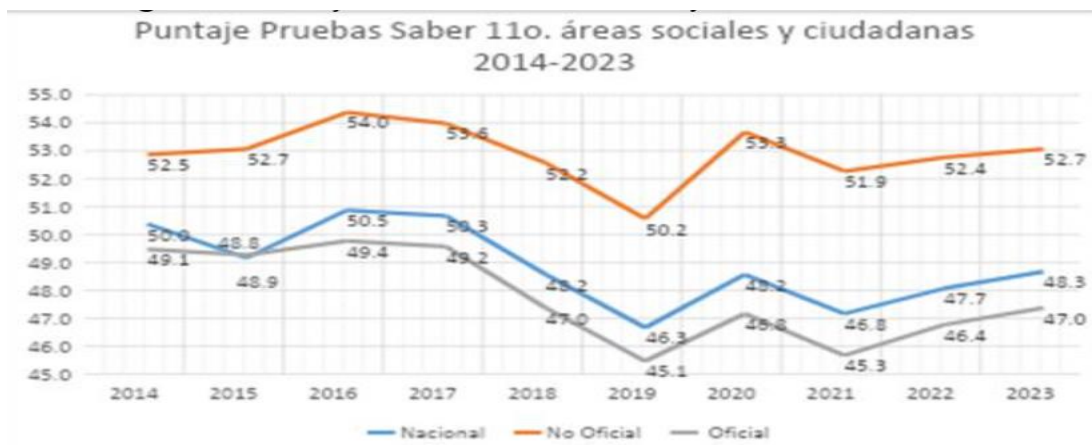
DISCUSSION

According to the statistical report of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana on the Saber, 11th grade tests in the area of social and civic skills in the last ten years, the lowest performances in the area of social and civic skills are found in the public sector.

The deficiencies are found in the traditional teaching method practiced in educational institutions, which means that students are not familiar with the coexistence manual, their own rights as children and adolescents, the Constitution and the laws, are not sensitive to community problems, do not apply the values learned, do not integrate with the environment, have bad behaviors, have no leadership in the learning processes, have no sense of belonging, do not know the causes of the Colombian conflict, their rights in the educational establishment, nor have they participated in any social service project, in addition, some of them come from dysfunctional families and communities.

This confirms what was found in the Saber 11th grade tests in the area of civic and social skills over the last ten years, since students in calendar A never reached 51 of the 100 possible points between 2014 and 2018, and between 2019 and 2023, 50 points, as it can be seen in the following figure (Pontificia, 2024, p. 4):

Figure 4. *Score in the area of social and civic service*

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from Pontificia.

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The gap between official and non-official schools in all these years has been on average 5.2 points, 47.4 points against 52.6 (Pontificia).

The steps of the Mexican school

One of the references that can be found in the literature about the promotion of a Service-Learning project in a public school is the research carried out by Ochoa and Pérez (2019). The authors introduced three Service-Learning projects on 117 students from three public secondary schools in Querétaro, Mexico, from which the first one was chosen.

It is worth opening this section by stating that what happens in a public school in Mexico can also happen in an educational institution in Colombia. Here we are talking about the Latin American identity on both sides, made up of the three population groups since the arrival of the Europeans, and which are connected in different proportions throughout the continent: the European, the native and the African; as Ramos points out, in terms of hierarchy the dominant one is the European, although it is not the majority (p. 121, 2003).

Regarding the Service-Learning project implemented by Ochoa and Pérez in the public school, the steps seem to coincide when Tapia (2010) speaks of three stages to follow: the first, referring to an approach to reality, the recognition and diagnosis of the problem, and the project approach; the second, to the execution; and the third, to the project closing and evaluation:

Several examples of Service-Learning

Examples of Service-Learning projects are readily apparent in the pages of educational literature. In this case, only those proposed by the Zerbikas Foundation through the publication of 60 service-learning good practices Battle with other authors, 100 good practices of Service-Learning and Young Service America of the Anglo-Saxon world will be taken into account.

Table 6. *Project examples*

Cause	Academic connection	Type of impact	Example
Nutrition	Natural / Social	Awareness	Students organize a health and nutrition fair on campus
Saving energy, water, home gas	Science / Computer Science	Awareness	Students investigate ways to save energy, water, and household gas and organize an exhibition on effective methods at the school

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Cause	Academic connection	Type of impact	Example
Literacy	Spanish / Foreign Language	Service	Students begin a reading program with peers, mentoring them
Bull ying	Social Studies / Computing	Service	Students advise younger students on school problems coexistence and the risks associated with the Internet and how to deal with them.
Recycling	Social Studies / Maths	Service	Students collect and sort used items at school for their recycling programs.
Childhood hunger	Social / Natural	Awareness	Students advocate for a statewide breakfast program.
Health care	Natural	Philanthropy	The students set up a book stand to raise funds to support research into a disease affecting children.
Local newspaper	Language / Social	Awareness	Students learn from their environment, developing critical thinking; they improve reading and writing; they organize and work in teams, developing social and communication skills.
Environment	Natural / Social	Awareness	Students promote a campaign among their peers on climate change and its relationship to world poverty, developing communication and relational skills
Education for citizenship and human rights	Chair of Peace / Citizenship / Social Sciences	Service	Students give lectures on equal opportunities and gender, overcoming conflicts
Tourist guides	Social / Natural	Service	Students are trained as tourist and historical guides

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Cause	Academic connection	Type of impact	Example
Citizen participation	Chair of Peace / Citizenship / Social Sciences	Awareness	Students respectfully address state entities to address school problems

Source: YSA (p. 5), Zerbikas Foundation (pp. 23, 26, 29, 35).

When it comes to knowing the impact an activity can have, awareness raising means educating people about a problem and inspiring them to change their attitude and behavior; service means taking practical and direct measures to address the problem; philanthropy means raising and donating money or supplies to address the issue.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the findings provided by the author of the article on her doctoral thesis applied to the José de la Vega Educational Institution in the city of Cartagena, Colombia (Vargas, 2024), there is no doubt that the most common problems among seventh grade students are the little knowledge they have about the Constitution and the codes that regulate the rights of children and adolescents, the institution's Coexistence Manual. Even the commitments on school coexistence, the environment, animal care, the phenomenon of violence in the country and peace dialogues to mitigate its impact on society.

On the other hand, extracurricular projects with a social and community character can also be used for Service-Learning, such as events, fairs, festivals, exhibitions, Olympics, bazaars, entrepreneurships, conferences, beauty pageants, music bands, participation in local festivals.

The aim of this proposal is to integrate the scenarios that occur in Service-Learning with the real scenarios of schools in the pedagogical, citizen and social participation, and institutional management dimensions. Not only this, but also to promote teacher training on the subject, such as the social and emotional student formation, the institutional management of school directors, and communication with the community.

Therefore, we are talking about the effectiveness of a proposal that is able to adapt to the sociocultural and educational realities of the environment, which not only promotes knowledge in the classroom, but also cognitive, emotional, communicative and integrative skills as indicated by the EBCC. That is, the proposal aims to train the student as an active and responsible citizen, with values of peace and coexistence, democratic responsibility and appreciation of

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differences, as established by the general educational law.

This teaching method not only brings schools closer to communities, but also integrates them in a socio-affective way, which is aligned with the causal relationships that exist between Service-Learning and EBCC, as well as its transversal scope with other teaching areas.

Finally, it can be concluded that this proposal is a repeatable experience in any of the educational spaces proposed, and that it enhances the literature in this field of pedagogy as well as the school culture of the country's schools.

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