ABSTRACT:
Recent decades have seen growing international concern about the lack of social commitment among young people, shown in their failure to participate in social affairs, their scant interest in formal politics, and their low turnout at elections.

We first outline the international framework which forms the background to our paper. This leads to a discussion of the ethical and civic education which university students receive in the context of the social mission of the university and the European Higher Education Area. The article then moves on to examine one of the most promising initiatives in this field: service-learning. We conclude with a proposal containing some suggestions of relevance to higher education. The need for education in ethics and civics underpins the whole article, since this is the key to promoting social commitment among young people.

Key words: ethical and civic education; social commitment; university students; European Higher Education Area; service-learning; social mission of the university,
Estamos siendo testigos en estas últimas décadas de una creciente preocupación internacional por el escaso compromiso social de los jóvenes, que se manifiesta en su baja participación social, el exiguo interés que muestran por la política formal y la insignificante participación electoral que ejercen.

El esquema que seguimos es, en primer lugar, dibujar el marco internacional en que nos movemos. Después se indaga en la formación ético-cívica del alumnado universitario en el marco de la tercera misión de la universidad y del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. Posteriormente tratamos de una de las iniciativas más fructíferas en este ámbito: el service-learning. Finalizamos haciendo una propuesta de algunas sugerencias para la educación superior. Está latente a lo largo del artículo la necesidad de la suscitación de una formación ético-cívica como clave para la promoción del compromiso social de los jóvenes.

**Descriptores:** formación ético-cívica; compromiso social; estudiantes universitarios; Espacio europeo de educación superior; service-learning; misión social de la universidad.

Les dernières décennies ont été témoin d’une inquiétude internationale croissante au sujet du manque d’engagement social parmi les jeunes, manifesté par leur manque de participation aux affaires sociales, leur peu d’intérêt dans la politique formelle, et leur faible taux de participation aux élections.

Nous résumons en premier le cadre international formant l’arrière-plan de notre papier. L’éducation éthique et civique que les étudiants universitaires reçoivent est discutée dans le contexte de la mission sociale de l’université et dans le secteur de l’éducation supérieure européenne. Nous examinons ensuite l’une des initiatives les plus prometteuses dans ce domaine : l’apprentissage au service. Nous concluons par une proposition contenant des suggestions pertinentes pour l’éducation supérieure. La nécessité de l’éducation éthique et civique soutient tout l’article, puisqu’elle est la clé pour promouvoir l’engagement social parmi les jeunes.

**Mots clés** : l’éducation éthique et civique ; L’engagement social ; les étudiants universitaires ; le secteur de l’éducation supérieure européenne ; l’apprentissage au service ; la mission sociale de l’université.

1. **Introduction**

_Recent decades have seen growing international concern in Western democracies about the lack of social commitment among young people, shown in their failure to participate in social affairs, scant interest in formal politics, and low turnout at elections (Saha, et al. 2007; Fraile, et al. 2007; Print, Milner, 2009)._ Though it is true that, as some authors point out (Benedicto, López, 2008) that sometimes there is an overabundance of negative or reductionist diagnostics on the lifestyles of young people, it is nevertheless important to make a few observations. For example, it may be asked if there is more social and political apathy among young people than among older people. It such a claim is doubtful, it is logical that it is worrying especially among young people. In either case, it is a fact that both the young and the old lack a culture of politics or ethics, and that lack leads to omissions in one’s duties as a citizen.

The aim of this article is to delve deeper into these matters by analysing universities as areas for civic and ethics education. The final goal is to look into the role that
a suitable education in this matter may play in evoking civic commitment among university students.

2. International Panorama

Spain’s university students seem to identify less and less with the political institutions and customs of our current markedly individualistic society in terms of values, lifestyles, and risks (Ingelehart, Welzel, 2005). The consequences of this situation range from electoral absenteeism to social exclusion or juvenile violence, to cite a few (Sloam, 2007).

Many countries have shown their concern in recent years over the impact these social problems have on political participation, national identity, and democratic citizenship (Crick, 2004; Stoker, 2006). These are some of the reasons why education is being re-examined in its ethical and civic dimension in a search for an answer or solution to many of these social problems (Kisby, Sloam, 2009), sometimes overzealously viewing education as a cure-all for every danger. Some examples of this international trend are the introduction of “civic, legal and social education” (*éducation civique, juridique et sociale*)—ECJS) in France in 1999 (Tourner, 2006); the introduction of citizenship education classes in English schools in 2002 (DFEE/QCA, 1998; Benton, et al., 2008); and the “learn and live democracy” program developed in Germany (Sliwka, et al., 2006).

Research carried out by the IEA (Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) has shown that when civic education is appropriately integrated into the curriculum, citizenship education has positive effects on fostering civic and political commitment (Torney-Purta, et al., 2001). Nevertheless, only slight attention has been paid (with a few exceptions: Ahier, et al., 2003; Arthur, Bohlin, 2005) to the ethical and civic dimension of higher education in Europe (Sloam, 2008) in the field of education and in the field of education policy.

However, in some of the English-speaking countries (notably, the USA, Canada, and, in part, the UK), the institutions of higher education spend a great deal of their resources on initiatives such as service-learning (community volunteer service integrated into the curriculum: Battistoni, 2000), and there is competition between them to be recognised as colleges with a conscience (Princeton Review, 2005). Some studies present evidence that activities such as service-learning have the virtue of improving the students’ academic scores (Colby, et al., 2003 and 2007).

In regard to its proper place in the curriculum, there is no unanimity: both courses specifically dedicated to civic affairs as well as approaches that involve the entire university institution all have their pros and cons (McCowan, 2009). In any case, it highlights the social responsibility that higher education has (Plantan, 2002).

Institutions of higher learning have the capability and responsibility of informing the political processes, and of using the resources at their disposal to solve contemporary problems. Specifically, universities have a civic responsibility for being agents of social change.
3. Civic and Ethics Education of University Students and the Third Mission of the University

With its universal character, the university contributes to raising the level of social harmony and development among persons and peoples. But does the university have a mission to educate? The question is not new in an absolute sense but is new in terms of orientation and perspective of analysis on aspects that are most related to social cohesion, or to forming identity, a national conscience, or a civic culture. This is the line of the work on historical review carried out by Mayordomo (2003).

If political disaffection is growing among young people, we must look deeply into the causes and outline the creation of our re-use of areas where they can readily express their concerns, complaints, and alternatives.

In 2003, the European Academy of Arts and Science held an interesting symposium in Barcelona, where, in the “Educating Europeans” project, particular attention was paid to the role and responsibility of the university institution in educating about European citizenship. What certainly seems clear are two points, judging from the conclusions that resulted from this event (García Garrido, et al., 2004):

- The enlightened or cultivated person in terms of education possesses a set of skills of moral and instrumental order that place that person in a privileged position to meet new challenges in the area of social harmony, and
- The university plays a vital role in developing and honing the communicative skills and common heritage of knowledge we as subjects need to participate in constructing a shared knowledge that is truly European in scope.

It is worth bearing in mind that recent studies (Jacoby, 2009; Mcilrath, Labhrainn, 2009) suggest that participation in projects of civic commitment may be related to the rise or consolidation of professional vocations linked to development and cooperation for that goal, almost always within parameters of sustainability.

This may be a good moment to remember Oser (1994) stating that effectiveness may stimulate morality and morality may encourage effectiveness. We should not forget them when the time comes to act, especially when the needs are so challengingly visible around us.

As Barber (1998) noted, it is not that the university has a civic mission, but rather, that the university is a civic mission; it is civility in and of itself, he added, defined through the rules and conventions that facilitate dialog in a community and the kind of discourse on which all knowledge depends.

If the university were not a good place to cultivate and practice civic virtues (as are schools, families, and businesses), what sense would there be to all the discourse (some fairly rhetorical) on the invaluable connection universities have with their surroundings, with community life and the needs that can become a boon to generating new ideas or designing projects of the most diverse kind (Santos, Lorenzo, 2007 a and c)?

Achieving this is, in our opinion, an educational objective: in short, the point is for people to assume their role as citizens. As a result, preparation for the job market and education for becoming active citizens are presented as the two most relevant
objectives of education in the upcoming decades and also as two of the key goals for university education.

They are sometimes presented as being at loggerheads when interpreting the third mission of universities (their social commitment) of two different kinds: one we may say more “economistic” and another that looks more at civic and social aspects. The first focuses more on the business innovation that can be fostered from the university, while the other aims more at service and commitment to the community (Montesinos, et al., 2008, 262).

Most likely, the most common interpretation is the business-related one (Vorley, Nelles, 2008, 5); this third mission is sometimes presented with an overly narrow view when speaking of the transfer of knowledge. This interpretation uses the language of patents, innovation, corporate spin-off companies from universities, interface specialists, etc. (Etzkowitz, et al., 2000).

The alternative social interpretation points the university toward commitment to civil society and includes concepts such as the university’s commitment to the community, or universities being spoken of as areas for citizenship and civic responsibility (Plantan, 2002).

These last few years have witnessed a movement that demands greater attention to the civic role of the institutions of higher learning in response to the needs of society (Kezar, 2005). In this scenario, the lack of student commitment in its diverse forms often appears in the literature and reflects the challenges that universities face when designing curricula to help develop the competencies required in society today (Evans, 2004; Bok, 2006; Côté, Allahar, 2007; Kronman, 2007; Rochford, 2008).

4. Citizenship and the European Higher Education Area

It is precisely in this field that we cannot forget the opportunity brought by the construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a framework for a new outlook on education.

At the university we would have to be able to set new areas for pursuing proposals for ethical learning connected to new ways of professional and scientific learning. The hallmark of each university program is what will give the right amount of its involvement and commitment with the goals stated in the main documents of the EHEA, from La Sorbonne in 1998, to Bologna (1999), Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) all the way to Bergen in 2005.

The civic and moral component appears in the EHEA in the conference held in Berlin, especially in the allusion to the need to achieve greater social cohesion by reducing social gender inequalities both within the nations and states as well as on the European level.

In any case, a set of documents shows a decided will to advance toward a plural Europe, whether speaking about technology or about cultural and scientific creation (see http://www.universia.es/contenidos/universidades/eees/htm). With this ingredient, the final interest is in attaining greater levels of equality and social inclusion, which means attitudes and values linked with responsibility and active citizenship.
Sooner or later, earnest talk of the EHEA leads to talking of citizenship, and that lends itself to discourse on university education, not only in terms of the professional but also of citizenship (Santos, 2005; Martínez & Esteban, 2005).

In this context, Escámez, et al. (2005) point out four models of quality at universities: quality as excellence, as fitting pre-established standards, as institutional capability of setting its goals and achieving them efficiently, and as a public service to the rights of the citizens. Needless to say, this last point is the one of interest here since it encourages us to delve into what ought to be taught, how, and for what kind of learning.

Nowadays it is clear that the university integrates domains where actions and workloads that are favourable to values education and to developing intercultural education (Santos & Lorenzo, 2007a, b, and c).

Universities are places where people learn to become citizens. Even a personal education concerned with academic and professional excellence is incomplete if it is not accompanied by developing a set of competencies related to education in democratic values of active citizenship concerned about social inclusion (Santos, 2005). The university student must be able to become involved in that world, must know how to become committed to projects in active citizenship, and must dare to change it and transform it. This is the reason civic learning should fundamentally be a matter of competences (Martínez & Esteban, 2005).

Defining what those “competences” are is a difficult task. It may be said they are complex structures of processes that people put into action to solve problems and carry out activities aimed at constructing and transforming reality.

Civic education at the university must consider three objectives directly related to the acquisition of two types of competences: some of a specific nature or competences for exercising citizenship, and others of a generic nature, or ethical competences:

- Education aimed at teaching the person to be able to develop and guide his or her way and style of life
- Education aimed at discovering and accepting that ways and styles of life that are upheld on criteria of justice, equality, and dignity are the only ones that are legitimate and suitable
- Education specifically for exercising rights and responsibilities of citizenship and for participating effectively in debates and decision-making

Achievement in the first two would involve learning ethical competences, whereas the third would involve learning competences for exercising citizenship.

Our task is, at least partly, to work together in preparing our students to develop their education autonomously in situations of social interaction. Yet that same society urgently requires participatory citizens who can produce shared living spaces that are freer, fairer, and more inclusive.

In our opinion, the possible pedagogical renewal taking place at universities because of the EHEA may provide an opportunity for civic education of university students.

We are aware that there has been an excessive increase in individualism as a way of life and as a way of understanding the world at the university as well as in society.
at large. Thus, much of the work done to promote civic commitment at universities focuses on promoting the commitment of the students through curricular initiatives such as service-learning and through extra-curricular volunteer programs for students to undertake.

5. Service-Learning and the Roles of the University

As mentioned above, the university is fully committed to extending its task beyond the traditional endeavours in teaching and research. The so-called third mission, which opens it up to tasks of innovation, enterprise, and social commitment, poses questions such as how to turn knowledge into socially useful innovation, and how to contribute to the personal development, and education in values and citizenship education demanded for proper preparation of its degrees. This is a very broad task of which we only address the last point, and even then only partially: the civic and moral education of its students.

There is much talk these days of the importance of learning ethics, of the systematic consideration of human rights, of education for citizenship and for democracy, of the forgotten role of the Humanities and other ways of approaching the goal of personal development and civic and moral education we are considering (Ehrlich, 2000; Martínez, Hoyos, 2006; Escámez, et al., 2008).

In this commitment to finding formulas for bringing values education into university studies, different methodologies are being tested, such as exercises in discussion and deliberation, research and political action projects, discussion of dilemmas, problem-based learning and cooperative learning (Colby, et al., 2003, 2007). The one that stands out the most in terms of both its widespread implementation and the results it attains is service-learning (Martinez, 2008). Not only is this methodology widely contrasted (Naval, 2008), it is worth paying attention to because of the ends it pursues: to educate citizens and give meaning to knowing.

6. First Approach to Service-Learning

Service-learning is an educational proposal that combines learning processes and processes of community service into a single, coherent, and cohesive project (Puig, et al., 2006, 22).

The meaning of service-learning becomes clearer if we compare it to other pedagogic proposals. To differentiate them, it is helpful to use the service-learning charts proposed by the Service Learning 2000 Center at Stanford University (1996). The chart below shows two axes that cross: the vertical axis ranges from a quality community service at the top to a poor quality or simply non-existent service at the bottom; the horizontal axis shows systematized learning that is well integrated with the community service on the right, and scarcely systematized learning that is only poorly integrated, if at all, with service on the left. The point where these two axes cross determines four quadrants where we can place other proposals we are interested differentiating from service learning (Furco, 2002).
7. Service Learning as a Multidimensional Proposal

Service learning is a complex proposal we present based on commentary on seven basic concepts: social needs, community service, curricular learning, participation, cooperation, reflection, and partnership (Puig et al., 2009).

Service learning begins with an exercise in analysis and criticism of reality to determine how we may intervene to improve whatever seemed incorrect to us. This methodology is not limited to detecting needs; rather, it attempts above all to engage young people in performing a service to the community. The possibilities for community service offer a rich typology: in some cases it involves helping needy individuals directly, at other times the help is for a collective, and at yet others the recipients of the help are more diffuse, such as when the task involves giving out information, protecting an environment, fund-raising or doing research.

This methodology has little in common with teacher-centred pedagogy or with expository classes where students learn and account for their work individually. In contrast, service learning is a student-centered methodology that requires them to participate as much as possible throughout the process of the activity.

Although the importance of collaboration has been mentioned above, it is worth pointing out the various possibilities of cooperation that are present in the service learning proposals as well. First, the service and learning activities should be carried out in teams. Second, the people or groups who receive the help should also cooperate. Rather than passively receiving the help, they also intervene and collaborate in multiple ways despite being receivers. And last, the possibilities of cooperation are

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Figure 1: Service learning: proposals
completed with the cooperation established between the students and the organizations providing the opportunities for service.

The next pedagogical characteristic of service learning is reflection, in the sense of reflection on what we learn and what we carry out. The experience becomes its most meaningful when we are aware of what we are doing, of why we are doing it and what it means at each moment, how we experience it, in short, if we have truly taken in what we have experienced.

Lastly, in addition to being a collaboration between people, service learning almost always requires a considerable degree of collaboration between institutions: a partnership. Many of the service learning proposals require creating bonds between centres of learning and social organizations. This aspect reveals the three-way task for universities if they want to implement service learning methodology in their courses: first, achieve the impetus from their respective university vice-chancellors and the deans of each faculty so that they acknowledge and provide incentive for gaining the involvement of their teachers; second, the creation of ties of the university with social organizations that can provide service opportunities related to the respective degree programs; and third, the creation of an inter-university network to defend this philosophy of learning, help share experiences, promote research, provide logistical help, and publicly represent everyone involved in the growth of service learning at the university level.

8. Reflections and Proposals

The horizon sketched out in this article suggests the advisability of paying attention to three aspects in teaching university students:

1. Understand community as something specifically theirs; be aware of belonging to it.
2. Have the capacity for dialogue, respect, and tolerance; skill at finding information and enforcing one’s rights, and sensitivity to the common good.
3. Be able to judge critically the information they receive from the media, teachers, family, Internet, etc.; be able to put themselves in the other’s shoes and take on and carry out whatever actions they are committed to.

A necessary condition for fostering critical citizens is to offer real opportunities to become involved in analyzing and solving immediate problems not only in the local community, but at the national and global level as well.

In that sense, education for citizenship is a responsibility of the university institution and not something merely subordinate in higher education (Naval, 2003; Repáraz, et al., 2009; Naval, et al., 2010). Most problems in society today are not only technical or scientific in nature, but rather, they require background in ethics and an ability for social analysis that are difficult to improvise. To have opportunities for action and learning, the university must consider the existence of a time and a space in the curriculum aimed specifically at that end.
Thus, regardless of the field of study chosen, it would be advisable to offer every university student the chance to:

• Awaken and enhance their moral sensitivity: prepare them better to identify ethical problems and, as professionals, avoid making decisions based on ignorance.
• Acquire knowledge on relevant values: learn minimum democratic values and important professional values as well as helping them become personally clearer.
• Enable them to take ethical decisions: the decision-making process is susceptible to teaching-learning. Anyone hoping to have a career would need to learn more about profession ethics.
• Become more autonomous: suitably deal with peer pressure and pressure from society. Education can be used to help students develop the courage to behave ethically.

In short, our proposal for education is addressed at finding a place in the curriculum and is aimed fundamentally at three ends:

1. Knowledge of the civic rights and duties of every citizen, and of students in particular, which may be called \textit{education in civic rights and duties}.

2. Becoming more sensitive by knowing more about the civic possibilities and outcomes of the chosen profession, which may be called \textit{information and education in professional deontology}.

3. Education in designing and performing service programs. This means offering chances for them to design community service projects and for them to become involved in carrying them out by incorporating service learning as a suitable methodology to do so.

To better understand our proposals of the objectives of ethical and civic education of university students, Table 2 features some of the basic rights as well as the duties associated with them, the values that match up with them and, in the last column, the objectives we suggest be set with students.

What is intended in this paper is not to give a closed proposal, but to offer a basis for discussion and reflection that can better guide the endeavours of education.

In terms of the contents, it is suggested that the education be focussed on these areas:

I. \textit{Civic and citizen education}: this involves acquiring basic knowledge such as:

a) Knowledge of the meaning of citizenship: representation vs. participation; passive vs. active forms of civic life; citizenship and service

b) Knowledge of the university community: its structure, governance, rules, the role of the students, the faculty and governing bodies, etc.

c) Human rights

d) Knowledge of social problems in the community
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rights</th>
<th>Civic Duties</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Right to information</td>
<td>1. Duty to understand how the democratic institutions work.</td>
<td>• Freedom</td>
<td>(1) Know the essential values that uphold democracy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Right to equality</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Equality</td>
<td>(2) Learn how laws regulate the various ways of behaviour.</td>
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<td>• Academic rights</td>
<td>2. Duty to know the university community</td>
<td>• Participation</td>
<td>(3) Know the structure and form of government.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(4) Be aware of the role of students: their rights and duties.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Right to information</td>
<td>3. Duty to be informed to solve conflicts in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity.</td>
<td>• Cooperation</td>
<td>(5) Know the main problems facing contemporary society.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Solidarity</td>
<td>(6) Develop the capacity for exploration to find out about one's surroundings.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Knowledge</td>
<td>(7) Know how to keep better abreast of the main arguments on the problems in society today.</td>
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<td>• Right to education integrated with society</td>
<td>4. Duty to exercise responsible participation for the common good.</td>
<td>• Participation</td>
<td>(8) Be willing to participate using their professional knowledge to try to collaborate on solving social problems.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
<td>(9) Not be limited to reflection, but be committed to helping to solve concrete problems affecting the society they live in.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Constancy</td>
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<td>• Right to free personal development</td>
<td>5. Duty of self-knowledge and personal enrichment</td>
<td>• Self-knowledge</td>
<td>(10) Learn to manage life autonomously by a process of deliberate selection.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Personal identity</td>
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<td>• Self-esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Right to freedom of expression</td>
<td>6. Duty to develop critical thinking towards the mass media and political leaders</td>
<td>• Critical thinking</td>
<td>(11) Avoid being manipulated by the mass media and political leaders.</td>
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<td>(12) Be able to discover the value of the reasoning used in discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Right to freedom</td>
<td>7. Duty to respect others (differing opinions, etc.)</td>
<td>• Tolerance</td>
<td>(13) Be respectful of the opinions, ways of life, any type of difference, etc., of others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Civic rights and duties
e) The nature of service: social responsibility, differences between rights and needs or desires. What is the relationship between community service and citizenship? Can service be compulsory? Does a state have the right to require the training of citizens or does that violate their freedom?
f) Cooperation and competition as models of community interaction: how are public and private interests of a community related?
g) Types of civic communities: local, regional, national, international

II. Deontological education: ethical questions and problems involved in carrying out a future career. This block, for example, will analyse the social, economic, etc. effects and dimensions of the chosen career.

III. Development of autonomy and decision-making, or what Martinez (2006) calls “human, personal and social education” that contributes to ethical optimization of the future degree-holding professionals as people. This is the aspect MacIntyre refers to in a recent (and not uncontroversial) article (2009, 359-362) where he writes of the importance in undergraduate education of collaborating for the students to learn to provide a whole range of answers to the question What are you doing?, which implies being aware of what we are doing, but also of what we are not doing, in a tight relationship between theory and practice, reflection and action.

IV. Participation in Service Projects: Introduce service learning as an educational model, understood as a pedagogical proposal that addresses the search for concrete formulas to engage the students in the daily life of the communities, neighbourhoods, and nearby institutions. It is conceptualized within experience-based education and is characterized by: a) student protagonism; b) addressing a real need; c) connection to curricular objectives; d) execution of the service project and e) reflection.

In short, these contents will help students become aware of their own potential as well as their shortcomings by making them more knowledgeable of their intellectual capacities, of the characteristics of their personality, of their own interests and of a progressive structuring of their value system. The final objective is for them to learn to make decisions in relation to the evolution of society today, their professional training, and the effects they may have on the common good.

Bibliography


