

## **CAMINEM JUNTS: CANCER IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

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***Francisco Pascual Soler***

Generalitat Valenciana, Ministry of  
Education

Alicante-Spain

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0774-6049>

***Immaculada Ròdenas i Marco***

Universidad de Valencia, Education Faculty  
Valencia-Spain

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9692-6044>

***Belén Catalán Gregori***

Universidad Internacional de Valencia,  
Education Faculty

Valencia- Spain

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4084-0680>

***Lucía Granados Alós***

Universidad Internacional de Valencia,  
Education Faculty

Valencia- Spain

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8620-8333>

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**Abstract:** *Caminem Junts* is a Service-Learning project in favor of children with cancer, carried out by two promotions of fifth and sixth grade of the San Roque de Alcoy school (Alicante). An educational work that was awarded the National Service-Learning Award in 2018 in the Solidarity / Human Rights modality, with which it was possible to raise awareness of two main objectives: accompanying the sick and raising money for research. In the first, it was possible to raise awareness among students and families about cancer in general, and childhood cancer in particular, and its prevention and cure were promoted. They were made more resilient in the face of this disease and they learned that they must act against this scourge, which many had touched closely, instead of being indifferent. The inclusion of recovered children with cancer on their return to school was also worked on with a daring hair donation activity by the students. And, in the second objective, it was possible to exceed the sum of 60,200 euros through cultural shows open to all audiences and solidarity campaigns. The result was a project with unbeatable personal and academic results. The best indicator of success was that of Aitana, a girl who was terrified of seeing a child without hair and who came to visit the chemotherapy room. She wrote in her educational portfolio that *Caminem Junts* has changed my life and also that of my family; I want to be an oncologist when I grow up.”

**Keywords:** Service-learning, childhood cancer, healthy habits, inclusion, resilience, mourning.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an Intervention Project in Education towards Service-Learning (ApS). This intervention proposal entitled: *Caminem Junts* is designed so that a promotion of 100 ten-year-old students from a Primary School in the province of Alicante learn about,

prevent and fight against cancer in general and childhood cancer in particular.

The ApS is an innovative educational project with social utility that integrates service to the community with the learning of content, skills, abilities and values (Puig et al., 2007; Martín et al., 2010).

In addition to different academic contents, social and civic competence, initiative and personal autonomy are developed. Empowerment, responsibility and commitment are also stimulated, and socio-emotional skills are strengthened (Hernández, 2019).

First of all, after receiving different testimonies in the classroom, the students draw up a road map to actively fight against cancer. As a consequence, they work on two well-differentiated backbone objectives: that of accompanying cancer patients and that of collecting money for research. As it is an active and significant learning process, the student body is at the center of the work as the main protagonist of the solidarity action. For this reason, when fighting for others, self-esteem is developed, achieving values that go beyond the education law, such as solidarity, empathy or resilience. The project proposes an applied learning, connected with reality, so it is a lived learning and, consequently, deeper (Mendía, 2012).

## THEORETICAL FUNDAMENT

The ApS is an innovative didactic methodology that consists of students learning curricular knowledge of a specific subject (GARCÍA-PÉREZ, & MENDÍA, 2015). However, it also aims to learn other knowledge that students acquire during their practice, such as the development of cooperative values while performing a service to society (BATLLE, 2010). In other words, the ApS aims to show help to a vulnerable group to improve the environment that surrounds

them. Therefore, pedagogical and social intentionality is combined, demonstrating (by the numerous experiences carried out) that the ApS contributes to a better learning of the contents to be studied and to a better understanding of the world in which we live (DE HEVIA, 2016).

With the present work it is intended to implement the service to the community of an Alicante town, with diverse needs, as a relevant learning resource within the stage of Primary Education.

According to Romagnoli and Gallargo (2018), the human being is a social being and learns by interrelating, which leads to an increase in emotions, however, how to ensure that this emotion in a child is motivated by learning it? With initiatives such as the ApS, the student body, in addition to working oriented, knows first-hand different realities of their environment, which otherwise would go unnoticed by them. The fact of helping others displays an increase in motivation and subjective well-being (GARCÍA, 2016). Among the positive effects of helping others are well-being (mental and physical), decreased stress and increased self-esteem. This perception that we have about ourselves affects our behavior with others, so it can be said that an adolescent used to being supportive is more decisive and a better conflict manager (LUY-MONTEJO, 2019). However, the final objective of the ApS is not only based on specific help to a vulnerable group and to the student's own motivation at a given moment, but to trigger in the students their own awareness that their own perceived well-being when they help people outside his closest circle, can be present throughout his life (RABANAL, and DE LA CONCEPCIÓN, 2021).

Ethics must be present throughout the curriculum. Thus, students must develop their empathy and forge a critical judgment

on human rights, asking questions about how to build a better society. This way, they will reflect before occupying positions that have a direct impact on society (SANMARTÍN, 2017).

In this sense, the relationship and collaboration between people is increasingly necessary due to the variety of resources, sources and communications. Therefore, the school must be redefined, open its doors to all of society and work towards the outside, since our current students are the future of our society (FURCO, 2011). The ApS offers that the opportunity to work in a network goes further; teachers, students and institutions are committed and collaborate to carry out the different proposals (PUIG et al., 2009).

According to Delors (1996), to guide the education of the 21st century, four basic pillars must be proposed; learning to think, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Traditional education is only oriented towards learning to think, on the other hand, the other three pillars open the door to an education of the human being as a person and member of a society, that is, to an integral formation that serves for a lifetime. Exactly, the ApS intends with its learning to achieve these pillars in the implementation of knowledge, teamwork, initiative capacity, communication capacity to face and solve conflicts, understanding of the other and empathy, respect for diversity, tolerance, plurality, autonomous and critical thinking and personal responsibility (PASCUAL-SOLER et al., 2014).

As has been seen after reviewing the scientific literature, the ApS is an educational proposal that combines learning and being processes. In summary, previous empirical studies such as the one prepared by Puig and Palos, (2006), show that ApS is a teaching and learning methodology, through which children develop their knowledge and

skills through a practice of service to the community. In short, service-learning could be defined as a supportive educational project led by students, whose objective is not only to meet a need of the recipients of the activity, but also to improve the quality of school learning (TAPIA, 2001). In this sense, the ApS combines learning with the provision of a service, that is, “service, combined with learning, adds value and transforms both” (HONNET AND POULSEN, 1989, p.1).

Dewey (1926) is considered a pioneer of the ApS, being his fundamental contribution to the gestation of the ApS. His pedagogical thought was based on principles such as activity, interest, experience and “activity associated with social projection”. It is a necessity that education starts from the real experience of the students (who are the protagonists), carried out collaboratively with peers and adults, and that this redounds to the benefit of the community; that is, that it is done for the benefit of the environment.

According to Batlle (2020), there are currently thousands of initiatives related to ApS around the world. The Ibero-American ApS Network, which was founded in 2005 and now has more than 70 members, is led by the Latin American Center for Solidarity Learning and Service (CLAYSS) in Argentina and the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) in the USA.

Argentina is the country that best develops ApS in the world. Since 2009, there is a regulation that prescribes a compulsory practice of ApS in Secondary Education, called “solidarity socio-community projects”. Likewise, in Mexico, since 1945 there has been the obligation of social service as a requirement to obtain a degree or university degree. And Peru obliges universities to develop their “University Social Responsibility”, with learning based on social projects. Others such as Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Uruguay also

include different networks of practices with ApS.

In Europe, however, the practice of ApS has awakened later, but little by little, new initiatives are becoming known. In this sense, there are experiences in Germany Lernen durch Engagement (learning through engagement) as the main organization promoting ApS. Likewise, in the Netherlands, the ApS is mandatory in Secondary Education since 2011, where students must carry out internships with social entities, and in the same way in Hungary the ApS is mandatory in their internships in order to graduate. Finally, in the USA, with the NYLC as a reference organization, a network of schools, teachers, students and entities has been created where information on the different initiatives can be exchanged. (GONZÁLEZ and DE FRUITS, 2021).

In Spain, the ApS is of recent creation, since it was not until the year 2000 when different initiatives related to this learning methodology began to be developed. Until then, there was only tradition in the solidarity movement, but the link with the curriculum, which is what characterizes the ApS, will not begin until 2003-2004. Today its practice is more than widespread, and it is very valuable, but not as it is not yet mandatory in our country, it is not known exactly how many ApS proposals are being carried out in our country (Batlle, 2017).

From the creation of the Spanish Service-Learning Network (RedApS), the exchange of experiences at the national level is encouraged, sharing resources, methods and knowledge between the different initiatives. Said RedApS is made up of the seventeen autonomous communities that make up our national territory. Its members come from educational institutions at all levels from primary education to university and from other institutions of a social nature (REDONDO and FUENTES

2020).

The Organic Law of Education 8/2013, of December 9 (LOE), in force when the project was carried out, states in its preamble that the student body is the center and the *raison d'être* of education, without forgetting that the Education is the engine that promotes the well-being of a country.

Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29, which modifies Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education) is a legislative document that repeals the LOMCE, Education Law of 2013, and that, as its name indicates, updates, modifies and complements the LOE: Educational Law of 2006, also includes that the student body is the center and the *raison d'être* of education. Learning at school must be aimed at training autonomous, critical people, with their own thinking. All the students have a dream, all the young people have talent. Our people and their talents are the most valuable thing we have as a country.

Based on previous empirical evidence, this study aims to achieve the curriculum, skills and values, performing a service to a social cause. In this case, the fight against cancer. The specific objectives set are the following: promote values such as critical thinking, social responsibility, effort and commitment; promote initiative and personal autonomy; develop social skills such as resilience, empathy and assertiveness; work through cooperation; improve self-esteem, intra and interpersonal intelligence and motivate students towards meaningful learning.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

This research project was developed with 98 students (46 males and 52 females) from the fifth and sixth grades of the San Roque de Alcoy school (Alicante). The students were between ten and eleven years old.

## **INSTRUMENTS**

The ApS approach is more than a methodology. It is a philosophy, a way of learning that is characterized by bringing to society in the form of a service those curricular elements that have been worked on in class (Batlle, 2020). Thus, the ApS approach is characterized by the empowerment of students, who become the center of learning, the teacher acting only as a guide.

The curricular elements of the course were linked through field notebooks, exercises, activities, mental maps, murals, exhibitions, diagrams and videos. The classroom work was carried out through different instruments derived from the use of methodologies such as the culture of thought, with The parts and the whole or Compare and contrast; cooperative work, highlighting the Aronson Puzzle; the Flipped Classroom, with viewing of videos and documentaries at home and worked on at school; the culture of evaluation, with rubrics, targets or the portfolio of evidence and reflections; but, above all, manipulative activities and real experiences were sought, many of them as hard and dramatic as necessary.

For the elaboration of the activities in the classroom, stationery material was used; iPad and field notebook; video camera; video editing program; projector and wifi; creative stuff; Recycled material; cardboard and markers; and computers and printers.

## **PROCEDURES**

*Caminem Junts* started in the classroom and also affected other subjects. In Languages they learned to write an ordinary letter and they did it with the Queen of Spain, to invite her to a concert, and with Pope Francis. Both answered the letters.

They also wrote messages of encouragement for cancer patients (relatives, friends and teachers) and written news, prepared

presentations for organized cultural events and went to countless media outlets. In Plástica, they designed solidarity material, the posters and the tickets for the shows, they worked on the photographs and auctioned off a photo of José Benito, a professional photographer from Alicante. In Religion, they carried out another project with a controversial theme entitled After Life, with which they learned to cope a little better with the subject of death and be more resilient in life. In fact, during the course of Caminem Junts, Rosalinda, a girl they met in the hospital and who could not overcome the disease, died. It was the first dueling experience for most of the promotion. In Physical Education, healthy and sporting habits were promoted with a preventive purpose. And in Mathematics they were able to make a balance of the accounts of each organized act with all that this implies.

The project covered a school year divided into three trimesters. In each of them, the two main objectives of the project were worked on: accompanying the sick and collecting money for research.

The students carried out carnage dissections to better understand how our body works and the possible diseases that can affect it, including cancer. He learned to analyze food labels and detect potentially dangerous substances on them. He valued the importance of a good diet, the negative influence of alcohol and tobacco, and they put into practice the necessary healthy habits to prevent all kinds of diseases. And, as a complement to this curricular work, they received visits from external specialists such as doctors, nurses, psychologists and other testimonials. A school for parents was organized, with the visit of a mother of an oncology girl, who related her life experience to a large number of families in the promotion and achieved very profound results. A round table was also held with the participation of a boy who lost his sight due

to leukemia, a grandfather who suffered from laryngeal cancer, two mothers of children with leukemia and a professional athlete who had an amputated foot due to osteosarcoma.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

As mentioned in the summary, with the efforts of two promotions it was possible to accumulate a clean sum of 60,200 euros to allocate them to associations that fight directly against childhood cancer. This was achieved by organizing countless cultural events open to all audiences and organizing different solidarity campaigns. In all of them it was achieved, thanks to many sponsors, that the solidarity box office was used entirely for research. The students made brochures, posters, tickets, interviews, visits to the media, wrote for newspapers, letters to collaborators, etc. Plays, skits, musicals, performances by magicians were offered, among which we highlight that of the magician Yunke, best magician in the world in 2018.

They also organized all kinds of musical concerts (Christmas, Moors and Christians Festivals, classical music, traditional Valencian music, guitar...). To promote physical activity, they also participated as volunteers in the *Trail Solidari Ciutat d'Alcoi*. They presented the events, sold material, accommodated the staff, collected the tickets, collected and balanced the accounts. They also made badges, bracelets and crafts to be able to add money with the horizon of the battle against cancer in their vision. It is noteworthy that their involvement went far beyond school hours and best of all, they dragged their family, friends, colleagues and even the businessmen of the Rotary Club Alcoy. They established a healthy and supportive lunch sponsored by Mutua de Levante, a faithful collaborator in our cause, where the 1,600 children from the school supported the cause on World Childhood Cancer Day and also raffled a shirt given by

Valencia CF.

Apart from distributing part of the final collection among the associations Aspanion, PayaSOSpital, Lola busca nueva imagen, AECC Alcoy and Solc, an amount was allocated to the achievement of different very ambitious final products such as financing part of the children's park of the oncology ward of the General University Hospital of Alicante and the full expenses of the more than sixty vinyls, by the artist Antonio Aragüez, that adorn the External Consultations of the same health center, visited daily by thousands of people. Some final products that endowed warmth and color to this hospital where all the children with cancer in the province of Alicante attend.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Oddly enough, the most important thing about *Caminem Junts* was not the collection, but the accompaniment of sick children. This is what really left an indelible mark on the hearts of the students and what has changed them as people. Visiting the school classroom of the General University Hospital of Alicante eight times to play and share time with children with cancer is something that stamped them forever. Participating and organizing, on two occasions, the national celebration of Hospitalized Children's Day in this hospital was more than unforgettable. Helping the Josep Carreras Foundation, which fights against leukemia, hand in hand with our friend Álvaro, who suffered from it as a baby, was more than gratifying. Directly encouraging acquaintances with cancer or suffering the death of a teenage friend, hospitalized for two years, impregnated them with reality. Everything together made *Caminem Junts* become a life project with capital letters.

An issue that people are unaware of is the difficulty of inclusion that recovered children

have. Patients who lose their hair from chemotherapy have many problems when they return to school. First of all they are joys, but when they have been with their classmates for a while, because of not being able to lead a normal day to day, on many occasions they end up feeling excluded from the group, especially in the primary education stage. For this reason, the students of *Caminem Junts* decided to show solidarity with those baldheads who leave the hospital for schools with the activity Without hair, but it's still me, through which the boys shaved their hair to zero and the girls donated more than 20 cm. centimeters necessary to make solidarity wigs and give them away to those families who cannot afford them due to the high economic cost.

Irene, a student who has visited the cancer children at the hospital and was afraid to go to the hospital, points out that "before going in my hands trembled with nerves, but once inside, when we started to sing I blow you a kiss I calmed down. I don't think time has ever passed so quickly." Aitana, in her reflections, states that "this project has changed my life and that of my family; When I grow up, I want to be an oncologist."

## CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained after the implementation of the project evidenced the importance of the ApS. The project was chosen as the best educational project in the Valencian Community and awarded the National Service-Learning Award for Solidarity and Human Rights in 2018. It was possible to exceed the figure of 60,200 clean euros to fight against cancer. Children with cancer were accompanied through eight visits to the Alicante General University Hospital, participation in the National Festival for Hospitalized Children and more than 60 vinyls were installed in the Outpatient Clinics

of the same hospital.

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