

## SHACKLES FOR MEMORY: PRISON, ALZHEIMER AND READING AT THE FOOT OF THE CLASSROOM IN PRIMARY

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**Abstract:** In this project, which resulted in the National Service-Learning Award in 2019 in the Human Rights/Elderly Persons modality, fifth-year Primary students provided a first human and academic service to the fifteen people deprived of their liberty who were part of the Reincorpora program of La Caixa. They opened the doors of the classroom to spend time together and promote Literature. To this end, they held different literary gatherings, with stories on the Alzheimer's theme, and round tables on life experiences, both of the inmates and of other participating people (elite athletes, the elderly, priests...). They also improved the reception floors of the Alicante Penitentiary Pastoral, with libraries of "collected" books, to encourage reading by all the people and families who use them on their temporary releases from prison. Later, as a second service, and together with the members of the Reincorpora project, the students held a solidarity day for the elderly of the Cocentaina Association of Relatives and Friends of Alzheimer's Patients, to whom they prepared a lunch, told stories, poetry, board games, and even recreated a town square to perform dances from the time of the elderly. Shackles for the memory was intended to be a space for inter-social and intergenerational collaboration in which schoolchildren participated in the work of reintegration and all together cooperated to improve the quality of life of the elderly with Alzheimer's disease. The values that were pursued circulated in both directions, they were many and very necessary, and above all it was possible to transmit a real, exemplary and human message to the whole of society, in defense of the dignity of all people.

**Keywords:** Service-learning; People; Dignity; Sorry; Alzheimer's; Socio-labour reinsertion.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an Educational Intervention Project towards Service-Learning (hereinafter, ApS). This proposed intervention was created to promote reading, enhance the social integration of people at risk of exclusion and to provide a service to elderly people with Alzheimer's. This project was carried out by a class of 100 students from ten to eleven years of age from the San Roque de Alcoy Primary School (Alicante, Spain).

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; MARTIN 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).

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 far beyond the Education Law, such as equality, solidarity, second chances or resilience. The students open the doors of the class to 15 inmates of the Fontcalent prison to carry out literary gatherings and to establish a relationship whose objective is joint service to the elderly with Alzheimer's disease in Cocentaina. 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 consisting 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 through 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).

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 his learning? 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 students their own awareness that their own perceived well-being when they help people outside their closest circle, can be present throughout their lives (GONZÁLEZ, R., & 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. Already, 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 Batllé (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.

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. Based on the education law in force at that time, as explained, the following objectives were set: Know and appreciate the values and rules of coexistence, learn to act in accordance with them, prepare for the active exercise of citizenship and respect human rights, as well as the pluralism typical of a democratic society; Develop their affective capacities in all areas of the personality and in their relationships with others, as well as an attitude against violence, prejudice of any kind; Describe the characteristics of the Spanish population and its social consequences, and fight against the stereotypes that are created in men and women, many of them fathers and mothers, who have been or are interns; Value, understand and empathize with the people

who are inmates in a penitentiary center and make them understand that society accompanies and helps them at a human, labor and social level, respecting the dignity that they have as every person; and Promote Literature in persons deprived of their liberty, as well as raising awareness of the active fight against Alzheimer's, through work in gatherings and with the creation of a library in the reception rooms.

As a general didactic objective, the following was proposed: Knowing the different types of people that make up society, especially those who have been in prison and helping in a real and direct way in social reintegration and, at the same time, fighting against Alzheimer's through prevention, accompaniment and collection activities involving most of the agents that society provides us with.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

This research project was developed with 100 students (42 males and 58 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 characterized by the empowerment of students, who become the center of learning, with the teacher acting only as a guide.

The ApS methodology is characterized by bringing to society in the form of a service those curricular elements that have been worked on in class. For this reason, these elements of the course were linked with activities such as 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, cooperative work, Flipped Classroom, scripts for oral presentations...

The evaluation was carried out through a portfolio of evidence and reflections in digital support (IPad), where all the activities carried out were recorded, as well as the deepest emotions.

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

The proposal involved carrying out an action plan to integrate into society people who were still serving a sentence in prison, while at the same time reading was encouraged through joint activities in the classroom. This project was the first, which evidenced a second main service carried out together with the protagonists of the first service, the inmates of Fontcalent, and consisted of accompanying and organizing a festive day for the elderly with Alzheimer's from AFAMA Cocentaina and raising an economic amount to solve the problems of the lack of material for the association.

The project covered two quarters of a school year. After the school Christmas holidays, the theme was chosen, an informative meeting was held with the families, the project was designed and it was carried out until the end of the school year.

In class, we began by analyzing some news from the press to detect the previous needs on which all the efforts and motivation were directed: discovering an extreme taboo subject, transmitting the social message loudly, encouraging reading among the inmates and solving the problems of AFAMA Cocentaina, which required technological material valued at 5,800 euros. To solve or alleviate these

problems, a road map and all the educational work were designed. The exercises carried out as a theoretical basis will be ignored here, and the most relevant activities that were carried out will be highlighted, all of them aimed at achieving the final scheduled tasks.

Once the action plan was sketched, the curricular contents were worked on in class through different cooperative works. Meanwhile, in the parallel subject of Natural Sciences, they were carrying out another project entitled A San Martín arrives to each pig, where they dissected a pig, studied its parts and turned it into food to hold a solidarity raffle and raise funds to buy electronic tablets for the AFAMA Cocentaina association. However, this amount did not cover the initial need of the association.

Later, the long-awaited social gathering would arrive. For the first time, the doors of the classroom and the hearts of the students were opened to receive some prison inmates with open arms and hold a discussion about Alzheimer's: The Last Sleight of Hand. Then, there was a lunch everyone participated, students, families and boarders, to move on to the next activity: the round table Something to tell. In it, the people deprived of their liberty and the guests Javi Ramírez (elite athlete ruined by drugs and gambling), David Porras (elite soccer player and coach, based on effort) and Ramón Micó (a priest who cared for his father and mother, both suffering from Alzheimer's disease), told us their testimonies translated into life advice. The students freely asked questions that had not been previously prepared, to encourage children's spontaneity.

The second dialogic gathering came just a week later with El escarabajo del abuelo Joaquín, a story that touched the soul of the hardest. On this occasion, other different inmates participated and it turned out better than the previous gathering. Later, in the second round table, the inmates from

Fontcalent, Judith (mother of a daughter with cancer), Filo (adult who had childhood cancer) and Rosa Carmen (retired teacher and prison volunteer) participated who, as in the previous activity, revealed their life testimonies and gave some valuable life messages.

The next activity consisted of visiting the Municipal Plenary of Cocentaina, with the aim of requesting permission to carry out the service for the elderly with Alzheimer's disease in this neighboring town. The occasion was used to request funding to cover the costs of the orchestra and lunch for the sick, which amounted to 600 euros.

During that week, a campaign to collect reading books was organized to make the libraries of the inmate reception apartments a reality. The students were collecting free books to be able to make two libraries a reality in the reception floors of the Penitentiary Pastoral, which is the place where inmates who leave prison live on their permits and do not have a place to reside because they are from far from Alicante.

Meanwhile, in the subjects of Spanish Language and Valencian Language, the students had to learn to write an ordinary letter. For this, it was decided that this activity was real and we wrote directly to Pope Francis to communicate our solidarity work.

The Pontiff answered by the hand of his Secretary of State, encouraging him to continue working for those most in need and for the dignity of all people. They also wrote to the magician Yunke to raise funds for two charity performances.

The project ended with the arrival of the final task, The Alzheimer's Party, in which, working shoulder to shoulder with the people deprived of liberty from Fontcalent, an unforgettable service was provided to the twenty-four elderly people with Alzheimer's from Cocentaina. On this long-awaited day to share time with the elderly, origami and music

therapy activities were carried out, Bingo was played and psychomotor circuits were made. Meanwhile, the inmates, who were taking a cooking course in prison, prepared an exquisite breakfast for everyone present. After the agape, to the sound of the orchestra, a town square was recreated to dance pasodobles. The result was unforgettable. And to end the day of service, as soon as the dance was over, the material purchased was delivered with the two full capacity performances by the magician Yunke and a nominative employment recommendation letter signed by the entire promotion was delivered to each inmate, so that they would have an easier time finding work and thus reintegrate into society with the same rights as any citizen.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The students learned about the European Union, the countries and capitals of the world, immigration, migrants, refugees, density, birth rate, mortality and population distribution. They discovered the different prisons in Spain, the types of crimes and the different sentences.

Thanks to the parallel project carried out, titled A San Martín arrives to each pig, and included in the general project, they discovered the functioning of the human body by dissecting a pig bought at a butcher shop. After studying its parts and comparing them with that of humans, they turned it into food, to hold a charity raffle and raise 1,800 euros that were destined to buy electronic tablets for the AFAMA Cocentaina association.

With the gathering on Alzheimer's: The last sleight of hand, in which the inmates collaborated, they managed to overcome all initial nerves and resistance. It turned out to be a very exciting activity where almost all the students and some adults were moved by the narration, previously worked on at home. For example, one of the students wrote in her

portfolio: “I started crying three times and look how strange it is for me.”

In the round table activity Something to tell, the students discovered that life can be very complicated if the correct decisions are not made. The activity, also very emotional, went perfectly and the day ended hoping that these people would return to the classroom as soon as possible.

The second dialogic gathering entitled Grandfather Joaquín's beetle was also very emotional when close relatives affected by this disease were remembered. For example, in her portfolio a student wrote: “I have learned that if you don't enjoy the people who love you, when they leave, you regret it.”

In relation to the financing that was requested from the Cocentaina town hall to cover the expenses of the various activities that were organized for Alzheimer's patients, which amounted to 600 euros, the requested aid was granted without any problem.

Regarding the campaign to collect reading books for the libraries of the inmates' reception flats, the result was so positive that they could not take all of them due to space problems.

In addition, 5,800 euros were raised at the box office in the charity performances of the magician Yunke, which were used to cover the needs of the association for the care of the elderly with Alzheimer's disease AFAMA de Cocentaina.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained showed the importance of the ApS for the achievement of all the proposed objectives. The project was awarded the National Service-Learning Award for Solidarity and Human Rights in 2019 and had a high social impact. It was possible to exceed the figure of 5,800 euros to buy computers, electronic tablets, printers and other materials for AFAMA Cocentaina. Libraries in the reception flats for inmates became a reality. A party was organized for the elderly with Alzheimer's. Shackles for the memory improved society and empowered a class of students in an extremely complicated issue to deal with in Primary Education. A service-learning project that catapulted the active participation of all students without exception, connected classroom objectives with real services and achieved a high social impact. A network work was structured where values such as compassion (empathy in action), forgiveness, second chances, solidarity and commitment were the main actors.



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