

Spreading of Service Learning in Spain: premises and strategies

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Historical Facts

A collective of people and social entities found Service Learning and started to see its potential in 2003 in Catalonia. And they decided to initiate a process of reflection in order to visualize how they could go about spreading this methodology in this region. In September 2005, Centre Promotor d'Aprenentatge Servei (Service Learning Center) was created and publicly announced as a network without legal entity.

The members of this network were Fundació Jaume Bofill (a non profit organization), University of Barcelona, Fundació Catalana de l'Esplai (Non formal Education organization) and Diputació de Barcelona (City Councils Network). Later on Fundació jaume Bofill was designated as a coordinator.

In 2008 Fundación Zerbikas was founded in the Basque Country by three social entities: Fundación Edex (focusing on Health Promotion), Fundación Vivir sin Drogas (On Drug Addiction) and Federación Sartu (On social inclusion). The Foundation board was composed of Social Entities, Public Administration Workers and Teachers Training Centers.

At the end of 2008, Fundación Zerbikas and Centre Promotor d'Aprenentatge Servei met with Fundación Tomillo of Madrid and started a process of collaborating and sharing their knowledge and know-how.

In 2009 Ashoka Foundation supported me with a fellowship for three years, focusing on spreading Service-Learning in Spain. As I was a member of Fundación Zerbikas and also of Centre Promotor d'Aprenentatge Servei, I became a link between both organizations.

During these years, the Ministry of Education introduced a new subject in the curriculum of Primary and Secondary Schools called Citizenship Education. Teachers recognized Service-Learning as a methodology to develop this new subject.

Spreading in a horizontal way

The expansion of Service-Learning does not consist in widening the Catalan and the Basque initiatives to the rest of Spain, because both of them wanted to grow only in their own territory.

On the other hand, we did not want to create another organization to expand, because in Spain there are many associations, federations and foundations. Thus, creating a new one did not guarantee the best spreading of Service-Learning.

The expansion started off by introducing Service-Learning at the core of every organization already existing in the regions. By encouraging organizations to find this methodology as a useful tool and at the same time, to make them realize that to spread it, you need others.



Generally speaking, we say that the spreading was bottom up approach. We tried to show to educational and social sectors that Service-Learning is a discovery and not a complicated creation. Teachers were able to recognize their own good practices as Service-Learning activities, although they developed these without strong connection between Service and Learning or without the name "Service-Learning".

In conclusion, the way we are still expanding Service-Learning today is based on three premises:

TERRITORY: Empowering every territory and involving all kinds of schools, associations, foundations, universities, Public Administration, etc., and letting them to draw up their own introduction strategy.

PLURALISM: Uniting all of these and working together as a small network and sharing leadership among themselves. And at the same time, avoiding that Service-Learning could become a private ownership.

EXCHANGE: Benefiting from exchange of resources, methods and knowledge among the different territorial initiatives in order to grow faster and better, and putting importance that territorial sharing is critical to growth.

These three premises in spreading have been useful and effective, but have limitations. In this table, it shows you the advantages and the disadvantages:

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Solid growth. ▪ Strong engagement of all participants. ▪ Flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Slow growth. ▪ There is no single authority on Service-Learning. ▪ Risk of disorder.

The three-year support of Ashoka on spreading of Service-Learning in Spain had been useful for:

- Planting the seeds of Service-Learning: training, materials, resources, contacts and etc.
- Creating the Spanish Service-Learning Network.
- Attracting municipalities.

Since 2003 the first sector interested for Service-Learning has been the Third Sector: associations, Foundations, NGO, and it has been drawing educational sector and later on, Public Administration.

Even though all kinds of innovation in education are very slow in Spain, we have many schools with community activities and social entities with educational proposals for schools. As a result, the spreading of Service-Learning was relatively easy.

Usually teachers are described as unmotivated, tired, conservative, because we have had many educational reforms and lack of resources to implement them. On the other hand, there are many teachers with high desire for Youth to overcome failures, selfishness, skepticism, consumerism, and carry out constructive projects. We have in Spain skillful and enthusiastic educators and a good tool, Service-Learning to develop their talents.

Five keys to success

It is clear that Service-Learning has made a big impact in Spain. The most important keys are the following:

1. Good foundation

It is easy to find a school with social activities or a social entity with educational activities for schools in Spain. For this reason, understanding Service-Learning was easy for schools and entities; they only need to mix both ingredients, Service and Learning, to start to develop S-L projects.

2. The mindset of innovation among teachers

The conviction to innovate in education has spread in the last years. Teachers think that old methodologies are not useful today and felt the need to do something new to change classes. Service-Learning has been perceived as an innovative tool and at the same time, it is also close to active pedagogies as *learning by doing*, thus creating confidence to launch these initiatives.

3. The reaction towards the economic crisis

The economic crisis might have provoked an increase of collaboration among people to solve problems when resources were low. And Service-Learning fits in the concept of collaboration, because it empowers people, increases self-awareness that changes are possible, stimulates civic participation and personal responsibility.

4. The joining of three elements

In a time when Service-Learning started to grow we had in Spain three different initiatives that agreed to develop Service-Learning in the same way. These initiatives were Fundació Zerbikas in Basque Country, Centre Promotor d'Aprenentatge Servei in Catalonia and Ashoka as an international organization who became interested in spreading S-L in Spain.

Had it not been the existence of these initiatives or an agreement among them, the development of Service-Learning could have been a small scale.

5. Service-Learning simply works

In the end this is another factor, much more basic than the rest: Service-Learning has been expanding because it just works. Teachers who try to develop S-L do not give up, because the academic results are positive and also S-L promotes good atmosphere in classrooms and reinforces better relationships between schools and communities.

It works in social entities because S-L provides an academic approach on activities that have been developing for years, and provides also a meeting point with schools.

On the other hand, S-L is also useful for municipalities because of concerns of high dropouts rate and lack of social inclusion, thus S-L becomes a double-purpose tool: it addresses both problems.

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