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# DIGITAL CONTENT CREATION AS A SERVICE LEARNING PROPOSAL IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Abstract

This Article includes a study of a teaching program based on Service Learning and the creation of digital content in learning Spanish as a Foreign Language course in Higher Education. The study embrace the design of a theoretical framework for the reproduction of projects such as the one described here, as well as the development of the following educational bases: reflection and critical thinking, digital competence, emotional and affective dimension, service, participation and cooperation.

**Keywords:** *Prosumact*; Critical thinking; Digital Competence; Participation; Cooperation; Emotional and Affective Dimension.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Creating new digital content by students – what we call the service offered – and targeted at the Hispanic community implies itself processes related to metacognitive learning. Participants shall also develop behaviour and skills directly related to digital communication skills. Consequently, the educational proposal supports pedagogical learning linked to critical teaching aimed at ending the separation of education between knowledge, action and values. It is a teaching project that, through Service Learning and the creation of digital content or *prosumact*<sup>1</sup> (Ríos, 2017), aims to develop knowledge learning processes and promote the acquisition of new skills.

The study is part of the identification of educational means in language teaching in Higher Education. In particular, research has been carried out on how a learning ecosystem supported by digital tools through interaction and the creation of digital content –service– can improve and facilitate well-informed and deep-learning processes.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The project is based on action research as a qualitative study method. The data was obtained through questionnaires, reflexive learning diaries, interviews, final presentations through academic written and field notes. A group of students from the *CdS in Relazioni Internazionali della Facoltà di Scienze Giuridiche, Economiche e Politiche dell'Università di Cagliari* participated in creating a service as a digital content informational on the current traditions, culture and contemporaneous events of the island of Sardinia. The content or information created as a service shall be accessible through the following link:

<https://relazioniinternazionaliunica.blogspot.com/>

A number of 19 students in the first year of the Magistrale<sup>2</sup> has been part of the study. Specifically, at the Spanish Language 2 Course – Corresponding to B1 level of QCER–.The project had the duration of 54 school hours during the academic year 2018-2019. In the field of Higher Education, the submitted proposal

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<sup>1</sup> The term is defined as the union of consume, produce and interact.

<sup>2</sup> First year of master's degree. In Italy the period of specialization usually last two years.

combines the academic study (ELE<sup>3</sup>) with the service to the community<sup>4</sup> and a given institution, the University of Cagliari and, in particular, the island of Sardinia

### 3. RESULTS

The analysis of the data identified in student quotations and declarations has produced a number of categories or labels which have also been grouped into those defined as the pedagogical bases for projects based in *prosumact* and Service Learning in Learning Foreign Language.

These are the following bases: critical thinking, digital competence, emotional and affective dimension, service, participation and cooperation. In addition, among these educational principles, there are other important elements that form part of the results of data analysis. These are, on the one hand, the distinction between the stages of the work carried out and the predominance of some of them and, on the other, the tools for collecting data which, in student reflections, have been shown to have a primary value in the project.

#### 3.1. Pedagogic consistency of the Service Learning and the *prosumact*

The study has a high degree of practicality in the context of learning theories, the Service Learning and *prosumact*. On the one hand, as Bartolomé, Castañeda and Adell (2019) argue, in the theoretical framework, we refer firstly to the epistemological perspective known as the teaching model and the perspective of the context we develop in it; and secondly to the psychological or theoretical approach of learning. On the other hand, reference is made to the project itself, which is the approach of technological design or to the design of interaction (*prosumact*) by which the process of the context of this methodological proposal has developed. The theoretical framework stresses, firstly, the focus to be paid to the central dynamism of Service Learning –needed, learning and service– to the pedagogic ones –participation, cooperation, reflection, recognition– and to organizational dynamism –partnership and consolidation– that subscribes to the Service Learning, understood as an education and ethics through action (Batlle, 2012). Secondly, the theoretical framework also contains the educational principles of what we call *prosumact*. These are autonomy in learning process, cooperative learning, digital competence, emotional dimension and evaluation.

##### 3.1.1. Service Learning's Dynamism

Of central dynamism – needed, learning and service – the service is the only element that has emerged in analysing the data. This, on the one hand, rejects one of the criticisms levelled at this type of project in language teaching. The criticism is, above all, that the idea of service that is being raised is not so clearly perceived. It appears that the product created is not recognised as a potential community information service. However, in this case, the participants in the study recognise that the service and the idea that they acquire from it have been an important source of motivation.

Three of the educational dynamics – critical reflection, participation, and cooperation– are part of the results achieved. Two of these elements, critical reflection and cooperation, are at the same time essential components of *prosumact*. Critical reflection is the quintessential nature of Service Learning projects and *prosumact*. With regard to cooperation, the essential idea of interaction within cooperation processes, such as the one proposed by this study, is being strengthened. What has been alleged to respect reciprocity in favour of social interdependence, critical thinking and reflection is reflected in the results that have emerged. It is not surprising that cooperation increases the working space or ecosystems in which dialogue, resolution of problems and the exchange of views are essential for individual and group success. Finally, participation, which is somewhat linked to cooperation, indicates that the contribution of each participant was perceived as a differential element of the project. The theoretical intuition on the impact of participants on the design structure and dynamism of the project, the impetus leading to dedication, commitment and individual constancy and, therefore, to the group, is reaffirmed.

##### 3.1.2. *Prosumact's pedagogical bases*

Among the educational bases of *prosumact*, in which we also find critical reflection and cooperation, digital competence and the emotional dimension are two of the three elements that have a greater impact on the whole project. The data analysed indicate that the participants experienced a marked improvement in the levels of the multimedia skills (Scolari, 2018). Projects such as the one presented here are a clear example of what Biesta (2009) calls a *learnification*. The fact that digital ability has been a centre stage indicates the strong learning content of the project itself. Improving the competence to access, manage and critically manipulate information is a responsibility that any educational process should include in its school curricula. Students themselves recognise it as essential knowledge, often left to informal training.

The emotional dimension was another element in a successful learning process. Students enhance the positive value that the emotional dimension has had for the whole project. Relations between members, positive

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<sup>3</sup> Español como Lengua Extranjera - Spanish as a Foreign Language

<sup>4</sup> We mean the whole Hispanic community

interdependence and the development of communication skills have shown that, when they are given due attention, they play a key role in consolidating successful work ecosystems. Recognising this dimension in a context of use of technology underlines the existence of a connection of digital technology with participants' emotions and feelings. This alliance has made it possible to address crucial issues such as identity, responsibility and the idea that digital technology can be conceived as a collective endeavour based on social relations (Castañeda and Selwyn, 2018).

### **3.2. Critical flexion as a pivotal point in *prosumact* and Service Learning projects**

There is no doubt that the critical reflection is the essence of Service Learning projects and the proposals for *prosumact*. What was indeed a discovery was the strong opinion that students had on this issue: a capacity for reflection that has always been linked to any other category that emerged in the analysis of the data.

The 'critical reflection' educational base includes various levels and types of reflection. Metalinguistic reflection and linguistic awareness are the objective and essence in the implementation of Service Learning and *prosumact* projects in language learning in Higher Education. The ability to reflect on the issue of the way in which we can reflect and raise linguistic awareness in connection with collaborative writing and analysing errors leads us fully to the processes underlying language learning. This makes the participants explain how we speak, how we use the language, how and why we use some combinations or speech structures to name and incorporate them into our baggage. This explicit element was one of the main objectives and the fact that it has been achieved is further proof of the success of the project itself. The linguistic awareness of the phases of the project has led to a marked improvement in the process of learning the languages of the participants. This is the way in which metalinguistic reflection –as a learning strategy– reinforces participants' autonomy across different lines of action: it allows for monitoring, permits a conflicting analysis between L1, L2 and FL of the learner and enables conclusions to be drawn.

Metacognition for learning development is a second element of the reflecting capacity identified during data analysis. It therefore represents clear proof that, despite the complexity of its identification, it strengthens the involvement of various skills that emerge during critical reflection work, such as the ability to apply the knowledge acquired to relevant situations. Similarly, critical thinking, inherent in human nature, is another relevant intellectual process that students have carried out and which has emerged in the analysis of the data.

As regards digital skills and the reason for their use in the project, students have thoroughly considered the need to acquire this type of expertise, as well as the training and professional value that these know-how confer. Not only in terms of instrument skills, but above all in terms of critical capacity to analyse, manipulate and understand in depth information, including socio-pragmatic, civic dimensions and learning skills. Knowing what has been done and why it has been done, being aware of the skills involved in the processes and recognising the feelings at stake has enabled them to develop the ability to learn. All of this can be collected within the so-called Transmedia literacy (Scolari, 2018) or within a range of skills, practises, values, sensitivities and learning and exchange strategies developed and applied in the context of new collaborative digital cultures. Digital skills, within the proposed action, offer a field of cultivation for writing and reading. In addition, they promote opportunities and opportunities for creation –blogs, collaborative writing and peer-adjustment, management of information sources, among others – that favour interaction.

The critical reflection, from the point of view of emotion, mood, feelings and attitude, has enabled us to know the inside and take the group's pulse. Once again, after critical reflection, introspective mechanisms have been activated that consolidate the work done. This type of factor, taken sensibly and in favour of the group, can make a difference. It is not so much the positive feeling of what a given Service Learning and *prosumact* project can produce, but that the learners reflect on each of them and have the capacity to analyse them in order to give them even greater and significant meaning.

Through critical reflection, students have been able to analyse the value of cooperative work and how they are prepared to solve the problems. Giving critical times for reflection on what makes it easier or prevents progress effectively and successfully with the project and tasks has made it possible to strengthen the validity of the cooperation activity and the positive interdependence that is being created. It is clear from the data analysed that the reflection processes have made it possible to know all of this.

#### **3.2.1. The Reflective Learning Diary**

The reflexive learning diary is, from the outset, a tool that enables both learners and teachers to know how tasks and sensations evolve. It has become clear that most of the quotations and declarations have been taken up precisely by this instrument. This confirms its role in allowing significant links between practical and disciplinary knowledge. In addition to the analysis and further consideration that we can make in this regard, this instrument primarily serves to ensure that students return to and deepen their experiences.

Another element associated with critical reflection through the reflexive learning diary is the time when it acts most effectively and can be used more effectively. It is in the early stages of implementation of the project and requires a great deal of attention from all participants, especially from the teacher. With the exception of the final report, which showed a larger number of quotations on participation, the reflexive diary was the main collection tool for the other categories.

### **3.3. Work-stages in Service Learning and *prosumact* projects**

The project has demonstrated the development of skills such as ability to interact, decision-making, both individual and cooperative, and the cohesion of the group normally present in healthy and relevant relationships in various contexts and practises of daily life. Therefore, there is a strong, strengthened relationship at every stage of labour, between consumption, interpretation, interaction, sharing, production, filtering and circulation of content as potential forms of citizen participation.

Of the three stages identified in the implementation of the Service Learning and *prosumact* projects –information’s access and management; content creation, analysis and reflection; and spreading of the service– two of them –access to and management of information and the creation of content, analysis and reflection of the language– focusses the greatest number of declarations by students. This fact shows that, both in the early stages and in the mid-term stages, the level of reflection of students in the process of deepening is clearly higher.

In the first phase, the management of access and information, digital skills and the service shall be distinguished from the other categories. It is clear that it is at the beginning that digital skills are needed for the manipulation of information and for online cooperation. In addition, the service created and its utility have reached its highest level at this stage, since the idea is now a concept that is rooted in students.

The analysis of the data clearly shows that the priority, or at least the elements highlighted in the first stage of data manipulation, lies in service, critical reflection and digital competence, while in the stage of creation, analysis and linguistic reflection, in addition to the three categories mentioned above, the emotional dimension is introduced. This shows that it is in linguistic manipulation that linguistic awareness has an essential value and that positive feelings, empathy and interdependence also play a key role.

Taking the categories rather than the stages at the centre of the analysis, we see that digital competence, service, cooperation and participation are more important at the stage of accessing and management of information than in subsequent stages. On the other hand, critical reflection, digital competence, emotional dimension and participation are more important at the stage of content creation, analysis and reflection on language.

There is a certain analogy between these three stages of work and the educational moments of Guillén and Forés (2018), which form the basis for the so-called emerging pedagogy. This report would not be so much in the design and execution of the projects, which would relate more to the structural and educational stage of our study, but rather to basic educational constructions.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

There is a strong link between learning theories and the use of language in real communication situations through a range of conceptual, aptitude and procedural content caused by Service Learning and *prosumact*. The proposed framework opens the way for more teachers and, above all, educational institutions to build and broaden new forms of citizen participation for the growth and training of students, both individually and collectively, and to promote a fairer and politically involved society. In this way, our project aims to enrich the field of open educational resources by providing the educational material created through the structuring of the theoretical framework.

It is also worth remembering that the methodological approach also covers the difficulties posed by Román-Mendoza (2018) when it expresses the need to define and implement a theoretical framework that will make the potential of current Technology for Learning an Knowledge (TLK) beneficial for real autonomy for both the teacher and the teacher.

It is intended to create useful and meaningful digital information content for the community and to promote the spread of student territory (Sardinia –Italy–, in our specific case). Although the impact or relevance of the service created on the community has not been systematically assessed, the ‘service’ analysis shows a high degree of awareness and usefulness.

The project developed in this study took into account narrative behaviour as a tool for work and reflection associated with language and information skills. The data analysed show that the participants’ perception of linguistic improvement and growth is an empirical proof. Participants show, according to their experience, an increase in their metalinguistic capacity and recognise the development of their linguistic skills and awareness.

With regard to digital skills, it can be said that the participants have improved their digital skills within the four dimensions of digital communication, that is to say, what tools we are working with, the ability to learn by doing, communicate and exchange experiences, where learning takes place and, finally, why digital environments are used for learning.

As regards the emotional dimension, the study took into account the progress of neuroscience in terms of emotion, emotionality, curiosity and attention. This emotional dimension played a central role at every stage of the project.

Human values are acquired through action and cooperation, and this is where the project has intervened: ethical values, responsibility, human relations and problem-solvable capacity have been developed during the implementation of the project, in which the teacher has played a role as a creative and facilitator of memorable experiences and profound learning. The participants have experienced a learning experience that has favoured responsibility, understanding of reality, perseverance, generosity and respect for differences.

The case presented here establishes an educational orientation for the training of competent and strategic students who can learn to learn. Above all, we emphasise the demonstration by students who participated in

the project of a critical attitude in the design, management and exploitation of learning opportunities. With the results of the study, we are even more aware that manipulating digital instruments, knowing how to be and behaving in cooperative interaction spaces strengthens the skills and competences of 21st century citizenship.

Projects in language teaching currently under way in other areas must take account of the fact that the development of student autonomy and their social commitment requires a high level of knowledge and ability to manage the mental processes of apprentices. Recognising, emotion and attitude are the structural components on which they are based. In addition, this social commitment stems from the cooperation of the institutions. Education centres are needed to measure and promote cooperation between public bodies and institutions in order to improve future lines of research, employability and territorial wealth. The competences and competences of the 21st century are recognised not only in technologies, but also in their relationship with learning, knowledge and critical and creative capacity, with the emphasis on processes.

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