



# Service-learning as a strategy to educate in citizenship

# El aprendizaje - servicio (APS) como estrategia para educar en ciudadanía

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#### **Abstract**

Educate to be an active part of citizenship means that everyone has the possibility to be part of public matters and to acquire the civic competencies. Because of this, it is essential to promote the participation of children and teenagers (NNA) in public and community matters, generating a genuine, authentic and committed involvement. Regarding this issue, the Learning Services Projects, happen to be a methodology that promotes and stimulates the participation of the NNA, putting together the learning based on the experience, the curricula and the social commitment, letting them be the protagonists who change and improve their environment. Therefore, an application of the APS Project was made with the objective to analyze the ways and levels of participation of a group of 3rd grade students (12 women and 8 men) of a middle school in the metropolitan area of Queretaro, Mexico. To gather the information we used field observation and a diary to keep a register of every event; we also used an Evaluation Rubric for APS Projects. The results showed that the

students participated in a genuine manner, this being a projective participation, because they become responsible agents of the project, making relevant decisions, activities that are the basis for an active citizenship.

**Keywords:** Children participation, School coexistence, Service learning, Secondary education, Education for citizenship, Active citizenship, Social engagement.

#### Resumen

Formar para la ciudadanía activa implica la posibilidad de participar en los asuntos públicos para adquirir las competencias ciudadanas. Por ello resulta indispensable promover la participación de los niños, niñas y adolescentes (NNA) en asuntos públicos comunitarios, generando una participación genuina y comprometida. A este respecto, los proyectos de Aprendizaje – Servicio (APS) resultan ser una metodología que promueve y estimula la participación de los NNA, uniendo el aprendizaje basado en la experiencia, contenidos curriculares y el compromiso social, permitiéndoles ser protagonistas

activos al implicarse en las necesidades de su entorno con la finalidad de mejorarlo. A partir de lo anterior, se realizó la aplicación de un proyecto de APS con el objetivo de analizar las formas y grados de participación que muestran los alumnos de un grupo de tercer grado (12 mujeres y 18 hombres) de una escuela secundaria de la zona metropolitana de Querétaro, México, al implicarse en un proyecto de APS. Se recopiló la información utilizando la observación participante y el diario de campo para registrar lo acontecido durante el proyecto

así como la aplicación de una rúbrica de evaluación de proyectos de APS. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes participaron de manera genuina, siendo un tipo de *participación proyectiva* puesto que intervinieron en todas sus fases, tomando decisiones sobre todos los aspectos relevantes del mismo, acciones que son consideradas base para la construcción de la ciudadanía activa.

**Descriptores:** Participación infantil, aprendizaje. servicio, educación secundaria, formación fiudadana, ciudadanía activa, compromiso social.

#### 1. Introduction

The proposal to educate citizens in the 21st century, based on the formation of responsible, participative and committed citizens in search of the common good, has allowed the emergence of new practices and ways of doing citizenship, away from the classic assumption that inks the citizen with the passive acquisition of rights and obligations linked to a territory. Among the new proposals, child participation is a fundamental element for the formation of the so-called active citizenship, defined as the possibility for children and adolescents (NNA) to participate in public affairs in order to acquire citizens' competences (Folgueiras and Luna, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to promote children's participation in the public affairs of their community, generating a genuine, authentic and committed involvement (Trilla and Novella, 2011). In this regard, the Learning-Service projects are proposed as a strategy that promotes and stimulates the participation of children, joining learning based on experience, curricular content and social commitment, allowing them to be active protagonists by being involved in the real needs of their environment with the aim of improving it (Tapia, 2010).

## 1.1. New Citizenships for the 21st Century

While it is true that the concept of citizenship, as it is understood today, can be framed at the end of the seventeenth century in the modern

era (Corona and Morfín, 2001), it is also true that its political origins can be traced back to the Stage of Classical Greece and from Classical Rome from its juridical aspect (Cortina, 1997), shaped by the idea of self-determination and responsibility of a subject within his community (Corona and Morfín, 2001). This idea of equality between the citizens, maintained an exclusionary character throughout the centuries, it being possible to point out the fact that in the Greek polis women, children and foreigners lacked such rights, as well as commoners and subjects at the stage of the Roman empire (Zapata-Barrero, 2001). Also, although in the Renaissance monarchic period of the Middle Ages was characterized by a growing humanism, the appearance of the modern, absolutist and authoritarian state, resulted in the submission to the will of the monarch. The concept of citizen was replaced by that of subject submitted by the physical force of the ruler (Zapata-Barrero, 2001).

In the eighteenth century, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789, allowed a change of perspective, passing from being subjects to citizens (Horrach, 2009). This revolutionary ethical project of modernity could not bring to reality the process of equality that in its beginnings pursued, because the social order was homogenized. At the moment of proposing the equality and inclusion of all individuals, at the same time it attracted the common problems of exclusion in the discourse of modernity, since the creation of a system of equality was

based mainly on a Eurocentric vision (Wagner, 2013). This not only alienated those non-Western societies, but also proposed an exclusionary effect for those who were not part of a specific sovereignty, which in turn led to a social state of marginalization of anyone who did not comply with the required status.

In relation to the mentioned above, it is pointed out that the concept of citizenship, as it emerged in the Enlightenment, is now an archaic term, limited, exclusive and in crisis, since it represents in itself an ambiguity, since it assumes in itself the relations, borders and limits of inclusion and exclusion. Factors such as migration, multiculturalism or multi-ethnicism are, said by De Sousa (2003), elements of reality that precede the classic definition of citizenship. If the citizen does not generate links based on the legal aspect with the State, he is excluded from the legal, procedural and instrumental range and finally from participation in society (Del Re, 2001). It is this process of exclusion that has to do with migration, globalization and multiculturalism leads us to think no longer in a single concept of citizenship, but in understanding and accepting the emergence of a plurality of citizenships, with adjectives that highlight the multiple components or dimensions that currently constitute citizenship: cosmopolitan, global, responsible, active, critical, socially responsible, multicultural, intercultural and economic (Gallardo, 2009).

The criticism of the classic citizenship regarding the passivity and the consequences of exclusion with respect to the so-called groups in situations of vulnerability, allows to reflect and to propose a new concept of citizenship where the fundamental element that characterizes it is to propose an active position of people who allow them to effectively influence public affairs of their interest, exercising their political and social rights, which is in short the legitimacy of the democratic system.

It is for the mentioned above that it is proposed that the concept of citizenship should be as broad and inclusive as to provide elements of duties and freedoms to all members of society, highlighting the active participation of citizens as

the key element of formation and construction of the citizenship, being fundamental for the inclusion of the NNA when considering them subjects that have the possibility to participate of the social and political life of the place where they inhabit. The latter, referring to the active participation of people in public affairs, also called *active citizenship*, is according to Folgueiras (2008) one of the fundamental keys to the construction of citizenship of the XXI Century.

In contrast to classical citizenship (Marshall and Bottomore, 1998), which is achieved through the acquisition of rights and obligations linked to a territory, considered as private and passive (González, 2001) in that it grants individuals personal and individual rights without this forcing it to participate in political community public life, active citizenship is a process based on the active exercise of people because it is not necessarily linked to a legal status, but rather to a sense of belonging to the community: this means the opportunity to participate in public affairs and acquire citizenship skills (Luna and Folgueiras, 2014). That is why the participation of children is of paramount importance for the configuration of democracy and for its training process as active citizens. Educating for democracy involves empowering students to actively participate in all spheres of political and social life. Therefore, it should be noted that there is no democracy without the active participation of citizens (Bolivar, 2007), which at the same time represents the foundation of *active citizenship*, understood as a social construction not necessarily linked to the acquisition of rights granted by the state through the fulfillment of a certain status, that is, active citizenship is related to a sense of belonging and collective participation that allows the acquisition of citizenship skills necessary to develop in the public space (Luna and Folgueiras, 2014).

It is necessary to recognize in the participation of the NNA the basic element for the construction of an active citizenship that allows them to participate, de facto and as right, as citizens committed to their community, regardless of age or individual characteristics.

Based on the ideas above, the work presented here was carried out, whose objective was to analyze the degrees and forms of student participation through a strategy of participatory pedagogy such as Learning-Service. Values, at the same time the strategy to assist in the formation of citizens.

### 1.2. The training of active citizenship in school

La formación de la ciudadanía activa tiene un componente fundamental en la participación genuina que llevan a cabo los NNA, por lo tanto, el aprender a participar debe ser un elemento indispensable la formación ciudadana proporcionada en los centros escolares.

According to Latapí (1993), citizen education is a mandatory task of the State, being the reflection of the interactions between members of society, a situation that in the school is translated as the processes that day by day students live in classrooms.

At the same time, educating or training for citizenship represents an indissoluble correlation between the purposes of the educational system and the political and economic conditions of a country, which leads to assuming a political intention within the educational content, since it is through the school where the State has one of the first direct contacts with the inhabitants of the country.

Within educational policies, citizenship education has been taught under different pedagogical models and under different curricular types (Reimers, Cox and Jaramillo, 2005). At the moment the efforts to teach an active democratic citizenship, combining knowledge, skills and attitudes, stand out as the base of the so called citizen competences (Reimers, C, et al, 2005).

These citizen competences would be directly related to an educational proposal aimed at developing an active citizenship (Egea, A., Tey,

A., and Prats, E., 2014), a cross-cutting approach that crosses the juridical and emotional view of citizenship. At the same time, it is also pointed out that the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) proposes as one of the axes of formation of the subject of Civic and Ethical Formation that of citizen education (SEP, 2011a), based on "A democratic political culture that seeks the development of critical, deliberative, entrepreneurial, committed, responsible, supportive, willing subjects to actively participate "(SEP, 2011a, p.19), which implies building citizenship as civic, social and Political action, emphasizing participation as the essential component of the construction of citizenship (SEP, 2011a).

In short, what is proposed is the appropriation of social competences through the active participation of students, seeking also that students are aware of their rights to participate in an inclusive, equitable and supportive manner, while declaring that it is necessary for students to understand and appreciate democracy (SEP, 2011b).

It is important to point out that active participation must be signified as a main characteristic of citizenship, being one of the main components to be developed in the education systems, because this type of participation generates citizens committed to their community, regardless of age or identity characteristics of each of person, recognizing in children's participation the ideal means by which children can become an active part of the collective to which they belong.

However, despite the fact that child participation is proposed as the ideal medium for the construction of citizenships in formal education, the use of official structures has not made possible the learning of citizenship and the appropriation of concepts such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Bolivar, 2007). Formal education, which represents an important area of the socialization of school-age subjects, has not been able to distance itself from the concept of passive citizenship, being until now only a way of transmitting knowledge of certain contents (Zapata-Barrero,

2001), while children's social participation, which includes being involved in the tasks and needs of the community, is practically nil (Santos Guerra, 2003). This leads to the conclusion, according to Reimers et al. (2005) that the curricular plans of the State reflect "a traditional vision of citizenship associated with the knowledge of public powers and the formal exercise of voting in representative democracy. There are serious deficiencies in this area "(p.8).

Therefore, the school has been limited in the teaching of citizenship due to the traditional way in which the citizen training has been proposed for its learning. The formal education presents flaws and ruptures when trying to systematize the training knowledge of the citizen and at most, what the student learns are theoretical and non-practical knowledge, in addition to the fact that participation of students is limited to the imposed and ordered by teachers within the classroom, dissociating theoretical knowledge from practice.

Although it should not be only in the curriculum where the efforts to teach citizenship are focused, it is necessary to act directly in the space and social context where the school is inserted, which implies to participate directly in the community in activities aimed at its improvement (Bolivar, 2007), turning student involvement with the community as one of the objectives of education for citizenship.

In order to know the extent to which the NNAs carry out an authentic participation, different authors have proposed the revision of the participation, graduating the levels of the same, taking into account the role of the children, as well as the role that the adults play in the process. For this work, the typology of Trilla and Novella (2011) is adopted, who propose four broad classes of participation:

 Simple participation: corresponds to the first and most basic form of participation. Is to perform activities in the role of spectator, without being able to influence the outcome of the action or process. The children are incorporated into the activity,

- organized by an adult, where the important thing is that they know how to follow the instructions.
- Consultative participation: where it supposes to listen to the words of the subjects. It is a type of participation in which individuals are asked their opinion on matters that directly or indirectly concern them.
- 3. Projective participation: where the subject is not a simple user, it becomes an agent making the project where he is acting. This type of participation implies that the NNA take action, being an action planned and executed by the children themselves, who take charge of starting, executing and developing the project.
- 4. Metaparticipation: the subjects themselves request, demand or generate new spaces and mechanisms to participate. "The objective of participation is participation itself" (Novella and Trilla, 24, 2014).

The above typology is useful for observing how the participation of girls and boys develops and to evaluate the strategies that have this purpose. In order to encourage the participation of children in activities that allow them to be linked to their community and to carry out activities of political participation, a strategy n has been proposed for the formation of citizenships, the commitment of the students with the service to the community and their involvement with the academic content of the school; this methodology is known as Learning-Service (Tapia, 2010).

According to Puig and Palos (2006) it is not possible to find a definition of Learning-Service (APS) that brings together the different theories, purposes, tendencies and objectives that, throughout the history of its evolution, that concept has had. However, according to Tapia (2010) from a general point of view, the Learning-Service are specific experiences or programs developed by a group of children or young people in the context of formal or informal education, being a

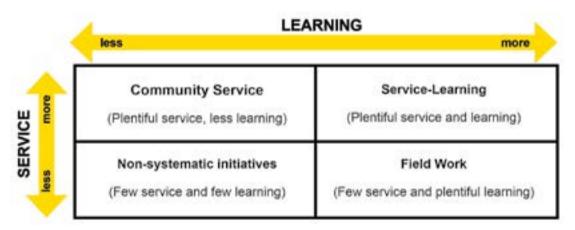
pedagogical proposal and away of intervening in the social (Tapia, 2010).

The APS is composed of two elements that have an intimate relationship: learning and community service (Puig, 2014). According to Puig (2014) the APS is not only a strategy that allows to acquire more and better learning; Nor are they just volunteer tasks carried out by students to raise awareness of their reality. APS encourages student learning through active participation in community-based experiences through a structured and intentional project (Puig, Batlle, Carme et al, 2007). Thus, the methodology allows the student to become involved with the recipients of the service he/she performs, recognizing their

needs and the reality in which they live, which would not be possible to fully know the activities carried out in the classroom (Folgueiras, 2008). For this reason, APS becomes a strategy that links learning with service but with clearly delineated objectives, with structured activities and with a pedagogical intention oriented to citizen training.

Considering the two elements mentioned above, learning and service, have served as a basis for the proposal that Tapia (2010) retrieves from the Service-Learning Center 2000 of Stanford University, with the intention of deepening the differences between the educational activities that can be developed in the community context.

Figure 1 Learning-service quadrants. Source: Service-Learning 2000 Center, Service-learning Quadransts, Palo Alto, CA, 1996, adapted by Puig et al (2007).



As can be seen in figure 1, the vertical axis indicates the lower or higher quality of the solidarity service that is offered to the community, while the horizontal axis indicates the greater or less integration of the service to the learning that is promoted.

According to Puig and Palos (2006) the APS presents six desirable characteristics that should be found in the projects, which are:

1. APS is an appropriate strategy for formal and non-formal education, valid for all ages and applicable in different time spaces.

- The APS intends to carry out a genuine service to the community that allows learning and collaborating in a framework of reciprocity.
- APS triggers systematic and occasional processes of knowledge acquisition and life skills.
- 4. The APS is pedagogy of experience and reflection.
- The APS requires a network of alliances between educational institutions and social entities that provide services to the community.

 APS impacts on personal development, changes in the educational and social institutions that drive it, and improvements in the community environment that receives the service.

It is for the above that, with the intention of integrating the formation of citizenship, the children's participation in the school curriculum and the relationship with the community in a single educational project, the pedagogical methodology of the Learning-Service is proposed, which according to Martín (2009) aims to promote the participation of children and young people in activities that involve them in the public life of their community, in order to encourage the training of active and entrepreneurial citizens.

The implementation of the APS project allows students to become interested in community-based activities while learning curricular contents of the educational level to which they belong, making possible the training of active citizenship, because the students put in play skills and knowledge that allow them to directly influence the public life of their community.

#### 2. Methodology

The present work had a qualitative approach, it is a case study with an exploratory-descriptive character, and was based on the following objective:

To analyze the forms and degrees of participation that the students of 3° of secondary school show, starting from the implementation of a project of Learning-Service, with the purpose of generating their involvement in the public affairs of their community.

#### 2.1. Population

The population consisted of 30 students (12 men and 18 women) of 3rd degree of secondary of a public school of the metropolitan area of the city of Querétaro.

#### 2.2. Instruments

In order to assess the implementation of the APS project, participant observation was carried out during its execution, and an observation guide based on the type of participation proposed by Trilla and Novella (2001) was used.

Also, a rubric was applied for the self-evaluation of Learning-Service experiences, which is a tool that allows to collect in a systematized manner the information of the APS experience in order to improve the projects (Puig, J., Martín, X., Rubio, L., Palos, J., De la Cerda, M., Gijón, M., and Graell, M., 2015). The rubric is divided into two dimensions: dynamism and levels.

The dynamisms are pedagogical elements that are organized according to objectives, which form, in a global manner, the experiences of APS (Puig et al, 2015). Twelve dynamics are distinguished for the analysis of APS experiences, which in turn are grouped into three basic, pedagogical and organizational sections (Puig et al, 2015). The basics point to the fundamental elements that cannot be missed in an APS experience. The pedagogical ones are those that approach the elements of training that form the educative proposal of the project. Finally, the organizations deal with the logistical aspects of the institutions involved in the projects (Puig et al, 2015).

#### 2.3. Description of the project

The objective of the PHC project was for the students to detect a need in their community and to propose a project to solve the problem. For the above, the five phases proposed for the Learning-Service projects (Tapia, 2010) were used, using 22 sessions of 45 minutes each, as follows:



Figure 2 Sessions worked during the project based on the stages of Learning-Service



Figure 3. Stages and activities carried out in the Learning-Service project. Source: own elaboration

Stages	Sessions	Activities
Motivation	2	Cohesion and group knowledge activities were carried out with the intention of getting to know the students, as well as informing them about the activity to perform.
Diagnostic	3	The tool of social cartography was used which allowed to visualize, discuss, dialogue and recognize, points of interest and problems in the reality of the community. This technique allows recognizing the ways in which individuals identify with a particular area to which they consider their own, meaning it in different ways, making it their own, which makes it possible to observe the sense of belonging to their community.  The students took photographs of the spaces of their school that they wanted to modify, and because the students were also asked to diagnose a need in their community, they were asked to write in their notebooks what they would like to change or improve in their community. Finally and through a vote conducted by the same students, they decided to intervene in the problem of obesity and overweight in their community.
Design and Planning	9	From the detected thematic, the students designed a project by means of which they could spread the information that they had just obtained. Thus, the students were divided into small teams which had assigned an activity: assign the name of the project, recognize the problem, propose the objectives, the purposes, the activities to be done, the people who could help, the places to develop the project, the resources, the ones responsible and time of accomplishment. For the implementation of the project, the subjects of Tutorings, Civic and Ethics Training, History and the Food Conservation Workshop were linked. The teachers, who intervened in the project, knowing the problem that the students had detected, were given the task of linking the practice with theory.
Execution	6	The students decided to present the information gathered through the liaison with the school subjects through leaflets, posters and a radio program, where they explained the origins and consequences of obesity and overweightness, resuming the use of the dish of good eating and drinking well. Thus, the students were distributed in teams responsible for making the brochures and posters, as well as systematizing the information to create a script for a radio program.  The dissemination of information was carried out both at school and in the community through the delivery of brochures and the placement of posters at school and in the most representative public places in the community.  Likewise, the students went to the "Inter-cambios" radio program of the Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro
Closure and Evaluation	2	In order to evaluate the ideas, grades and forms of participation of the students in the project, the questionnaire on child participation was applied again and the information obtained from the participant observation and the field diary was systematized, as well as applying the rubric of project evaluation of APS.

#### 3. Results

As described in the instruments section, an evaluation rubric was applied for project analysis. The twelve dynamics included in the rubric were

jointly evaluated by the group that participated in the implementation of the project: the researcher, the four teachers who participated and the school principal. Each of the dynamics was evaluated in a particular way by the members of the evaluation group assigning a rating that ranged from one to four, one (1) being the lowest level of involvement until reaching four (4) corresponding to a higher participation in the project. For each dynamism, the members of the group set a qualification in a personal way to later be discussed in a group

manner with the intention of reaching a collective consensus in which all were in agreement with the proposed number.

Thus at the end of the evaluation the dynamisms were valued as follows:

Chart 1: Evaluation of the dynamism of the Learning-Service project

Basic Dynamisms	Evaluation of the levels	Results
Needs	3	Decided. The participants, along with the educators, decided the needs they want to act on, through the analysis of different problems and the choice of one of them.
Service	3	Complex. A long-lasting service that has allowed to acquire experience and skill in the performance of tasks of considerable complexity, the implementation of which involves high demands and involvement.
Meaning of service	3	Civic. The Service responded to a need of the community whose social dimension the participants are aware.
Learning	4	Innovative. The apprenticeships were acquired from a research activity, were related to the curriculum and were directly linked to the service to the community.
Pedagogical Dynamisms	Evaluation of the levels	Results
Participation	4	Led. The participants became promoters and project managers so that they intervened in all their phases, deciding on the different relevant aspects.
Team work	3	Cooperative. It allowed for an interdependent work process between participants in a collective project that needed to articulate complementary contributions to reach a common goal.
Reflection	3	Continuous. In addition to having moments and reflective tasks, participants carried out reflective exercises during the entire project.
Recognition	2	Deliberate. The educators organized activities to positively reinforce the work of the participants and to celebrate the completion of the service.
Evaluation	2	Intuitive. In order to evaluate, educators simply observed, without defined criteria or indicators, the attainment of certain general learning objectives, which can be accredited
Organizational Dynamisms	Evaluation of the levels	Results
Partnership	3	Agreed. At least two organizations - one educational and one social - jointly agreed on the conditions for implementing a service-learning project designed exclusively by one of them.
Consolidation	1	Incipient. Service learning is known because of a project that is already carried out by some educator or because of the presentation of an experience from another center.

In order to present a clear and global image of the evaluation by means of the rubric, it was decided to show the results by means of the spider chart, which allows the visualization of the obtained results for each one of the evaluated dynamisms, allowing observing the level of development achieved (Puig et al, 2015).

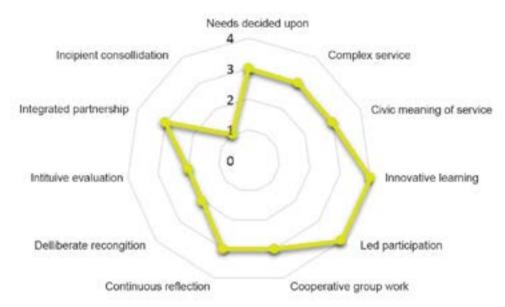


Figure 4: Image of the results of the application of the evaluation rubric of the APS project.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

From the analysis of results presented in figure 4, the level of qualification received by the dynamism of learning and participation can be observed, both in level 4.

With reference to the dynamism of learning, it should be noted that the teachers commented on the fact that the students had more easily understood some themes and contents that were revised in the school year, linking what was learned in classes with the solution of the problem in the reality. It also highlights the dynamism of participation, where the maximum was also obtained in the assessment by levels. From the students' involvement in the project, participation was classified as projective because the students became agents responsible for the project, intervening in all phases and taking decisions on all relevant aspects of the project (Puig et al., 2015). The actions carried out by the students report their passage from simply giving an opinion, to taking action, being planned and carried out through the actions that the students themselves proposed (Novella and Trilla, 2014). The latter is part of the so-called projective participation, in which students "become active agents and develop the project" (Novella and Trilla, 2014, p.23).

This confirms the results of the participant observation carried out during the process, that is to say, it was possible to identify that the students' involvement occurred in a gradual manner, increasing from the stages of the Learning-Service project, due to the fact that they were performing increasingly complex activities, which required them to put into play the learning and school knowledge, citizenship skills and the sense of service. These components had repercussions on decision-making and responsibility, from a simple participation, at the beginning of the project, to a projective participation (Trilla and Novella, 2011) in the design and execution stages of the project. Students actively participated in the service experience while reviewing contents of the subjects, performing the activity according to the interests they expressed in the diagnosis of the detected need. Although the project was initiated by adults, in this case at the request of the school's management, the teachers and the researcher, it was the students who led the project, detecting the need

in their community, agreeing to to design a plan of solution of the problematic and finally, carried it out until its last stage, always in agreement with what they themselves had proposed. The obtained results from the execution of the project allow us to affirm that participation is an educational principle (Novella and Trilla, 2014), which implies the development of social and political competences which allow the critical reflection of the context in which we live (Chaux et al., 2004; Hart, 1993), fosters critical sense and personality in the students (Martínez and Martínez, 2000) makes it possible to learn democratic values (Puig, 2009; Trilla, 2010) at the same time as the training of active citizenship (Cabrera, 2002, Luna, 2010).

Therefore, it is concluded that the implementation of a Learning-Service project allows children and adolescents to live meaningful experiences of citizen training and community service, enabling them to participate in an authentic and real in public affairs which are their responsibility, which has a positive impact on the students' citizenship, because it allows them to participate genuinely in the public affairs that are their concern, which is the basis for the construction of the active citizenship.

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