



Building on
Linguistic and
Cultural Diversity

Principles for service-learning towards linguistic and cultural diversity in higher education



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Abstract	This document presents the foundational principles outlined for service-learning in higher education following the BOLD round tables and questionnaires. These guidelines provide a framework for integrating service-learning initiatives that not only enrich academic experiences but also actively engage with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
Keywords List	Service-learning, linguistic and cultural diversity, design principles
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Table of contents

Introduction.....	4
What is service-learning	4
Role of service-learning in European HE and teacher education in particular	5
Service-learning in European higher education	5
Service-learning in teacher education	6
Link between service-learning and the Sustainable Development Goals.....	8
Results of the BOLD round tables.....	9
Design principles for service-learning activities towards linguist and cultural diversity om higher education	10
1. Meet actual real needs of stakeholders in relation to linguistic and cultural diversity..	10
2. Partnership	11
3. Reciprocity	11
4. Defined goals	11
5. Link to Curriculum	11
6. Civic learning	12
7. Learning in Real World Settings.....	12
8. Students´ active participation.....	12
9. Facilitate systematic Student Reflection	12
10. Ensure support and coaching for students.....	12
11. Offer adequate time frames	13
12. Include evaluation and documentation.....	13
13. Values transdisciplinarity.....	13
14. Sustainability	13
Sources	14

Introduction

The aim of the present deliverable is to propose main design principles for service-learning initiatives in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe. The overarching work package that resulted in this deliverable was intitled “Landscape analysis and social action principles for promoting linguistic and cultural diversity”. Its specific objective was to enhance HEIs capacity building in social action through innovative learning and teaching practices promoted via modular course designs. The work package, that also included mapping 58 social actions across 5 European settings and carrying out 8 round tables with relevant stakeholders, feeds into the general objective of the BOLD project which is to support civic engagement and active citizenship of Higher Education (HE) staff and students through the development of competencies leading to social action.

The BOLD project is carried out by the following six partners:

- University of Aveiro, Portugal
- Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain
- Universite d’Aix Marseille, France
- University of Hamburg, Germany
- University of Groningen, The Netherlands
- Web2Learn, Greece.

We're a collaborative team

Distributed by 6 individual points in Europe: Aveiro, Madrid, Marseille, Hamburg, Groningen and Greece.



What is service-learning

Service-learning (SL) is an experiential educational method in which students engage in activities that address real human, social and environmental needs from the social justice perspective, by integrating community service with the curriculum to enrich learning in any degree, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities through action and critical reflection (EASLHE, 2021).

Service-learning is a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995, p. 112).

Role of service-learning in European HE and teacher education in particular

Service-learning in European higher education

In 2017, the European Union published the Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education, in which it calls on universities to counteract the growing polarization of society and mistrust of democratic institutions by engaging more actively with the communities that surround them and promoting social inclusion. This document challenges higher education institutions to “not be ivory towers, but civically conscious learning communities connected to their communities” in which students develop skills through activities based on real problems, and in the work volunteer and community. In Europe, much has been done in relation to the development of civic engagement in higher education, but much remains to be done. Educational practices, such as Service-Learning, that integrate community service into the curriculum, are necessary to improve learning, develop civic skills and transform the community. For that, higher education institutions should develop programs that promote such practices.

If in Europe more and more communities need actively committed and democratic citizens who advocate for social justice and use their energy and talent in promoting initiatives for the construction of a society with possibilities for a better future, the University must not remain oblivious to these objectives. The challenge for European higher education is to reconsider its mission: to educate students for a life as responsible citizens, instead of training students solely for a career. Its function must be to educate competent professionals connected to the needs of the community. It is necessary to combine academic rigor for the development of professional skills with social commitment. In this way, the new university will connect theory with practice to face social problems. (Aramburuzabala, 2022).

For this, the most appropriate pedagogical model is experiential learning, which allows students to connect practical experience with the training that is given in the classroom, in an area that is outside their comfort zone. But, how to implement these experiences? Bringing the university student closer to social reality can be done through various techniques. In order to respond to these needs, in the last decades of the 20th century, European universities launched volunteering and international cooperation activities in a fairly general way. Since then and up to the present, these solidary practices not linked to the curriculum have received institutional support in numerous European universities, where there are units dedicated to these practices, funds are assigned to them, and the activities usually have credit recognition (Hoyt, 2014).

Another proposal, which emerged in some European universities at the beginning of the 21st century with a social justice approach, is Service-Learning, a methodology that goes beyond the walls of the university connecting with the community and its needs, and contributing to

improving society and, specifically, the lives of the most vulnerable people, but also connecting theory with practice to improve learning.

When Service-Learning arrives in Europe, it is already consolidated in higher education in other regions of the world, where not only projects are developed, but there are structures inside and outside the university that support and promote these actions (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019). The first decade of the 21st century was characterized by the silent work of individual teachers using Service-Learning in some universities, mainly in Ireland, Germany and Spain. In the second decade they began to create networks in order to share experiences and research. Then national networks such as Campus Engage (in Ireland), the Network for Social Responsibility in Higher Education (in Germany), and the University Service-Learning Network (in Spain), arose. The European Association for Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE) was created in 2019. The Association houses the European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EOSLHE), that has gathered 154 Service-Learning experiences in 20 European countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Ukraine (<https://www.eoslhe.eu>). In addition, 10 national networks in European countries have been founded since 2009: in Austria, Finland, Flanders, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

The situation is very diverse, although the use and research of Service-Learning is growing in all the countries mentioned. While some countries are at the critical mass construction phase, and others have already passed it and are making progress in the institutionalization process, in some States there is no evidence that this methodology is being used (Cayuela, Aramburuzabala & Ballesteros, 2020).

Institutionalisation of Service-Learning is a multifaceted process that integrates civic engagement values into higher education curriculum of an institution so that SL becomes part of the culture of the institution. It implies the inclusion of SL in the strategic plans of the institution, to provide resources needed to support the use of this methodology, including a SL office, staff, funding and space, training, faculty rewards, credit recognition for student participation, and a program evaluation. In Europe, more and more universities are creating formal structures for promoting and supporting the use of this methodology. These centralized service-learning units are also creating networks, such as the Madrid Network of Service-Learning University Offices (<https://blogs.upm.es/tellus/2022/04/27/red-madrilena-de-oficinas-universitarias-de-aprendizaje-servicio-aps/>)

Service-learning in teacher education

Teacher education is one of the fields in which service-learning has been a pedagogical resource. In the early 1990's a variety of studies indicated that SL appeared to have a positive impact on the development of competent in fostering competent professionals with commitment and empathy for others. Some of these studies offered recommendations for incorporating SL into teacher education curricula.

The 1998 Eric Digest report on the subject also informs achievements related to the participation of student teachers in SL programmes. Students developed skills in planning, communication with parents and representatives, improved self-esteem and self-efficacy, positive attitudes towards participation in community activities, and increased social engagement.

Early studies, like the review of the field done by Root, Callagan and Sepansky (2002) document a number of qualitative studies that have found links between SL and the development of competencies and dispositions necessary for effective teaching. They highlight the development of sensitivity to diversity issues and commitment to teaching. In extensive quantitative research conducted by the authors with a sample of student teachers from six SL programmes, they found that a significant percentage of participants report changes in their views of teaching and students as a result of the experience.

These authors synthesise the findings into three aspects on which SL appears to have had an impact. Firstly, the development of *teacher efficacy*, which they define as the teacher's belief in his or her ability to influence student learning achievement. This deserves special consideration, as it indicates the impact of SL on the teacher's representation of himself/herself and specifically in the field of beliefs, which shape his/her implicit theories about what he/she can do and the decisions to be made. A promising aspect for teacher training is that beliefs seem to be aspects of human cognition that are particularly difficult to influence (Marrero, 1993) and that it is possible to modify them in the direction referred to through the experiences of SL.

The second finding of the authors cited above was an *increase in commitment to the teaching profession*, understood as the psychological attachment of the teacher to the teaching profession. The third aspect was the *commitment to incorporate and participate in SL activities in their future professional activity*. SL experiences seem to be related to teachers' role as promoters of such activities when they enter the profession upon practising as pre-service teachers.

All of the above points to SL as a valuable resource in teacher education. Buchanan, Baldwin and Rudisill (2008) comment on this issue as follows:

Through service-learning experiences, student teachers learn to be reflective practitioners, sensitive to community-based issues. They learn to critically reflect on their own thinking, learning and practice while working with children in concrete contexts (p. 30).

When considering the relationship of SL to aspects such as engagement, self-efficacy, changes in perceptions of other cultures and revision of biases, it is apparent that SL impacts on the student's developing representation of their teaching role (Root, Callagan, & Sepansky, 2002; Tinkler, Tinkler, Reyes & Elkin, 2019) and their axiological frame of reference. SL can be seen as a viable resource to provide experiences that facilitate future teachers' reflection on the ethical aspects of the profession and their ethical aspects of the profession and their positioning with regard to their professional work.

In recent years, the social justice perspective on SL has been developed. Cerrillo (2021) points out that teacher education needs to be conceptualised as both a learning problem and a political problem with an emphasis on issues of equal access and social justice in education. The exposure offered by SL and reflection encourages future teachers to critically examine issues such as racism and equal opportunities.

Research on the topic is consistent in highlighting that SL in teacher education programmes has the potential to educate and engage students in critical debates about issues of power, privilege and social justice and how these issues are evidenced in schools (Iyer, Carrington, Mercer & Selva, 2018). We also know that for SL to be effective in changing attitudes and practices of prospective teachers, SL activities must facilitate reflection on how society, and schools in particular, function to maintain social inequality (Winterbottom, Lake, Ethridge, Kelly & Stubblefield, 2013; Franco, 2000).

Link between service-learning and the Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a landmark transformation by assuming an ambitious project with a universal vision, common principles, an implementation strategy, and a global review framework involving 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eradicate poverty and enhance sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

Within the scope of sustainable development, one of the most significant debates concerns the need and urgency to incorporate the SDGs in education and, more specifically, in higher education institutions, because universities are key institutions expected to intentionally promote their achievement. However, in order to reach the SDGs, it is necessary to change the academic paradigm, implementing pedagogies promoting students' agency and learning outcomes likely to contribute to the stimulation of students' motivation and critical thinking regarding the area of sustainable development (Ribeiro, Miranda, Themudo, Gonçalves, Bringle, Rosário & Aramburuzabala, 2023)

Higher education is called on to reflect on the SDGs in its programs, to develop proposals that integrate sustainability into curricula, and to take the 2030 Agenda into account. However, it is not sufficient to promote the acquisition of knowledge on sustainability; higher education must also facilitate the use of methodologies as models of sustainable development for students. One of these methodologies is service-learning: a pedagogical strategy that engages students in service, and a means of education about, for, and from sustainability that complies with the principles of sustainable development in higher-education environments. Therefore, it can be concluded that, as well as an educational tool for sustainable development, service-learning is an intrinsically sustainable educational action. (Aramburuzabala & Cerrillo, 2023).

Service-learning not only facilitates the acquisition of knowledge about sustainability and contributes to the improvement of communities, but the methodology itself is a model of sustainable development for students as it is intrinsically sustainable: through service-learning, students and teachers do not simply reflect on sustainability, but develop in practice work for social and environmental sustainability in a specific area in which they effectively and realistically improve the state of what they work for and promote, to some extent, sustainable development (Aramburuzabala, Cerrillo and Tello, 2015).

From the perspective of sustainability, service-learning would be a more powerful tool if it worked with an explicit focus on sustainable development, guiding all its phases, from the first moment in which the social and environmental needs are detected to the final phases of celebration and dissemination. Reflection on projects' contributions to sustainable development are essential. Service-learning projects should explicitly contemplate the development of transversal competencies for sustainability.

To genuinely empower the use of this methodology in higher education in order to promote sustainable development, the institutionalization of service-learning must be supported, ensuring that all students have access to this type of project throughout their studies.

Results of the BOLD round tables

To gain a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges for the institutionalization of SL to promote cultural and linguistic diversity and civic engagement, the BOLD consortium organized eight round tables with representatives of social actions, as well as other relevant stakeholders, such as students and teacher trainers (see synthesis report of round tables for further information – Gerritsen et al., 2023). After a presentation of each of the initiatives in which good practices between entities and HEIs were exchanged and needs for collaboration were identified, there was a panel discussion to establish strengths and weaknesses of collaborations in order to establish design principles for social action through SL encompassing cultural and linguistic diversity.

According to the participants in the BOLD round tables, for such collaborations to succeed, SL trajectories should carry a strong social relevance. During all round tables, representatives of initiatives and HEIs emphasized the importance of a strong connection to challenges in community and society for service learning trajectories in diversity contexts. Connecting service learning to substantial societal challenges will not only highlight the relevance of SL for students *and* communities, it can also increase the impact of actions to promote cultural and linguistic diversity.

Another significant lead for the institutionalization of SL is the urgency of having shared responsibilities and commitment in SL trajectories. Not only should bodies and representatives of both parties engage in shared commitment to support, communication, and measures to maintain the cooperation; participants of the BOLD round tables also agreed there should be a situation of reciprocal learning. The concept of an integrated design was suggested as a way to facilitate this in several round table discussions. This could be

achieved by tailored SL projects based on the needs of both HEIs, their students and initiatives. During several round table discussions, the idea was raised to exchange expectations and conceptualization of SL and diversity between all parties. Mentoring for students, training for teachers, and mediation of SL activities by HEIs could further strengthen reciprocal learning according to participants of multiple round tables.

Limitations and challenges that emerged from the discussions are related to the voluntary character of many social actions. Initiatives often depend on volunteers, voluntary services, and limited resources. This could impact the sustainability, recognition and regulation of SL trajectories.

Another challenge is the complexity of the formalization of learning trajectories and collaborations due to legislative matters or regulations. These could potentially limit the collaboration when principles of service learning do not align with the statutory requirements and declarations of educational institutions. Differences between BOLD partners on national levels should be taken into account. Whereas this situation requires flexibility and adaptivity in the Netherlands, participants in Spain suggest the use of a clear legislative framework.

Other suggestions to improve the institutionalization of SL encompassing cultural and linguistic diversity might be helpful in overcoming some of these challenges. For example, the importance of integrating HEI curricula, credits and competences with objectives and activities social action was stressed in several discussions. This could also be achieved by recognition of SL projects through honour programmes or additional certificates. Finally, many participants of the round tables emphasized the urgency of developing and securing sustainability. In round tables in Portugal, it was suggested to design and implement a stepwise approach with options for interventions.

Design principles for service-learning activities towards linguistic and cultural diversity in higher education

In previous research (Grönlund & Nortomaa, 2017), several general quality standards for service-learning activities have been proposed. Following the insights of the BOLD round tables, these quality standards have been revised by the BOLD consortium so as to act as service-learning design principles in the area of linguistic and cultural diversity.

1. Meet actual real needs of stakeholders in relation to linguistic and cultural diversity

SL meets both real-world challenges of the community, is meaningful and relevant to community partners and students working in and around issues of linguistic and cultural

diversity. Issues around inclusion, participation, linguistically and culturally sensitive teaching and learning, intercultural competences, etc. should be at the heart of stakeholders' needs.

1. The service component meets a real civic need in relation to linguistic and cultural diversity
2. SL is meaningful and relevant to community partners and students and is related to linguistic and cultural diversity
3. It explores issues that are vital to tackle linguistic and cultural diversity

2. Partnership

Community organisations are valued as partners in fostering linguistic and cultural diversity.

4. Community partners have been consulted
5. Community organisations are valued as partners

3. Reciprocity

There is a flow of knowledge, information and benefits in both directions between the University and its community partners in activities in relation to linguistic and cultural diversity.

6. There is a flow of knowledge, information and benefits in both directions between the University and its community partners in activities
7. Every individual, organization, and entity involved in the service-learning functions as both a teacher and a learner

4. Defined goals

Reachable and measurable, for the specific SL project. Goals and values are discussed with the community partner and are related to fostering linguistic and cultural diversity.

8. Defined goals are reachable and measurable, for the specific SL project
9. Goals and values are discussed with the community partner.

5. Link to Curriculum

SL is linked to the curriculum/study program of students, in particular regarding issues surrounding linguistic and cultural diversity. This requires active involvement of teachers/academic staff, systematic integration in study programs and the option to be recognized. Credit recognition is present.

10. SL is linked to the curriculum/study program of students
11. Teachers/academic staff are actively involved
12. SL is integrated in the study program in a systematic way
13. SL has credit recognition

6. Civic learning

Relied to personal and social competencies, as an important category of students learning goals (beside academic learning goals).

14. Civic learning relied to personal and social competencies, is an important category of students learning goals (beside academic learning goals)

7. Learning in Real World Settings

Academic theory is viewed in a real-world context. The main learning setting in SL is located outside the classroom in real world settings of community partners. It offers opportunities to learn and deepen understanding for all participants (students, faculty and community partners) in relation to linguistic and cultural diversity

15. Academic theory on linguistic and cultural diversity is viewed in a real world context
16. SL offers opportunities to learn and deepen understanding for all participants (students, faculty and community partners)

8. Students' active participation

Students actively collaborate with community partners in the design and planning of the project to foster linguistic and cultural diversity.

17. Students have a strong voice in planning, implementing and evaluating the SL experience

9. Facilitate systematic Student Reflection

SL facilitates active, regular and ongoing student reflection guided by teaching personnel and/or community partners. Reflection should lead to understanding diverse perspectives of challenges in fostering linguistic and cultural diversity. For students it is important to link their experiences to the theoretical and methodological background of the subject

18. SL facilitates active, regular and ongoing student reflection
19. Reflection is guided by teaching personnel
20. Reflection is guided by community partners.
21. Reflection leads to understand diverse perspectives of challenges.
22. There is a mechanism that encourages students to link their service experience to the academic curriculum
23. There is a mechanism that encourages students to reflect upon the effects of the service

10. Ensure support and coaching for students

Both from academic staff and from community partners.

24. Support and coaching for students is ensured from academic staff
25. Support and coaching for students is ensured from community partners

11. Offer adequate time frames

In order to make experiences and learn in community settings/with community partners effective and sustainable)

- 26. SL offers adequate time frames for making experiences effective and sustainable
- 27. SL offers adequate time frames for learning in community settings/with community partners

12. Include evaluation and documentation

As integral parts of SL activities, in order to prepare a final presentation of the results evaluated by community partners. Transparent evaluation with attention to the implications for knowledge on linguistic and cultural diversity.

- 28. Evaluation is included as an integral part of the SL activity
- 29. Documentation is included as an integral part of the SL activity
- 30. Service work is presented to the public
- 31. SL makes an opportunity for the community to enter into a public dialogue

13. Values transdisciplinarity

- 32. The service-learning activity is transdisciplinary

14. Sustainability

Impact of the activity in the community in terms of fostering linguistic and cultural diversity after the closing of the Project.

- 33. It is expected that the activity will have an impact in the community after its closing
- 34. The Project has the resources to continue running in the future
- 35. The community is engaged in sustaining the program for the long-term

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