

# Values and emotional learning in university training, applied to the degree in Audiovisual Communication at the University of Barcelona

Aprendizaje emocional y de valores en la formación universitaria, aplicado al grado de Comunicación Audiovisual de la Universidad de Barcelona

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## ABSTRACT

This work characterizes SL, from the perspective of positive psychology, as a learning model capable of articulating emotional and values learning in the field of Audiovisual Communication. Then, it describes the experience that the consolidated teaching innovation Group in Communication and Audiovisual Media (In-COMAV), made up of a multidisciplinary teaching team, has been developing since 2016 in the Audiovisual Communication degree at the University of Barcelona. It then presents, within the framework of this experience, the viability criteria established for the acceptance of collaboration projects, the critical success factors, and the results that the initiative has had on students, teachers, the institution, and society. Finally, it points out a series of challenges and limitations that must be overcome to guarantee the viability and effectiveness of SL projects in higher education.

**KEYWORDS:** Service-learning; emotional education; education in values; project-based learning; professionalizing skills; interdisciplinary work.

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo caracteriza el ApS, desde la perspectiva de la psicología positiva, como un modelo de aprendizaje capaz de articular la formación emocional y de valores en el ámbito de la Comunicación Audiovisual. Después, describe la experiencia que el Grupo de innovación docente consolidado en Comunicación y Medios Audiovisuales (In-COMAV), formado por un equipo docente multidisciplinar, desarrolla desde 2016 en el grado de Comunicación Audiovisual de la Universidad de Barcelona. A continuación, presenta, en el marco de esta experiencia, los criterios de viabilidad establecidos para la aceptación de proyectos de colaboración, los factores críticos de éxito y los resultados que la iniciativa ha tenido sobre el alumnado, el profesorado, la institución y la sociedad. Por último, señala una serie de desafíos y limitaciones que se deben superar para garantizar la viabilidad y la eficacia de los proyectos ApS en la enseñanza superior.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** aprendizaje servicio; educación emocional; educación en valores; aprendizaje basado en proyectos; competencias profesionalizadoras; trabajo interdisciplinario.

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## 1. Introduction

The university has a social function. It is an institution that trains professionals capable of integrating into the work world, but also, and not least, it trains individuals in skills and abilities that allow them to develop values and virtues that contribute to social and individual well-being. To achieve these ends, the so-called positive psychology offers teachers a scientific foundation with which to guide the planning of their academic activity. This psychological theory understands human behavior from the so-called strengths of character and proposes six universal categories of strengths or virtues around which strengths of character can be classified. These strengths are: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. From this classification, individuals —teachers and students— can identify their character strengths and work from them (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

In this work, we present a teaching experience that shares some of the assumptions of positive psychology. The social and human sciences are especially suitable to think about learning from this psychological current since their contents, competencies, and skills are largely related to values. Specifically, we address the case of a training practice of the Audiovisual Communication degree

taught at the University of Barcelona (UB). Since the 2009-2010 academic year, this degree aims to train professionals in the audiovisual sector in a set of profiles: director, scriptwriter, producer, filmmaker, production designer, and visual and sound post-production, researcher, a specialist in corporate communication, and community manager.

In the Audiovisual Communication degree, we start from a conception of communication not as a mere transmission of information. We question the linear model of communication, which for decades has dominated research in this area and which has also dominated the educational model, especially in the university. One of the consequences derived from this approach is an excessive emphasis on the transmission of content that may not pay enough attention to values and the associated emotional education. To the linear model, a model of communication as a community is usually contrasted: *commūnicāre*, in Latin, precisely means *to put in common, to create community*. And that is, for some authors, the main function of communication: establishing social ties, creating a shared culture (Carey, 1989, Craig, 1999). In this sense, values play a primary role.

In fact, we believe that learning cannot be articulated only around the transmission of content and that it must take into account the role of emotions and values in intelligent behavior. Learning through service-learning (SL) projects allows taking into account the character strengths of students, the social dimension of intelligent behavior, and the function of language and rationality as tools that serve to relate to the rest. SL is therefore part of an innovative current in the educational field that transcends the educational institution itself, is projected into the community, and thereby generates social change. Through SL, the university can offer students the opportunity to intervene where there are social needs.

## **2. Hypothesis and objectives**

This work has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it aims to characterize SL from the perspective of positive psychology, always starting from the hypothesis that it is a learning model capable of articulating emotional and values learning in the field of Audiovisual Communication. And, on the other hand, it describes the experience that the consolidated teaching innovation Group in Communication and Audiovisual Media (In-COMAV), made up of a multidisciplinary teaching team, has developed since 2016 in the Audiovisual Communication degree of the UB to promote and consolidate SL projects in the degree. Within the framework of this experience, it then presents the viability criteria established for the acceptance of collaborative projects, the critical success factors, and the results that the initiative has had on the students, the teaching staff, the institution, and society. Finally, it points out a series of challenges and limitations that must be overcome to guarantee the viability and effectiveness of SL projects in higher education.

## **3. Service-learning**

SL is a new way of promoting learning taking into account the social needs of the environment that must be identified by students, and also by teachers. It is a methodology with two facets that, combined, enables students to outline a vital commitment to the extent that there is social involvement. It helps to acquire technical skills at the same time that it helps the development of transversal skills, especially the civic skills necessary to be good professionals (Hwang, Liu, and Salusso, 2019). And, in this way, it is also a way of learning to start a business.

Not surprisingly, students, without abandoning their curricular objectives, learn and grow academically with the spirit, motivation, and courage of entrepreneurs who develop their strengths:

SL, to the extent that it is born from the need to find, design, and implement solutions to real problems, leads them to feel capable of promoting social transformations with which to contribute prosperity and well-being to society by identifying opportunities, overcoming deficiencies, building knowledge, and developing skills in a significant way, optimizing resources and seeking quality and excellence. All of these are intelligent behaviors and educable values, typical of an entrepreneurial spirit, which must start from the character strengths of each student to continue nurturing them, and which apply to their life and professional environment (Sobrado and Fernández, 2010). Ultimately, students learn while making vital commitments, satisfy a real social need, learn to start a business, and value the importance of their actions.

Thus, SL displays all its education potential from the perspectives of commitment and social utility, teaching, research and knowledge transfer, social responsibility, and entrepreneurship, which we associate with the objectives, values, and social function of the university.

### 3.1. Commitment and social utility

Although the educational system has been designed around explicit knowledge, that which allows collecting and archiving information to be used in later reasoning, for authors such as Sternberg (1998) wisdom resides in tacit knowledge, in procedural knowledge, in knowing how-to-do. This type of knowledge is not acquired directly from others and is linked to the objectives and goals that the person values. They are the skills that are acquired from life experience. Education must attend to tacit knowledge, that is, it must help to develop skills of social perception and social emotions that allow us to automatically perceive what is correct to do in each situation. And learning through SL enables the acquisition of this type of knowledge.

According to Jonathan Haidt (2006), what we usually call *rational thinking* has evolved in humans to support automated behaviors and intuitions. The main function of rationality, then, is not to search for true beliefs, but to create interpretations that support the most intuitive beliefs, those based on emotions. On the other hand, according to Haidt, there are two components of living conditions: love and vital commitment. In our society, vital commitment is usually carried out through work, and some professions allow it to be developed better than others. Examples of this are medicine, communication, education, science, or the arts, among others.

The development of SL projects is an effective path towards vital commitment since the work methodology usually includes objectives aimed at achieving a positive impact in an area of society. SL is an educational proposal that combines learning and community service processes in a single project in which the participants are trained while working on the real needs of the environment in order to improve it (Mendía, 2012). It is an educational instrument with social utility, capable of promoting learning, participation, and the development of basic and transversal skills.

SL is based on well-known elements: content learning, skills, abilities and values, and volunteer service to the community. Innovation, then, does not reside in these elements separately, but in their close connection, materialized in a single well-articulated, coherent, and more original educational activity in which the pedagogical purpose is fused with the intention of solidarity (Puig, Batlle, Bosch, and Palos, 2007; Martínez, 2009). Voluntary activity, in particular, effectively contributes to personal happiness, since it is, according to Haidt (2006), one of the external factors that drive it.

### 3.2. SL and teaching

Teaching has undergone a series of innovations that attempt to incorporate the emotional dimension and values into university education (Torre and Tejada, 2006). SL, oriented towards this dimension, is an innovation that has reached education centers after other notable developments such as the didactics of writings (essays) carried out by students, specialized seminars, and simulations (computer and experiential ones). Specifically, it affects the fact that teaching cannot be limited to educating students locked up in a classroom (Rodríguez and Tiana, 2015). Teaching also requires opening the door and going out so that the students can contribute to the needs of the environment and can thus help to strengthen the vital commitment. At the same time, working with SL enhances the vital commitment of teachers. A working structure is created in which the teaching body, in miscegenation of the student-teacher-external social agents, feels more committed to the students since the activity they perform has a social repercussion when relating to the environment as they would do in a professional context.

Incorporating the SL methodology into teaching not only breaks the walls of the classroom but also helps to break the boundaries typically associated with specific subjects. With this, it helps to overcome at the same time two barriers, in a certain way, self-imposed by the prevailing *habitus* in the university academic tradition, in the design of study plans, and in the forms of evaluation with which we coexist (Trigueros, Ribera, and de la Torre, 2011). As a result, the SL formula fosters cross-learning and provides several educational benefits:

- it helps to form citizens because students are involved in improving some situation in their environment;
- contributes to personal and social growth and strengthening;
- reinforces active and meaningful learning: students develop teamwork and learn to identify needs, conceptualize, structure, develop, and execute projects, and evaluate results.
- enhances communication (*creates community*) and collaborative work, because each work team, in pursuit of its objective, can be made up of students from different subjects and different courses, and even, in a multidisciplinary way, by students of different university degrees, all in interaction with professors and with social agents outside the university.

In other words, SL takes advantage of the strengths and potential of students, increases their vital commitment through work, reinforces tacit knowledge, creates community, and, ultimately, affects the level of happiness of students, teachers, and society. Furthermore, it promotes teaching innovation and the search for effective alternatives with which to enrich and expand the teaching model at the university to achieve solidly trained students, capable of integrating into the work world with knowledge, skills, and values and attitudes.

In short, SL leaves behind the more traditional university education focused on the teacher and oriented towards the master class, the rote acquisition of knowledge, and the individual work of the student. It goes even further than active learning or knowledge construction (pragmatic social constructivism) methodologies that, to get closer to reality, simulate real environments for the application of knowledge and the development of skills and propose role-playing games, or case studies, or problem-solving (Jenaro *et al.*, 2013). SL does not activate these simulation strategies, but rather takes students —and teachers— to reality, to real needs that demand viable and impactful solutions.

In this way, SL is aligned with other active methodologies such as challenge-based learning (Observatorio de Innovación Educativa, 2016), which also move the student to get involved to

research and act in a real environment, to relate areas of knowledge, and to create environments for reflection on their learning. It shares with these approaches the fact that the true protagonist is the apprentice, with his personality traits and character strengths; but so is the teacher, who takes on a leading role to the extent that he places more emphasis on collaboration with students than on grades, as well as on his guiding activity that supports them in their decisions and accompanies them in the creation of their cognitive structures and mental schemes, necessary to analyze and understand reality and develop critical and complex thinking (Karabenick and Collins-Eaglin, 1997): there is evidence that the promotion of this type of collaborative teaching-learning is useful to promote prosocial behaviors among university students (Jenaro *et al.*, 2013). In any case, SL, in the face of challenge-based learning or other active methodologies, never neglects its social and solidarity commitment. Social agents are also protagonists in SL.

### 3.3. SL, research, and knowledge transfer

SL also allows us to approach research from the emotional dimension, starting from the character strengths of the students, promoting tacit knowledge and motivated reasoning (that which supports our intuitions). The projects conceptualized in the framework of this proposal develop research capacities because they involve an analysis of society aimed not only at identifying social needs, but also at describing and arguing them, and then, also, transferring that knowledge to society with the formulation of a proposal of ideas channeled towards the transformation of some aspect of the researched reality. The student feels at all times that the research has to be meaningful and rigorous, to the extent that these ideas are decanted into a project that is necessarily conceptualized, structured, developed, and then executed, and, finally, evaluated.

SL constitutes, then, a work of scientific research and knowledge transfer that, also, provides the student with the management of processes and the evaluation of results that can then be applied in different contexts. Researching implies analyzing a plot of reality, identifying problems, causes and effects, distinguishing the appearance of the essence, formulating hypotheses, and, finally, looking for solutions. This research work equips students to be analytical, critical, and objective, and to discover ways in solving problems. All this, within a context in which the values of vital commitment, of service to society, of community creation, and benefit to the community play a fundamental role. It is, therefore, a type of research characterized by a professionalizing dimension and based on an emotional dimension. The character strengths described by positive psychology: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence come into play.

Although not all research and knowledge transfer projects have the same breadth and the same education and research potential, SL can be applied in practically any academic and social field. In fact, remarkable research projects have emerged from some SL projects (e.g., the development of a computer component tracking system; the improvement of the logistics system of a food bank), and vice versa, from certain research advances, SL projects have emerged (e.g., take advantage of obsolete telecommunication technology for the development of towns in the jungles of Latin America, where a company would not invest).

However, for SL to be able to address the research dimension, it must have the support of the institution and the entire teaching team (Furco, 2001). Institutionalizing SL is a complex process that requires the strategic coordination of several areas —the institutional mission itself, the association with environmental agents, and academic and structural issues— that must operate in a synergistic way to integrate SL into the academic fabric of universities (Furco, 2008).

### 3.4. SL and social responsibility

The social responsibility promoted by the SL philosophy fosters the vital commitment of those who participate in this type of initiative. Vital commitment is developed driven by social commitment, which is the set of actions that go beyond our legal obligations concerning society and the planet. It implies the improvement of the quality of life of people and each individual, and also the improvement of the environment.

In the business world, social responsibility implies generating wealth but also acting ethically. This duty does not have to be exclusive to the private sphere; It also affects the public and, therefore, the public university, which must also exercise it because it has an enormous and unavoidable responsibility in its task of educating professionals and citizens.

University social responsibility began in Latin America in the 2000s and spread to Europe. In Spain, we have the first major conceptions of social responsibility since 2006, with a criterion that goes beyond social action, university extension, and volunteering. It is a reformulation of the university, as a whole, as an institution (of its values, its initiatives, and its management policies) and implies a greater commitment to society and the contribution to a new model of more balanced and sustainable development (Universidad Construye País, 2006). Therefore, the actions that the university takes must lead to some degree of social transformation, and the teaching staff should be able to instill this philosophy in the students.

Social responsibility can be measured according to a set of indicators: the promotion of good governance and transparency, sustainable development, gender equity, social inclusion, the work environment and work-life balance, healthy life, responsible consumption and fair trade, the social economy and the circular economy, active and participatory methodologies, volunteering, and SL (Andres, Barberá, and Pallarés, 2017). These indicators appear in matters of social responsibility at the European level and also in matters of university social responsibility in Latin America. In this context, SL appears as a key element, and not only as a teaching methodology; it is an essential instrument to influence this model of innovation and social transformation. Citizens more involved with society and more willing to contribute to its development and cohesion are needed.

Therefore, SL is not mere "solidarity practices". It entails a greater implication that must contribute to transforming, not only the student but also the institutions. Therefore, it is convenient that there are projects of all kinds, which can both be linked to teaching and research. And that, once social needs have been identified, they involve the design, application, and evaluation of the actions to be carried out.

For all this, it is essential to establish links with the entities of the territory. If a social transformation is desired, it is necessary to ask companies and cultural, sports, and social institutions in the closest environment what needs they have. Therefore, it is advisable to leave the university context and listen to the voice of street organizations. Working in a network encourages the creation of alliances and thus complies with No. 17 (goal 17.17) of the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals* (2015): alliances to achieve objectives. Likewise, it contributes to achieving No. 4 (goals 4.3 and 4.4): quality education; and indirectly, it can enhance and favor other goals such as No. 8 (goal 8.3): decent work and economic growth; No. 9 (goal 9.5): industry, innovation, and infrastructure; and No. 11 (goal 11.4): sustainable cities and communities. Furthermore, SL directly collaborates in the achievement of goal 5 (goal 5.5), gender equality, which at the moment is presented as a spearhead for relevant social changes. As Fernández González (2016) points out, "the conviction that SL is a

good strategy to involve students in social problems leads to considering it as a tool to alleviate gender discrimination."

### 3.5. SL and social entrepreneurship

In the European context of education, the current guidelines provide five new qualifications. Entrepreneurship is one of them: information technologies, foreign languages, scientific-technological culture, entrepreneurship, and social skills. The acquisition of entrepreneurial attitudes should be promoted at all educational levels and, especially, in the university community, in all areas. Undoubtedly, combining the educational and scientific potential of universities through the development of entrepreneurial competencies makes it possible to achieve progress in the improvement and advancement of today's society (Sobrado and Fernández, 2010).

Entrepreneurial competencies can be understood in a narrow sense as a concept aimed at creating businesses. And in a broad sense, as a concept aimed at mastering business skills and attitudes, which includes the development of certain personal qualities and certain strengths of character that make up *entrepreneurship* or the *business spirit*. In this second sense, the *European Parliament's Proposal for Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2005, 1) defines this spirit as:

[...] The ability of the person to transform ideas into actions. It is related to creativity, innovation, and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan projects to achieve objectives. All people in daily life, at home, and in society, support themselves in this competence [...], and it is the foundation of other more specific skills and knowledge that entrepreneurs need when establishing a social or commercial activity.

From the university, SL contributes to reinforcing the creation of an entrepreneurial culture understood in its broad sense (Gutiérrez, 2006; Espíritu, González, and Alcaraz, 2012). It does so by integrating the dimensions of social commitment and utility, teaching, research, and social responsibility that we have described. And it also does so by building individual behaviors that, from the perspective of positive psychology, promote the vital commitment of each student through the assumption of a social commitment: their behavior as a student has to be aligned with a responsible collective action aimed at producing a transformation and an improvement in a sector of society. In this sense, we speak of social entrepreneurship.

Therefore, the university SL does not emphasize the development of specific capacities linked to the professional development of a businessman and does not pursue the creation of a company or the obtaining of economic benefits with the development of projects. On the contrary, many times it acts where companies do not because they do not achieve an economic return.

However, it does not lose sight of the fact that both society and the labor market need professionals with an entrepreneurial profile who also draw a business profile, adaptable to the enormous evolution of information and communication technologies, oriented towards increasingly more collaborative, interdisciplinary work, and with communication and expert-knowledge dissemination skills. Therefore, promoting the entrepreneurial spirit of the student in a broad sense, the SL also offers the student the foundations to continue training, if they feel like it, in the entrepreneurial spirit that leads



to the creation of businessmen who innovate, take risks, combine resources, conceive new ways of doing things, transform their environment, and pursue economic benefits, always from the ethical principles of social service that the SL contributes to developing. The entrepreneurial spirit of SL is the basis of the business spirit that does not abandon, in its claim to generate wealth, social responsibility.

#### **4. SL projects in Audiovisual Communication: the case of the University of Barcelona**

Professions related to communication can facilitate vital commitment and, therefore, contribute to happiness. In a context characterized by technological evolution, globalization, and the orientation towards increasingly collaborative and interdisciplinary work, the audiovisual sector poses new professionalizing demands. In this sense, it is essential that students, future professionals, have the necessary skills to successfully face the challenges presented by the audiovisual sector that, from our point of view, cannot be limited to the simple elaboration of audiovisual products that are competitive in the market.

In fact, learning to form effective work teams and consolidate them; build leadership and decision-making experiences that improve the quality of life of our societies; and strengthening character traits that drive tenacity, temperance, courage, self-confidence to solve the problems that will arise in the development of an innovative solution that will be implemented in increasingly changing environments are also challenges. Students participating in an SL face these challenges in a work environment that is real, with opportunities and limitations that will also exist in their new work environments after graduation.

The benefits of SL projects move us to promote the SL methodology, to consolidate its implantation in the degree to develop social and professionalizing values and competencies, and, therefore, to consider all the external proposals that come to us from social need.

##### **4.1. Criteria for collaboration**

In recent years, the teaching team of the Audiovisual Communication degree has observed an increase in the number of external collaboration proposals. Entities of various kinds, both from the university sphere and from other fields, request the involvement of students and professors of the Audiovisual Communication degree to develop an audiovisual product in the context of a communication campaign. As is well known, audiovisual content has a great power to attract and persuade, and, motivated by this conviction, many organizations see audiovisual as an effective medium for transmitting a message.

However, not all initiatives have the formative spirit and social commitment that makes them fit into the educational model of SL. To be successful in this context, collaboration proposals must have certain guarantees. In particular, they must have the potential to provide students, teachers, or the university department with a curricular benefit that compensates for the necessary investment of time, effort, and resources. As part of learning, students must have a clear role in the conception of the audiovisual work and the associated research and production processes. Consequently, the collaboration cannot be established in the form of an assignment whose development is governed by working guidelines more typical of a commercial relationship. In fact, it is the will of the teaching team to avoid unfair competition with audiovisual professionals, since, in our opinion, this type of initiative should not replace the work that is actually carried out by production companies and other audiovisual companies.

For these reasons, the Council of Studies of the aforementioned degree approved in May 2018 a set of guidelines to determine the convenience and feasibility of involving students and teachers of the degree in external collaboration proposals. Since then, these guidelines serve as evaluation criteria (In-COMAV, 2020) and require verification of compliance with a set of conditions:

- The initiative must have a pedagogical and academic interest and must allow the development of transversal and specific competencies of the degree.
- The resulting audiovisual product must have a social, political, cultural, or economic impact, and must have the endorsement of a public body, a social entity, or a company.
- The proposal must be able to materialize in a project for teaching improvement and innovation, service learning, knowledge transfer, or research, in which teachers from the Audiovisual Communication area of the department that manages the degree must be involved.
- The proposal must be able to be developed naturally within the framework of a subject, from both an academic and chronological point of view (an academic semester or, in exceptional cases, an academic year) and must be able to have the figure of a tutor.
- The collaboration cannot be limited to the realization of the audiovisual product, but must also include a task of research and conceptualization of the work to be carried out.
- The product cannot have as main purpose a commercial benefit or an exclusive benefit for the promoting entity; It cannot be, for example, an advertisement or a promotional video. If so, if the proposal comes from the university itself, the appropriate formula is the call for collaboration scholarships.
- The proposal must provide some resources, which can be both an economic endowment (collaboration grant, allowances, material rental, etc.) or some benefit, in terms of professional or institutional projection, for the students of Audiovisual Communication degree and for the department that manages the degree.
- The activity carried out by students cannot incur unfair competition with the professional sector. The recipient of the service must accept that students are engaged in a learning activity within the framework of their university training and, therefore, could make mistakes and the final product could not be satisfactory. Although the quality of the service will be ensured, in no case will the project replace the provision of a professional service.

#### **4.2. SL project development methodology**

The implementation of SL projects within the framework of the aforementioned degree in Audiovisual Communication is usually determined by the collaboration proposals received from external agents. The demand is so high that it makes it impossible to systematically diagnose the environment and its needs. Instead, therefore, it is preferred to base the choice of projects on the careful evaluation of the received proposals.

To do this, an interview is arranged with the person representing the promoting entity to determine, following the guidelines described above, if the proposal meets the necessary conditions and if it is compatible with the SL educational model. This reference interview helps to learn more about the institution and the social commitment of the potential project, and sometimes allows to adjust the objectives or scope of the project to consolidate its viability.

In cases where it is considered necessary (for example, if there are doubts about such viability), a committee made up of the head of studies, the head of the department, and at least one professor in

the area of Audiovisual Communication can issue a definitive assessment on whether to accept or reject a proposal.

If the proposal is aligned with the aforementioned guidelines, it is added to the portfolio of proposals and all of them are presented to the students of the Projects II and TFG (the Degree's Final Project) subjects, the ones that can best accommodate this type of project. It should be noted that students receive proposals up to three months before they begin to develop them. They have enough time to choose one that appeals to them. They also know that their choice will constitute the evaluation evidence of one of their subjects and that, before meeting the external interlocutor of the promoting entity, they will be asked for a personal and team commitment, maximum involvement, and the courage to venture into an active methodology that breaks with traditional teaching-learning schemes.

If all this is fulfilled and a teacher is willing to tutor it, the students and the tutor are summoned with the representative of the promoting entity for the first contact, the project receives definitive approval, a collaboration agreement is signed which turns the initiative into an SL project, and it is required that the final product reflects in the credits the participation of the Audiovisual Communication degree.

The promoting entity will intervene in the development of the project and has a voice to decide on the suitability of the final audiovisual product that motivates the project. It also values the result of the audiovisual work. When it gives its approval, the audiovisual work itself leaves the university environment and then acquires a rationale for its usefulness in the social environment that demands it. So far, no video has been rated as inappropriate or wrong. Only on some occasions have minor adjustments been requested —some design or graphic change— motivated by a change in the social context (for example, confinement in times of COVID-19).

On the other hand, it is also common for the promoting entity to organize an event to present the work, for example, in civic centers, in a congress, or within the framework of a significant date (an anniversary) for the entity. The entity is in charge of disseminating that work through channels as diverse as its website or the waiting room of a public hospital.

Specifically, one of the hospitals with which it has been collaborating has retained its participation in SL projects due to the good reception that the resulting audiovisual works are having among patients. In fact, joint research is currently being planned, in which students also participate, to measure the impact of the messages disseminated by audiovisual works on the level of compliance with the treatments indicated to patients who attend their turns in the waiting rooms in which the videos are projected. Even a new hospital has been interested in intervening in SL projects of the Audiovisual Communication degree.

At the same time, the faculty also evaluates projects. Students have to defend the feasibility and relevance of their work before a panel of teachers that assesses their persuasive oral communication skills. And what is more: after receiving the final grade, the next step is for students to disseminate their projects and audiovisual products at national and international conferences and congresses dealing with university teaching innovation or the dissemination of expert or scientific knowledge. In this way, they also develop persuasive communication skills not only in academic settings but also in scientific and professional settings.

This implies that SL projects are necessarily extended beyond one academic year, that students and professors seek funding sources to attend these conferences (a private company has been able to finance the participation of four students in a Pharmacology congress in the United States), and that students continue learning without receiving a grade on their academic record in return: their reward is the experience and learning they have acquired. Also, students who have participated in SL projects offer to tutor new students.

### **4.3. Keys of SL in Audiovisual Communication**

Three years of experience in planning and implementing SL projects allow us to identify a series of critical success factors.

#### **4.3.1. Dosage**

Conveniently, the SL initiative should be incorporated in a gradual and dosed way so that the results, and not only the processes, are adequate. In this way, the continuity and sustainability of the innovation can be guaranteed. At the end of the day, SL is part of a discourse and practice of innovation in education that requires an infrastructure.

A finished project is valued more than ten started without any signs of finishing. It is dangerous to want to give way to absolutely everything, especially if the degree has just begun to apply the SL formula, because in this incipient phase, although there may be willing students, it lacks adequate infrastructure. It is better, therefore, to start by getting involved in a large project, perhaps with many students, than to start in several small projects, since the management work multiplies with each new project.

#### **4.3.2. Receptivity**

Since from the university it is difficult to know all the needs of the environment, to detect them it is convenient to do an exercise of humility and stimulate social sensitivity. The university must know how to listen, it must understand the particular need of each context, and it must be clear that its role is not to impose solutions, but to find a way to help solve problems.

The university must not work *for* the agents of the environment but must work *with* them, as equals, be it another faculty, a disadvantaged neighborhood, a medical department, or any other institution. In this sense, the Audiovisual Communication degree is presented as a communication space that proposes tailor-made creatives.

#### **4.3.3. Mutual and collaborative benefit**

Beyond the positive impact that SL has on society, in this context of collaboration, all the parties directly involved —students, teachers, and the institution— have to win, and the benefit that each part will obtain must be precisely defined.

The activity carried out by the students, serving the community, must have a clear educational component. Students cannot end up as free labor. In fact, a large number of proposals from neighboring institutions are rejected because they are not projects with an educational component, but with the sole objective of benefiting from work without fees. Likewise, the product can be disseminated in different media, as well as a curricular entry, as shown by the philosophy of the

project. It has been observed how students become emotionally involved in SL projects and, sometimes, after completing them, they continue volunteer work (Einfeld and Collins, 2008).

Teachers, for their part, leave the classroom and tutor projects with a "client", so they must adapt to their needs and must guide the work towards the appropriate or agreed objective. In a degree like Audiovisual Communication at the UB, where 80% of the teaching staff are associated, it means accompanying the student to the workplace itself. The tutor knows the way, and the student walks it with the certainty that, if a setback arises, it will not be irreversible. And both tutors and students should be allowed to experiment and create, to the extent that the work schedule allows. It is not about solving a problem, but about conceiving a product from a specific social context, in order to influence and improve it.

The institution, as we have seen, defends, promotes, and accepts SL projects, so the notoriety it acquires by incorporating this field of learning is broad, and encompasses many and very varied values: innovation, cross-teaching, integration in society, and reciprocity. In the SL philosophy, the university finds a way to develop as an institution committed to the environment and to make the actions developed by the teaching staff visible in the missions of the university. Just as we have mentioned the character strengths of individuals, we should also speak of the strengths of institutions, in general, and of the university, in particular.

The project, then, becomes a beneficial situation for all the parties directly involved: besides the environment, the students, the teaching staff, and the institution win.

#### **4.3.4. Rigor**

Although students must be trusted, since they usually do their part to face challenges and overcome problems, that trust must be accompanied by rigor. Learning must be related to the subjects of the degree and must have defined objectives, which must be made explicit and must have adequate evaluation mechanisms. SL assignments, insofar as they are registered within a subject of the degree, such as the subject of Projects (compulsory third-year subject), or the Degree's Final Project (compulsory fourth-year subject), follow the guidelines of evaluation established in the corresponding educational plans.

#### **4.3.5. Control**

From the Audiovisual Communication degree, an attempt has been made to take on all the projects that provide the mutual benefit mentioned above (3.2.3). However, aware that the SL formula is in an incipient phase —three academic years— and lacking infrastructure, we observe how the management work multiplies with each new project. Thus, it is intended that the students themselves manage the expectations of their "clients", with the advice of their tutors and supported by their classmates in case they need additional help in different roles.

### **4.4. Results**

In the period from November 2016 to November 2019, and within the framework of the SL methodology, the degree in Audiovisual Communication at the UB has addressed seven audiovisual projects. These SL projects have each had a particular objective:

- the dissemination of the treatment of neuropathic ulcers in the diabetic foot;

- a public awareness campaign against self-medication, with an emphasis on the responsible use of antibiotics;
- the dissemination of the treatment of athlete's foot (dermatophytosis);
- the dissemination of Catalan language and culture among Erasmus students;
- the deaf-mute language in Catalan for university students;
- the breaking of the stereotype of the library profession;
- two projects related to the recovery of the historical memory of an underprivileged neighborhood.

Between 2019 and 2020, starting the third year of incorporation of SL in the degree, the projects in the development or pre-production phase are:

- a third project to recover the historical memory of the same underprivileged neighborhood;
- two more projects, related to the responsible consumption of medicines;
- the disclosure of the contributions of a maritime institution that turns 250 years old.

Therefore, there is a continuity with projects carried out previously, which is a positive indicator regarding the success of this type of work among students.

It is also a positive sign that the students themselves have presented these projects in twelve national and international conferences, which they have attended with the tutors or, on occasion, without these teachers.

#### **4.4.1. Student body**

The students who have participated in these initiatives have gained enthusiasm and motivation. They are aware that the projects they develop have a social utility and are used in communication campaigns. Furthermore, they perceive learning in an applied, very practical way; They find it more enjoyable and motivating, and that learning in society makes them able to develop more as people.

With the service dimension, students improve their social skills and, with the learning dimension, they develop professional skills. Most of these positive effects can be categorized within one of the six strengths mentioned at the beginning. For example, there is an increase in the love for learning (wisdom), leadership, citizenship (justice), humor (transcendence).

Since students choose the projects that best suit their profiles and motivations, as indicated above, they also tend to be active in their performance: they have to identify the needs of the environment, they learn to analyze the context, synthesize complex situations, formulate objectives, and design action plans. In the same way, they learn to evaluate: throughout the process, they reflect on what they do to improve, so that, by getting involved in real projects, they learn to learn and also learn to transfer the knowledge they generate to other areas of knowledge.

We are also faced with a labor market that needs professionals with an entrepreneurial spirit (AQU Catalunya, 2018), which is precisely the profile that best defines the nature of the student who participates in SL projects. In fact, the spirit of an entrepreneur is defined as a way of being, thinking, and doing that stimulates social transformations to improve the quality of life of individuals and bring prosperity and well-being to society. Their philosophy is the optimization of resources and the search for excellence.

With these purposes, it has been possible to increase the effort of students to achieve excellence in oral (pitches and presentations at conferences), digital (social media), and audiovisual (audiovisual works and their corresponding teasers and trailers) persuasion. And this excellence has not only been reflected in the product of their work but also in their satisfaction. Many of the students who join an SL in the third year, through the Projects subject, in the fourth-year hope to be able to repeat the experience in the Degree's Final Project.

As an additional benefit, as a result of the motivation generated by participating in this type of initiative, the students involved in them tend to obtain significantly better grades (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** *Grades obtained in SL projects and non-SL projects*

Subject - academic year	SL projects	Average grade for SL projects	Average grade for non-SL projects
Projects II 2016–17	2	9.10	7.56
Projects II 2017–18	1	8.04	6.83
Degree's Final Project 2017–18	2	8.40	7.48
Projects II 2018–19	1	7.31	7.35
Degree's Final Project 2018–19	2	7.37	7.65
From Idea to Screen 2019–20	1	9.00	7.19
	<b>9</b>	<b>8.20</b>	<b>7.34</b>

**Source:** Franganillo *et al.* (2020)

The teachers appreciate the students' satisfaction with the work done. The emotion and involvement with which they present their work in oral defenses are noteworthy: they act as a team, as a well-defined cog, supporting each other.

#### 4.4.2. Faculty

It has also been possible to intensify the didactic reflection of teachers on interdisciplinary work and the professionalizing skills of students. In short, improvements have been obtained in the teaching-learning processes of the degree.

The teamwork of the teaching staff, in permanent communication with each other, has been constant over the last three years. As a result, it has provided the appropriate framework of how and when the correct circumstances exist to incorporate SL in the different subjects, and how to tutor them most appropriately: for the project, the work team, and the external institution. In short, improvements have been made in the teaching-learning processes of the degree.

#### 4.4.3. Institution

Universities acquire institutional projection with this type of collaboration since they help to incorporate their social involvement into their brand and underline the close relationship between knowledge and social well-being. Thus, the type of activity in which students are involved through SL not only benefits them but also the institution itself, which manages to get closer to social realities and influence them. In fact, universities today are very aware of the value of social competencies and actively seek to articulate a way to recognize this dimension in university education (Arroyo, 2019).

It is essential to underline that, to achieve this objective, the university must intensify the filtering of proposals to avoid predatory projects without real value for students, teachers, or the faculty. As an institution, we must therefore reinforce rigor in selection. In our degree in Audiovisual Communication at the University of Barcelona, the filtering is exhaustive. In fact, we have expanded and prioritized the second of the guidelines as a criterion for selecting proposals: "Proposals directed directly or indirectly to groups in situations of social vulnerability or at risk of being part of these groups will have preference." The latter also aligns us better with the SDGs, which, while addressing equality, prosperity, and the protection of the planet, appeal to the help of underprivileged groups.

#### **4.4.4. Society**

It is obvious, from all that has been said, that the other great beneficiary of SL projects, is society. The university educates citizens who not only acquire knowledge but also develop social, moral, ethical, social commitment skills and abilities, attending to the great human capital that values and virtues represent. In this way, the university returns to society what it expects of it: to educate individuals who contribute to the collective welfare.

### **5. Conclusions**

The university must develop the ability to establish relationships with community partners, and must contribute to conceiving and designing collaborative projects as an experience capable of providing competency and experiential learning. The emphasis that positive psychology places on emotional intelligence, character strengths, tacit knowledge, and variables that are part of happiness or well-being is very useful for rethinking teaching, learning processes, and the role of the university in society. In fact, the University of Barcelona (2019) adheres to the 2030 Agenda, on equality and social action, and SL projects seem to be aligned with the objectives of this agenda.

In various meetings, the Rector of the UB has positively assessed the intense activity related to SL. In fact, the UB is the Catalan university that develops the most SL projects, and it is an upward trend. The fact that a faculty has a social vision and collaborates with entities gives it visibility and prestige. And the degree in Audiovisual Communication is, within the UB, one of the leading teachings in SL initiatives and social orientation. The activity carried out within the framework of the SL methodology is recognized in the European supplement and rounds off the curriculum of the students.

At the end of the day, the bachelor in Audiovisual Communication must be a versatile, proactive professional, with initiative and analytical, problem solving, and decision-making skills, with leadership and teamwork skills, and competent in persuasive communication. The recent report by AQU Catalunya (2018) agrees with this vision, according to which the transversal competencies most appreciated by employers are precisely practical education, the ability to solve problems, and the ability to make decisions. Likewise, the most valued specific competencies are the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to devise, plan, and execute communication projects, and the ability to present ideas and arguments in a reasoned manner.

In the framework of SL collaborations, students revert their knowledge to society, present their project outside the classroom, in the context in which they have developed it, and understand that their project has made a valuable contribution to a field of society. The positive experience accumulated during these three years means that SL projects are perceived among the students as attractive and meaningful experiences.



### **5.1. Challenges for the university**

Another aspect that our experience with SL has shown is that the university needs to make the type of contractual figure more flexible among the teaching staff, especially in those disciplines related to professional profiles, such as in the case of Audiovisual Communication studies.

It is necessary to incorporate experienced professionals into the faculty, even though the academic career is designed for those who dedicate themselves only to university. In Spanish and Catalan universities, the contractual figure conceived to incorporate professionals into the teaching staff is the figure of the associate professor, who by contract has a very limited dedication. Teaching through SL projects is carried out through tutoring which, as a teaching model, requires the dedication of time and personalized attention, especially when "the client", the external institution, is demanding. Likewise, it requires professional decision-making capacity, sometimes unrelated to regulations related to teaching plans. The promotion of these types of teaching models within the university should be accompanied by different contractual figures that do not focus only on the value of the academic career, since for the professional transformed into a teacher-tutor, the academic career usually lacks value.

The relationship between university and industry, for its part, has great obstacles to overcome. The contractual inflexibility of the teaching staff is one of them, but so is the rigidity of the study and teaching plans. The framework for the verification, monitoring, modification, and accreditation of official degrees (VSMA) contributes negatively to this. Although it is a necessary frame of reference to guarantee the quality of teaching, it is conceived with a rigidity that limits the ability to react and prevents the curricula from being adapted quickly and flexibly enough to the new communication scenarios and professional profiles, which are constantly changing.

Therefore, the university, to be truly modern, must make the processes for hiring teachers and also the academic processes more flexible. Modernity is not only determined by teaching methodologies, but also by academic organization. Currently, there is too much pressure on the teaching staff and many bureaucratic demands to show that university teaching is being modernized, but deep down the teaching activity is still conditioned by an excessively rigid university model.

### **5.2. Challenges about service learning**

The democratization of the university does not consist only in the acceptance of any student with adequate preparation, but also in the ability to adapt to its environment, that is, the ability to recognize that in the sky that encompasses it, a learning space can be included. For its part, the university is widely recognized as the center of knowledge, the elaboration of hypotheses, and the demonstration of theories, a space in which it can find processes, solutions, and contributions to its causes. There is no doubt that for both spheres—the university and society—SL is an especially appropriate methodology for education in values, which is, in fact, one of the tasks of regulated education.

Audiovisual Communication has its own language, with codes known to be established in the collective consciousness—the type of shots, the narrative rhythm, the warmth of the image, etc.—, through which it transmits culture, ideology, identity, and references. By applying Audiovisual Communication to SL, messages are easily popularized and their diffusion is transformed since they

are not transmitted through conventional distribution channels. At the same time, needs are tailored to demands and, by addressing real cases with real clients, university work is professionalized.

The work dynamics of the students are adapted to the professional processes, which begin with the meeting with the client and end with the presentation of the work carried out, and even accepting possible requests for changes. Surprisingly, SL projects propose very active and motivating tasks, accepted by efficient and caring students. In three years, with a single disappointing exception, resulting from the attitude, rather than the aptitude, of the work team, the results usually reflect high-level academic performance and represent a clear advantage in the incorporation to the professional world. In this sense, it should be noted that most of the students involved in SL projects have participated, and continue to do so, in national and international congresses of scientific or teaching-innovation nature related to their projects; and that some of them have obtained employment contracts or, in one case, have even obtained investors for their first start-up, thanks to the experience acquired in these projects.

Degrees with a high creative and experimental component, such as Audiovisual Communication, may perhaps inspire prejudices of little rigor and a lot of bohemianism and glamour. That is, a lot of aesthetics, little study. Nothing could be further from the truth. In this context, the figure of SL establishes an activity of very formal content in several planes of maximum relevance for the growth of the student, as a person and as a professional:

- a) Because of the treatment of the client, who is not previously known. By incorporating unusual manners and formalities, you must come to understand the situation and the needs of the interlocutor to develop proposals and solutions at their fingertips. Listening must be active and understanding maximum.
- b) Because of the work processes to get the job done, which must be professional in every way. The working method taught in the degree is the one that works in the professional sector, and the students adopt it to achieve their objectives.
- c) Because of the relationships between the team members. The audiovisual world, deeply hierarchical, is reflected in the tasks distributed in the team. Although the academic environment allows flexibility in responsibilities, the objective of SL determines flows of "power" and "decision-making" within the team itself, the ramifications of which can be the most varied in the performance of these roles.
- d) Because of the relationship of the students with the tutor of each project. The trust placed in students creates a nexus: communication improves, and language between youth and adults gets closer. The tutoring is a guide/suggestion for the work, not the work itself. The tutors receive an inspiring stimulus: the audiovisual work.

This final reflection, in short, confirms that SL incorporated into the degree in Audiovisual Communication at the UB is a highly professional tool that allows students to approach their future, both on a personal and professional level. The combination of academic and practical work with social projects has had a positive impact on the learning process and creative results. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that the pedagogical development of the degrees with a notable practical component will increasingly incorporate the SL methodology, based on the principles of positive psychology, as a model of teaching innovation and as a professionalizing instrument.

### **5.3. Future lines of work**

An immediate line of work will consist of applying the *VIA-IS* questionnaire to students of the degree in Audiovisual Communication at the University of Barcelona (available at <http://viacharacter.org>).

Peterson and Seligman began studying strengths in 2001 from this online questionnaire. Currently, this questionnaire collects up to 24 strengths. Through the *VIA-IS*, the 24 character-strengths are measured, and each of them is valued through 10 items (Gustems and Sánchez, 2015).

From the obtained results, we could more exhaustively detect those character strengths (virtues, values) that characterize Audiovisual Communication students. With this, we could improve learning proposals through SL, and have a better understanding of the profile of our students in terms of social skills.

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