

**Social responsibility and higher education: just a market target or a real educational challenge? An answer from the trenches**

<b>Maite Jiménez</b>	Escuela de Alimentos*	maite.jimenez@pucv.cl
<b>Gladys Jiménez</b>	Observatorio de Responsabilidad Social*	gladys.jimenez@pucv.cl
<b>Carmen Márquez</b>	Facultad de Teología*	carmen.marquez@pucv.cl
<b>Carolina Astudillo</b>	Escuela de Alimentos*	carolina.astudillo@pucv.cl
<b>Loreto Morales</b>	Escuela de Comercio*	loreto.morales@pucv.cl
<b>Lorena González</b>	Escuela de Alimentos*	maria.gonzalez.r@pucv.cl
<b>Jonathan Hermosilla</b>	Escuela de Comercio*	jonathan.hermosilla@pucv.cl

\*Pontificia Universidad católica de Valparaíso (Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso), Chile.

**ABSTRACT**

Currently, the globalization of local problems is both surprising and concerning, as the systemic impact of these problems undermines local territories and directly affects people and the environment. As these issues are inevitable, public and private initiatives have tried to find intercontinental socially responsible solutions to fight pollution, poverty and corruption, among other problems. In this sense, it is possible to find in South America a fertile field to grow awareness, but sometimes this useful marketing resource is unable to reach students within the classroom or change their views of their future professional practice. In this way, social responsibility coexists with academic capitalism practices. This article aims to show how anchoring learning in social responsibility and ethics can transform the classroom. From the students' narratives, it can be observed that they changed their view of their professional role and transformed their discourses, integrating consideration of others into their thinking. The results lead us to question how universities influence the way in which their graduates affect the world and vice versa. The classroom, a critical, reflexive and transforming space, is the field in which this question can be answered.

## Resumen

Actualmente, sorprende e inquieta que los problemas locales se han globalizado, y sus efectos sistémicos erosionan los territorios locales y afectan directamente a las personas y al medio ambiente. Siendo imposibles de evadir, se responde a ellos con iniciativas privadas y públicas, individuales y colectivas, que buscan soluciones socialmente responsables intercontinentales para la contaminación, la pobreza, la corrupción política, entre otros. Es posible encontrar en Sudamérica un buen campo de reflexión para ello, pero muchas veces es más adoptado como un recurso útil de marketing incapaz de alcanzar a los estudiantes dentro del aula y mucho menos de cambiar sus visiones sobre sus futuras prácticas profesionales. Así la formación en responsabilidad social convive con prácticas de capitalismo académico. Este artículo muestra cómo el aprendizaje implementado bajo los fundamentos de la responsabilidad social desde la perspectiva ética puede transformar el aula más allá de sus propios límites. A través de las narrativas de los estudiantes ellos cambian su visión acerca de su rol profesional y transforman sus discursos, integrando la presencia de un otro en su personal proyecto de vida. Los resultados empujan a preguntar cómo las universidades son una influencia significativa en la forma en que sus egresados afectan el mundo, y viceversa, y que el aula espacio y tiempo formativo, crítico, reflexivo y transformacional, es el campo donde esta pregunta es principalmente resuelta.

## Introduction

Professional training at contemporary universities is hyper-specialized and technical (Small, Shaklock & Marchant 2018). Cortina (2009) proposes that each profession has the mission of safeguarding certain social goods (health, education, justice, and so on). This purpose gives sense to the existence of each profession and, if it fails to care for this social good, the profession loses its social position. However, critical thinking about the 'social' or 'internal good' that professions should take care of (Cortina 2009) is scarcely addressed. And, in addition to these internal goods, professions also provide opportunities for sustaining or raising the social capital of their practitioners, giving them 'external goods'. This leads to graduated professionals who carry out their practices and assess them in terms of achieving 'external goods' (power, money and prestige), thereby replicating social inequality.

Quality assurance models for education have focused on teaching innovation, pressing universities to try new methodologies. Among these, service-learning has proven pertinent to the training of critical thinking (Halsted 1998; Rifkin 1996). However, this approach in itself does not ensure that students reflect and act upon the ethical dilemmas of their profession. Achieving this target requires understanding the process systemically, integrating teachers, students and community partners in horizontal dialogues based on trust relationships (Jiménez, Jiménez & Reveco 2017). Given the challenges facing education in the twenty-first century, and its effects on society, researchers need to

interrogate the role and purpose of education. Moreover, they must recognize that many social problems are exacerbated by university graduates (politicians, judges, medical doctors, lawyers and many more). As such, there is a need to develop a greater sense of social responsibility within university education, without neglecting disciplinary quality. Thus, this article aims to explore the narrative lines emerging from the application of service-learning from a social responsibility perspective, and it gives shape to individuals' comprehension of their professional engagement with social responsibility.

Service-Learning has a particular vision in the South that is aligned with the Latin American local context (Tapia 2010). Social problems faced in the South are different from those faced in the North, and Latin American universities need to graduate a new kind of professional, able to work with local demands and global perspectives. This focus has often been hidden from view because Southern referents are not privileged in Southern research design, and the urgency of the problems causes an abundance of empirical knowledge which is not always promoted within Northern dialogue spaces (Guzmán-Valenzuela 2017).

### **Why we need to talk about University Social Responsibility [USR] on graduation profiles**

The contemporary university has been characterized by a) hyper-specialization, which causes the fragmentation of knowledge instead of a multidisciplinary reality, b) an increase in bureaucratization; c) overcrowding that compromises social mobility and hinders institutional management, and d) a relationship with society that orients knowledge toward short-term results (Cortina 2009). These characteristics result in unclear objectives that are difficult to assess, cultural diversity at the internal and external level, and differences between the teacher body and administrative staff that hinder problem solving and make the university environment complex, changing and challenging (Tomas & Rodríguez 2009). This has affected the way in which professions are understood.

Higher education institutions have started operating as if they are businesses competing to sell their products to consumers, and academics have been put under pressure to treat students as customers (Fairclough 2008; Marginson 2006). Many instances of fraud, corruption and bad practice allow us to observe that the spaces directed by professionals who graduate from university have become spaces that generate and reproduce social models harmful to individuals and society, because these professionals focus on professional training instead of combining the professional knowledge of each field with the social, economic and cultural realities giving each profession context and humanity (López 2013).

It is with good reason that social responsibility is now seen as important in the professional world. University social responsibility is especially emphatic about the critical thinking that has to permeate professional training curricula (Chile & Black 2015) and, consequently, about the graduation profiles of different programs in a university, as this is a commitment to students and their education. The above is based on the notion that higher education serves the purpose of training the next generation of citizens and it is thus important that these citizens be able to question civic values, as well as their disposition and contributions to the world (Nussbaum 2007).

Some authors understand USR as an inherited branch of corporate social responsibility (Esfijani, Hussein & Chang 2013; Chile & Black 2015). From this standpoint, engagement with communities is merely an opportunity to confirm prestige. The concepts of *sustainability reports* or *vocational service* are useful to demonstrate some kind of social work, which gives support to the university image and overcomes their social legitimacy crisis (Felt 2003; Vasilescu, Barna, Epure & Baicu 2010; Vallaey 2014). Other authors, especially in Latin America and specifically in Chile, write about the University Build Country Project (*La Universidad construye país* or UCP). This initiative was driven by thirteen Chilean universities in the early 2000s (Chile & Black 2015). Within such a view, USR is rooted in the essential mission of the university, as well as in its social and historical positioning. As such, it exceeds simple management impact and has a strong and necessary compromise with local development and civic engagement of communities, incorporating students, academics, workers and stakeholders (Gaete 2015).

As a project, the UCP promoted the expansion of social responsibility across the entire Chilean university system. Thus, university social responsibility was conceived as the capacity that a university has to transmit and implement global and specific principles and values, through their key processes of management, education, research and community engagement. This implies a vision of a Socially Responsible University that responds to a country's needs. Such a university is characterized by efforts to:

- i. Preserve and create social capital in the form of knowledge and thought, through reflection and interdisciplinary research aimed at contributing to sustainable development and the improvement of society as a whole.
- ii. Become a real community of learning and knowledge-creation.
- iii. Develop highly qualified individuals with integrity.
- iv. Include a transversal curriculum that incorporates the reality of the country into its vision.
- v. Offer life-long training by facilitating the re-entry of graduates into higher education for updating and complementing their training.
- vi. Be open to change, to value and incorporate knowledge and experience of the environment, and to generate and maintain spaces for debate within the institution.

It is thus evident that there is significant polysemy (Esfijani, Hussein & Chang 2013) around this concept. We understand USR, according to the UCP project (2002) proposal, as inherent or constitutive, that is, as a sort of natural condition that inspires the sense of what the university should be. This condition guides a series of values within the tasks given to students:

- a) In the personal plane, such as dignity of the person, freedom and integrity;
- b) In the social plane, such as common good and social equity, sustainable development and environment, sociability and solidarity for coexistence, acceptance and appreciation of diversity, citizenship, democracy and participation; and,
- c) At the university level, such as commitment to truth, excellence, interdependence and transdisciplinary work (UCP 2002; Vasilescu *et al.* 2010).

### **USR and professional teaching: ethical dilemma of professions in a globalized world**

Having a job that allows for sustaining a life is as desirable as life itself. All professions provide the money necessary for survival. They also generate prestige which, in turn, generates affection,

recognition and enhanced self-esteem (Cortina 2009); therefore, families expect their children to have a profession. Universities are the primary institution to which families send their offspring to pursue further training, and their graduates are usually considered representatives of an elite class. With the advent of globalization, universities started to compare the expertise of their professionals and a new governance system spread due to the new demands in the field. The “new public management” (Hood 1991) imposed itself and the search for greater efficiency and efficacy led to the institutionalization of the accountability process (Morales 2014).

The first response to this phenomenon is related to the quality of training processes. Currently, country development is seen primarily as an economic matter, and this takes precedence over other factors that should be taken into account, such as wealth distribution and the satisfaction of the population’s basic needs in terms of design and technical quality of education (Martínez 2017). This has resulted in a technical rather than comprehensive approach to higher education. A comprehensive approach combines excellent technical training with ethical awareness, and its objective is to train workers who consider all people involved (Martínez 2017), have a sense of service and pursue the well-being of society.

All professions seek to bring some good to society, an internal good that gives a profession its specificity and makes, for instance, the medicine and engineering fields completely different from each other. The nature of professions is thus what justifies their existence, as well as the professional values and ethics applied to them (Cortina 2009). Taking care of this internal good allows society to be more humane and imprints an identity onto a profession, which, in turn, generates external good that motivates workers such as money, prestige and power. When the purpose (internal good) is mistaken for rewards or interests (external good), the profession becomes homogeneous and what is ethically improper becomes the norm, causing a loss of legitimacy (Cortina 2009; Martínez 2017). Limiting the internal good of university only to the training of young people for the world of work reduces the educational impact of these institutions to the technical-cognitive sphere, whose instrumental rationality is governed by efficiency and efficacy. This has cultural consequences (López 2013).

All professions contribute to the resolution of a series of social problems from an ethical perspective, whose action-scope comprises traditions, social demands and philosophical reflection (Martínez 2017). Therefore, ethical dilemmas are inherent to all professions, as decisions will always have ethical implications. The way in which professionals resolve their ethical dilemmas shapes their way of being, doing and coexisting. Therefore, as their decisions affect society as a whole, removing the ethical component from professional training defeats the purpose of all professions (Cortina 2009).

Although universities have incorporated the defense of their social role in their discourse (Beltrán-Llavorador, Íñigo-Bajo & Mata-Segreda 2014) and have methodologies that incorporate humanitarian work into their curriculum more frequently (Jouannet, Salas & Contreras 2013), literature is scarce regarding how this influences students’ social constructions of their professional role and its links with the community.

## Educational practices: Service-learning with a social responsibility perspective

Kilksberg (2009) indicates that universities have the duty of mediating transformative and socially critical learning to allow students to face the ethical challenges of today's society. This includes ethical training, participation in reflection upon important social issues, the promotion of volunteer work among students and inclusive education focused on the groups least-favored or excluded from society. De La Calle, García & Giménez (2007) point out five factors necessary for the development of social responsibility: (i) personal involvement in action, (ii) education based on values, (iii) ownership of social awareness, (iv) knowledge of reality and a sense of empathy, and (v) understanding of the social engagement of the profession.

Learning and Service (SL) originated in 1903 in the United States as a cooperative learning methodology. Its name was coined in 1966 and later on, in the late seventies, Robert Sigmon (1979) established the "three principles of service learning": (i) those who receive the service have control over the service provided, (ii) those who receive the service become more capable of serving and being served by their own actions, and (iii) those who serve are also individuals who learn and have significant control over what they are expected to learn. In sum, SL combines community service with academic training in order to develop critical and reflexive thinking, as well as civic responsibility (Barrios, Rubio, Gutiérrez & Sepúlveda 2012). To integrate SL into USR would mean to materialize the motivations and commitments present in the institutional mission and graduation profile. Briefly, SL can be defined as "a method of teaching that combines academic curriculum with service to the community. Students learn and develop by participating in their community and helping to fulfill the needs of that community" (Folgueiras & Luna 2012).

If you anchor this in social responsibility, understanding it as an ethical category, its pedagogical intentions raise awareness on three levels: self-awareness, awareness of one's self in relation to one's surroundings and to others, and the systemic effects one's actions have on the environment. These three categories allow for a theoretical framework that shapes a complex set of ethics (Aguirre, Pelakais & Paz 2012; Vallaes 2014).

Such a framework promotes civic and social responsibility and critical reflection among the students, providing meaning to the learning journey (Einfeld & Collins 2008; Folgueiras & Luna 2012). This is because service-learning methodology allows students to commit to a well-organized system of community service that seeks to reduce local needs and is able to create a dialogue between service activity and learning, thereby allowing students to make connections with what they learn in class (Barrios, Rubio, Gutierrez & Sepúlveda 2012). Orienting this methodology to USR aims to allow the student to see the community partner as a peer and not only as someone in disadvantage, transforming him into an agent able to contribute to the learning process constructively. An SL program oriented to USR focuses not only on local and situated action, but also on ways in which professional training affects the construction of otherness, allowing teachers to expose students to ethical dilemmas as part of their professional training.

The integration of social responsibility education and key elements from SL methodology require interdisciplinary responses to problems that particularly affect those excluded. An SL project oriented to USR has three dimensions:

- a) An academic dimension linking theory with practice in real social contexts of disciplinary training.
- b) A second dimension related to the vocation of serving others, contributing to the solution of community problems via the profession.
- c) A third dimension that corresponds to students' training in values, especially in the ethical dimension of social responsibility, which involves respect for human dignity, the common good and the sustainability of our shared home.

This way of being and inhabiting space calls for students to act in solidarity with the real world, and to be able to direct their own decisions and act in favor of the common good to build a fairer, more fraternal and sustainable society. Furthermore, beneficiaries are provided with disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge allowing adequate responses, formed together with their community partners, to the diagnosed needs.

Something that reflects southern identity in service learning is its emphasis on the pedagogical intention, clearly expressed in the methodology proposed by Jouannet, Salas & Contreras (2013), where reference is made not to service-learning activity, but to the service-learning project, giving it a relevant space for the community partner (Tapia 2000; 2006). The growth of SL in the global South has been made possible through networks like Clays ( [www.clays.org](http://www.clays.org) ) in Latin America, and REASE ( [www.rease.cl](http://www.rease.cl) ) in Chile specifically. Unlike their European counterparts, Chilean universities are privileged to be able to insert SL projects into courses, which are evaluated like disciplinary topics, rather than simply conceiving of them as community service. For these reasons, Tapia (2010) proposes using SL in a Latin American context, where students need to be sensitive to local demands and to express their professional goals in solidarity with pro-social behaviors.

### **SL and USR in hyper neoliberal context: the Chilean university system**

The Chilean higher education system is composed of 59 universities and they occupy an important role in the market context, serving as a good example of the "miracle" of the neoliberal intervention (Bernasconi 2005; Schmal & Cabrales 2018). The institutional reforms initiated in the 1980s included administrative decentralization, funding per capita, public support to private schools, implementation of universal academic achievement tests, and evaluation systems and monetary incentives for teachers (Bellei & Cabalin 2013). Also, because of these interventions (Guzmán-Concha 2017), all elements of the system live in a tension that frequently provokes student movement demands for change within the system (Valenzuela, Arriagada & Scherman 2012; Orellana, Cabalin & Bellei 2018). Such events suggest that, in spite of a discourse about inclusion or social mobility (Simbürger 2013), there is a gap between institutional mission and vision statements and students' perceptions of institutions. Thus, in spite of the targets proposed by the UCP project (2002) and how these permeate universities' mission statements, every year students raise their voices in massive student movements in public, because

they perceive a discrepancy between official discourse (supported in institutional statements) and institutional practices.

A quality assurance system was implemented in Chile in 2006, through the Chilean National Commission for Accreditation and Accreditation Agencies. The new criteria for accreditation of university programs require coherence between the graduation profile of students and the study plan of the program, and the statement of this information allows for differentiating one institution from another, giving them their own signature teaching style (CNA 2010).

Regarding the integration of social responsibility into graduation profiles of different programs, this aims not only to permeate training with the internal good of professional practice, but to contribute to making pro-social behavior part of being socially responsible. In addition, several studies have demonstrated how elements related to the relationship students establish with their peers (Torenbeeck, Jansen & Hoffman 2011), their perception of their own self-worth (Giacalone 2004), and the students' perception of their place in the institutional context (Youdell 2004) determine their academic performance. In the same way, the bond students have with their university space is a determinant of their well-being (Rollero & De Piccolli 2010).

How academics understand university teaching influences the learning outcomes of students. In this way, innovations in teaching are no longer focused on a teacher who delivers content, but rather on students who achieve learning, or on an intermediate point in which the teacher-student relationship is assessed (Kember 1997). Paradoxically, however, university teaching is characterized by a strong outsourcing trend, in which only 54.8% of teachers have full-time contracts, and staff spending less than half a day on campus conduct one third of teaching activities (SIES 2013).

## Methodology

This study is qualitative (Álvarez-Gayou 2003) in nature, since such a design allows for better assessment of the educational experiences of SL. A reflective approach to facilitate the systematic analysis of the teacher's personal experience was used. This was done to give voice to the teacher's narrative of his interdisciplinary experience, along with recognizing the social, political and structural cues making this narrative consistent (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2015). Data were gathered by means of the systematization and recording of reflections provided during work meetings.

Thereafter, at project end, we conducted a semi-structured group interview that was applied to community partners, teachers and students. This strategy was selected as it allowed for assessing participation throughout the project from a collective rather than individual perspective (Bleger 1982). In accordance with the spirit that guides USR, the participants in this study include teachers, students and community partners.

An inductive strategy, part of the reflective approach, is used for data analysis. The narrative analyses and their continuous reinterpretation thus permit creation of categories for different perceptions and construction processes (Creswell 2007). During the analysis, the three dimensions of ethical dilemmas guided the analysis, where the academic dimension was more evident in the teachers' reflections prior

to the project, and the other two, serving others and students' training in values, were emphasized in the community perspectives at the end of the process (Lariguet 2010; López, 2013; Jiménez, Jiménez & Revenco 2017).

The study scenario is the implementation of an SL project based on the methodology proposed by Jouannet, Salas & Contreras (2013), which includes the following elements:

- Evaluation of the feasibility of carrying out service during the course: the coherence of learning objectives and community service, the students' commitment and the possible community partner are reviewed.
- Course plan: the teacher adapts the course plan to incorporate SL and designs reflection activities and assessments for this topic.
- Establishment of an SL society: search for and contact community partners, and sign an agreement to plan and agree on the terms of the service.
- Introduction of SL in class: the teacher explains the methodology and its impacts on learning and the community to the students.
- Development and evaluation of all reflection tasks.
- Final questionnaire/focus or discussion group between community partners and students.
- Shared final self-evaluation.

Three academic courses from three professional programs in one Chilean university participated in this study as part of the regular academic work undertaken during one elective semester. The SL methodology was incorporated into the syllabus of the courses, taking into account its coherence with the mission and vision of the institution, its educational plan and the content of the discipline. The three sets of participants were:

- a) the students from three different courses (70 youth between 20 and 22 years old): forty students were from a general credit course about ethics; 20 students came from an accounting course working with organizational theory, and 10 students were from an engineering course focusing on thermal processing of foods.
- (b) the community partners – three micro-entrepreneurship organizations and one non-governmental organization with five employers and almost 10 residents.
- (c) the teachers leading each course.

The common strategy was that the students in groups (four or five per group) prepared one work proposal for the community, after dialogue aimed at understanding the dimensions of the problem that could be addressed during the semester, considering the problem and course context. The specific nature of the work was dependent on students' capacity for sensitivity to local needs, with the teacher remaining in the background acting as an academic mentor.

Three important milestones drove the process. The first was when students from the three classes discussed, with the community partner, the challenges that faced them. The second part focused on development of communication skills, leadership, interdisciplinary teamwork and social responsibility. The third part consisted of a seminar in which teachers, community partners and students from

different programs discussed the group experience of incorporating SL as a didactic strategy for disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning (Sanders, Oss & McGeary 2016).

As a result, while each student group is concerned with its particular project, and how to adjust technical knowledge to the needs of the community partner, the teacher must oversee the global process, ensuring a caring balance between course target and community. They must satisfy one pedagogical intention, whatever their particular project proposal.

Ethical care was taken because, at the beginning of the process, there was one meeting with the community partner to explain the service-learning project's scope and adjust reciprocal expectations. One agreement was signed between all parties and the methodology was designed to place all three partners in dialogue. Furthermore, before every focus group, each participant was asked for permission to record the interviews, and was also informed about the possibility of refusing to participate in the research process. All participants gave written consent to participate in the research study.

## Results and discussion

Discussion of the results is divided into two broad areas: the teachers' perceptions prior to the start of the project, and the perceptions of the teachers, students and community partners after the project.

### *Teachers' perceptions before the project*

Based on the teachers' reflections, three dimensions could be identified regarding the teachers' perceptions prior to inception of the project:

- i. Learning from others' experiences, even when the relationships with content and between students are unpredictable.
- ii. Preconceptions that are in conflict with the need to have students engage with social reality.
- iii. Cross disciplinary dialogue and the motivations of both teachers and students.

Each of these three dimensions is discussed in more detail below.

- i. Learning from others' experiences, even when the relationships with content and between students are unpredictable*

In this regard, teachers shared their narratives based on their previous experiences. Two teachers commented on an SL pilot experience. This was their first 'intervention' into a subject they taught together and what motivated them was the challenge of making students approach real-world problems. They expressed the view that the transition between discursive theoretical knowledge and contextualized social practices is more difficult in reality.

Although these teachers acknowledged that "many things didn't go as we expected", the experience was educational. They questioned how to make this intervention beneficial to students, so they can "grow as people and human beings". The legitimacy of this question reflects their concern with

relationships that students will establish not only with academic, disciplinary and interdisciplinary content, but also with their peers. As Morin (2010) argues, students are expected to become aware of and open to other views in order to accomplish a common project or objective, since their attitude could affect their decisions and actions in terms of interdisciplinary, shared social responsibility.

In addition, teachers were concerned about students' expectations, which did not always coincide with their own. They also manifested different approaches to the shared responsibility they had to take on when implementing SL projects. Regarding this, they argued that "human relationships are never predictable", and that "working with students is always hard ... we have had trouble making them work in groups ... sometimes only one student showed up and that severely affected the community partner ... that kind of thing got out of hand". The distress that causes the perception of uncertainty and loss of control can be tackled by means of a pro-social dialogue, which was observed within the teacher group. The lack of control over the situation is solved if there is a cooperation network in which the 'other' is seen as a collaborator; this breaks with the perception of competence and performance targets and allows for addressing a situation perceived as complex, establishing reward for the individual.

*ii. Preconceptions that are in conflict with the need to have students engage with social reality*

Some of the teachers' opinions call into question the implementation of SL methodology. This is because it was the first time they had participated in such projects, and they were especially concerned about the responsibility of students regarding agreements with the community partner. As stated by some teachers: "I am scared that they will commit and then not show up. I don't want them to come out of obligation, but because they are motivated", and "What I am not clear about is how we are going to make students do this". Along the same line, but with some more experience in the application of this methodology, one teacher expressed that "I feel that it will be difficult for them in the beginning ... that's also a possibility".

This narrative conflicts with the ethical mandate teachers feel they have to assume in university education. We believe that the following quotes provide evidence of the feasibility of applying this methodology for developing social responsibility and making students see service as a way of being and living in the country: "I believe that is almost a duty, because you have to get through to students", "they have to realize that there are parallel worlds ... broaden their views"; "In these contexts, students have to use other types of resources", and "if we don't do this, we're denying them an enrichment of their world".

*iii. Cross-disciplinary dialogue and the motivations of both teachers and students*

In this line, before starting the process, teachers believed the following: "I have always thought of interdisciplinarity as a basis for educational processes between professionals ... [that] can make professionals in our field more human"; "because if not, we're educating small automatons, we're showing them a path, but it's our path or the one we travelled. Interdisciplinarity allows for broadening our horizons", and "ethical reflection is strengthened." In expressing these opinions, it can be seen

that there is tacit agreement regarding interdisciplinary learning, which confirms the teacher's motivations and indicates that they believe the process can be conducted successfully.

The teaching approach of this group of teachers is oriented toward experience rather than to the technical qualification of professionals. This can be observed in the expression "... to humanize the classroom". Otherness and dialogue may be found in the social construction of learning, as teachers believe that this should come "not from our own beliefs" but that "we have to give it a more profound sense, to make students reflect upon what they are as future professionals ... there is a work niche with these guys". In sum, teachers aspire to a teaching approach that goes beyond the limits of technical knowledge, to a complementary approach, to give university teaching a human face by "contributing to the processes beyond the contents of a specific subject".

Additionally, teachers express their perceptions of the students' motivations. They believe that "young people ask for this" and "they are aware of the existence of others". Both the motivations of teachers and students are related to what Morin (2010) points out: that the concept of interdisciplinary work as exchange and cooperation is in direct contrast to the preconceptions of implementing this type of project.

Teachers agree that there is no magic recipe to ensure development of a project; however, despite their apprehension, fears and prejudices, they are convinced that students, teachers and community partners will achieve both academic value and learning through service. In this sense, dialogue is already a means to strengthen horizontal relationships and make students become socially mature.

These three argumentative lines are connected to a discourse of academic rigor, but they must be humanized as part of the teaching process. The teachers see SL as one opportunity to achieve a balance between quality and a truly socially responsible professional exercise, because they are not comfortable with their traditional teaching performances that only respond to quality ratios (Marginson 2006). They argue, from a critical perspective, that reality and otherness are vital for professional education. The concern for the human is the basis of good higher education and they see it as invisible in the traditional, and more popularly used, teaching methods.

Although Einfeld & Collins (2008) highlight the relations between service-learning and topics like social justice or civic engagement, the teachers did not focus on this; instead, they see in the methodology a unique opportunity for improving human qualities like empathy (Halsted 1998). This is necessary because higher education in Latin America (Colado 2003) obeys market demands and tries to adjust to globalized standards (Marginson 2006) for universities. This is especially strong in Chile (Jiménez 2015).

### *Perceptions of teachers, students and community partners at the end of the project*

Again, three dimensions regarding change in the preconceptions about project implementation could be identified:

- i. Leaving with gratitude for the experience shared
- ii. Emotional relationships built
- iii. Ignorance of the underlying structure

*i. Leaving with gratitude for the experience shared*

Students and community partners expressed the view that this was a positive experience. In the case of community partners, they repeatedly referred to their gratitude toward students; however, their gratitude is not only for the problem resolved, but also for having shared a common experience in which they felt validated by students. It is through the construction of the other and how this validates or invalidates individuals during the process that students display not only solidarity, but also social responsibility competence. As shown previously by teachers, this interaction requires early work on awareness to teach students not to violate the rights of their counterparts.

Students also expressed the view that this is an opportunity to connect with others, to be in an open and different context (“We were allowed to go out” or “to be outside”). They also critiqued the traditional narrative of university education, in which subjects are restricted in their scope and the community is not a participating agent. The “social component” is something seen as relevant only in the future, when students have already graduated from university.

This presents an interesting opportunity to improve social engagement in the mid-term (Guthrie & McCracken 2010) because students are put in a different scenario where, for the first time, they can see the faces of those who are affected by their professional work. The impact is visible and errors cause real consequences for people. This is important because many service-learning experiences are focused on community service and are evaluated in terms of hours of community service, emphasizing civic engagement and social commitment, and also conceiving of service scholarship as a resource (Bringle & Hatcher 1996; Einfeld & Collins 2008; Guthrie & McCracken 2010). However USR is, in one way, about the future and how their graduates can do better work for all. There is a need in Latin America to address problems of inequality and local development, so ethical concern about their work requires ethical concern about people. In order to engage with the ethical dilemmas of the professions, one needs experiential teaching and learning (Cortina 2009; López 2013; Kilksberg 2009; Martínez 2017).

*ii. Emotional relationships built*

Community partners were the first to answer questions about role and contribution, followed by students and teachers. This point was interesting, because for teachers it was more complex to identify their participation within, and contribution to, the process. This suggests, although not conclusively, that there is an analytical perception of the processes in which follow-up work in the classroom seems to be parallel to field work. To a certain extent, this confirms the fragmented sense of university training, since the emphasis is put on the emotion of the experience, without incorporating technical elements. Words like commitment, enthusiasm and energy reflect how partners perceive themselves as being in a horizontal and integrated relationship with their work. Student-partner relationships were built on an affective basis, and students did not underscore their technical role in the project. The same is true for teachers, who also did not identify themselves within the process, although they expressed being satisfied with the results.

Positive emotions are important as they promote community engagement and create the possibility for transforming learning experiences (Beard, Humberstone & Clayton 2014). Unfortunately, this element is not visualized within ranking criteria and is absent in institutional statements even where there is a concern with social responsibility (Gaete 2015).

*iii. Ignorance of the underlying structure*

In strong relation to the above and as a consequence of the uncertainty expressed by teachers, the educational value of the methodology seemed to become invisible. The process seemed to flow with an internal dynamic separate from curriculum planning, and experiential knowledge seemed to overshadow mastery of technical knowledge. In the participants' testimonies, there were no references to the educational process, to the difficulties in terms of required knowledge or even to the assessment method. Instead, their responses point to a sense of personal gratification without any structure or curricular intention. Therefore, while participants express a positive attitude toward the potential of the established relationship, there is still reliance on an excessively technical curriculum failing to integrate knowledge into the broader, comprehensive education of the individual (Reynoso, Castillo & Dimas 2014).

It can be concluded that the results confirm the conclusions by Jiménez, Jiménez, and Reveco (2017) who argue that it is necessary to place ethics of social responsibility at the center of discussions, and to take into account how it will affect disciplinary and interdisciplinary work in both ecological and human dimensions.

This is especially striking, because many Chilean universities – including the institution that was the site of this research – express, in institutional statements, their concern for social engagement (Gaete 2015); however, this does not seem to extend to teaching in professional programs, as were included in this study. Although such a teaching process promotes engagement with local needs, it does not appear to supersede the preference for individual gratification and immediate results.

## Conclusions

Methodologies like SL are seen as a good opportunity for the recovery of the concept of university life, giving it new significance as multicultural, inclusive and reflexive. In this way, instead of being “professional factories”, universities are committed to a social role in which they are responsible for the consequences of their actions especially for the training of socially responsible professionals, which requires incorporating social responsibility into their graduation profiles.

This method for university education is relevant in that it strengthens ethical reflection upon students' own actions, and enables teachers to assume reflexive, transformatory and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching. The students can develop a social commitment strongly linked with their professional work, and USR overcomes the advertising hype and becomes reality within the university.

The confluence of subjects in the same partnership offers an opportunity for solving complex social problems from different perspectives. However, what was not explored in this study is how an

interdisciplinary approach can offer a better perspective on ethical dilemmas and how this becomes a professional training strategy.

For the teacher, overexposure to emotional experiences over the technical aspects poses a curricular challenge. The biggest challenge, in this regard, is to move from intervention to co-transformation, which would enable creative replication of the experience for all semesters, and build trust and mutual valuation with the community partner.

Improving SL within the USR perspective is more complex than simply creating an attractive academic product. This is because it depends on an affective relationship that is fragile and easily broken if there is not appropriate induction or teachers do not proactively identify potential trouble spots. Thus, real institutional effort is needed, not just a good institutional statement. This paper contributes to the literature on experiential and interdisciplinary learning and shows the urgency of its advancement. Failure to implement SL within the curriculum will hamper professional performance of graduates in a complex and interconnected world.

In view of the need for professionals that are better able to reflect upon the internal good of their profession and resolve the ethical dilemmas inherent to it, we can conclude that incorporating participative SL methodologies into the curriculum does not necessarily ensure the achievement of social responsibility competence on the part of students. It is from the classroom, the field of action for teachers, where the “internal good-technical knowledge-construction of the other” triad is created, and the way in which this triad is placed in the curriculum will define the students’ graduation profile.

Finally, in the Chilean university system, very pressed by performance measures, service learning opens up the possibility of introducing social responsibility in the professional graduate profile without neglecting disciplinary quality criteria. If we extend this to Latin American universities, the relevance is even greater because the solution of the social problems facing the region require professionals who are conscious of social demands, inequality and who can participate in the transformation of society. In the South, service learning has a clear educational purpose and can challenge the dominant, traditional education paradigm. The real work in doing so lies in the trenches, inside the courses in which the teaching-learning process plays out.

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