

CROSS-CURRICULAR EDUCATION FOR SOLIDARITY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: ORIENTATION FOR PROBLEM EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

The present study is framed by the project of educational innovation “Cross-cutting education for solidarity in the training of psychologists and educators” (PIE 10-127; 2010-2012). The aim of this study is presenting the structure of this research and it shows an analysis of values and attitudes in a sample of university students as well as to provide an assessment of the impact and satisfaction that they had reported in specific educational activities in favour of solidarity. Participants were 945 University Students, aged between 18 and 57 years. The results demonstrate that most students participating in the study highly agree to consider situations reflected in items 1, 4 and 7, as stealing, violent behaviour or trying to avoid a conflict. The majority of the participating students does not collaborate with any NGOs; they mention the lack of time, the issue not being raised as well as not being involved in any solidarity activity noting as reasons: lack of information, idleness, not having the opportunity presented and not having the funds to do so. In addition, students have found these educational activities for solidarity very satisfactory.

Key words: basic competence, European space of higher education, solidarity-based teaching, university students, values and attitudes.

Introduction

Society increasingly places demands on professionals to know how to manage complex situations which consider the human and social aspects involved in different situations. The rapid development of knowledge also requires professionals to become “lifelong learners”, that is, to be able to update their knowledge and competences while constantly improving the quality of their professional practice.

The European Space for Higher Education has recently stressed its interest in training future professionals as social change agents, not only in relation to creating and managing new knowledge but also promoting a higher social cohesion among citizens. There are many risks associated with using the current scientific and technical knowledge for purposes other than for the good of the community, instead of using them to change our world and build a more equitable society. The decision making and ethical criteria that lead the application of such knowledge depend on the ethical training of the people responsible for such decisions (García Garrido, 2008), rather than exclusively on their professional or scientific training.

It is also the university’s responsibility (and not only in compulsory education levels) to educate students to exercise their civic responsibility and to be committed to the community based on their university knowledge. In order to face the challenges posed by a globalized world, Legendre (2007), Martínez and Esteban (2005) and Roegiers (2006) stress the urgent need for higher education to prepare competent people who know their field of expertise, as well as people who have solidarity competences, able to analyse the current challenges and

who are ready to commit themselves to helping others. The above authors also state that only competence training (when it is well-delivered) can really equip students to become citizens capable of acting in the direction of their own values.

Delors (1997) states that education is one of the keys to the 21st century and must consist of a constant re-educating of the person in terms of their knowledge, skills and power of judgement. The concept of “Education Society” is here evoked; where the individual’s personal and social life becomes the aim of learning. This is an overall experience that lasts for a lifetime, at both a practical and knowledge level. In sum, we must all “learn to learn.” Delors also clarify that the Knowledge Society makes professionals depend on one another. In line with this, the present project suggests that the university is one of the main dynamizing agents in the development of solidarity and volunteering activities. The project has been very favourably assessed, both externally and internally, and from both qualitative and quantitative points of view. The participants were a multidisciplinary group of 24 professors from 13 different disciplines.

Next, as background of the present study, the structure and main features of the innovative educational project that is being developed at the University of Malaga will be presented.

The present study is framed by the innovative educational project “Cross-curricular Education for Solidarity in the Training of Psychologists and Educators” (PIE10-127, Call for Innovative Educational Projects, 2010-2012) coordinated by Dr. Francisco Manuel Morales Rodríguez from the University of Malaga. The general aim of this project is to promote the acquisition of solidarity competences, encourage volunteering work with disabled people and raise awareness in the university context. Participants in this project were a multidisciplinary group of 24 professors from 13 different disciplines, who suggested a number of cross-curricular educational activities aimed to promote solidarity to their students. Activities were adapted for each educational programme and included the implementation and adaptation of advanced learning methods to encourage autonomous learning, active participation and the use of ICT. A total of 4304 students from 34 subjects have benefited from this project at the UMA (University of Malaga).

The activities developed were as follows:

a) Discussion of the importance of solidarity action in the world currently, in particular in Spanish and Andalusian schools, and spreading this discussion in ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education); b) Completion of a questionnaire on moral values and attitudes and social volunteering activities; and analysing its results by means of discussion groups to reflect on the causes and consequences of the lack of solidarity; c) Carrying out a survey and a self-report for students to assess the impact and satisfaction of activities, together with the difficulty and average time spent on each activity; d) Students design a solidarity action and, write a report, which is to be uploaded the following academic year; e) Arranging forums and wikis on different dates for each class group; f) Volunteering with disabled students in the UMA as well as with class groups without disabled students.

Next, the objectives of the research (PIE10-127) where this study is framed are set out below:

- To raise awareness and promote solidarity and volunteering within the university context.
- To promote cross-curricularity and the acquisition of solidarity competences by means of the joint participation and collaboration between students and university professors from different disciplines and teaching contexts.
- To contact associations and humanitarian organizations working to promote solidarity, disabled people, justice and social peace.
- To contribute to a comprehensive education for university students where solidarity plays a crucial role.
- To provide students with theoretical and practical knowledge about the lack of solidarity

and the value of solidarity, by carrying out practical and interesting activities.

- To present daily solidarity as being accessible to all, and not as a utopia.
- To encourage debate about the lack of solidarity in daily life.
- To promote practical activities to put into practice what students have learned about daily solidarity activities.
- To introduce practical solidarity activities as a daily part of university life.
- To promote volunteer work with disabled students at the University of Malaga.
- To encourage students to persuade other students to carry out solidarity activities.
- To encourage students to carry out educational activities aimed to promote solidarity, which foster and develop competences related to team work.
- To assess moral values and attitudes towards volunteer work with disabled UMA students and to solidarity activities, both before and after developing the project.
- To reflect on ethical behaviour in the workplace, stressing solidarity action.
- To encourage students to adhere to the ethical standards that should govern social life as well as national and international relationships.
- To analyse the values gathered in the Spanish Constitution with regards to solidarity.
- To spread the project within the university context, in secondary schools and in other educational institutions, in order to be adapted and implemented by means of a number of activities (contests, conferences, exhibitions, murals, posters, *etc.*).

Both the present research and the University of Malaga's strategic plans for the current graduate degree courses stress the relevance of promoting students' acquisition of solidarity competences as well as the need to carry out a more accurate assessment of attitudes and interests towards moral issues. This is because one of the main cross-curricular competences to be promoted among students is social and citizenship competences. Although there is data available from over 1000 university students sampled from different courses and degrees, the main interest in assessing solidarity and social justice values, lies mainly in the results obtained from the undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, such as the current Master's Degree in Secondary Education offered by the University of Malaga. This would allow for a better design of teaching activities in the current educational programmes, in order to develop the afore-mentioned competences and assume the university's social responsibilities. Therefore, an assessment of the impact and satisfaction reported by students in relation to educational activities which promote solidarity is crucial here, together with a more accurate assessment of students' attitudes and interests in relation to moral issues. We believe this is important in order to be able to plan an educational programme which takes into account criteria of an ethical nature as part of these cross-curricular competences that must be promoted, if the aim is to create socially responsible European citizens.

The objectives of the present study are as follows: (1) To present the structure of the innovative educational project "Cross-curricular Education for Solidarity in the Training of Psychologists and Educators" (PIE10-127); (2) To conduct an analysis of moral values and attitudes in a sample of university undergraduate and postgraduate students; and (3) To assess the impact and satisfaction reported by these students in relation to a number of educational activities for solidarity, framed by the present project.

Problem of Research

The present study is framed by the innovative educational project "Cross-curricular Education for Solidarity in the Training of Psychologists and Educators" (University of Malaga, 2010-2012, PIE10-127). It aims to present the structure of the research, as well as to provide future graduates with careers advice which promotes solidarity, volunteering and raises an

overall awareness of solidarity education among university students. Likewise, the study aims to carry out a more accurate assessment of moral values and attitudes of the students participating in this project, as well as providing an assessment of the satisfaction and the impact the main educational activities aimed to promote solidarity and volunteering have had on them.

As provides in the strategic plans of the University of Malaga in new degree programs and graduate of the University of the XXI century is especially relevant a more accurate assessment of attitudes and interest in moral issues and that one of the transferable skills to encourage students are social skills and citizens. This will enable better design of training activities in educational settings to develop these skills and social responsibilities in the university. So in our context is a priority a more accurate assessment of attitudes and interest in moral issues for the planning of educational practice criteria considering ethical and moral as part of these generic skills to be encourage European citizens.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

This study is part of the innovation project “A cross sectional study about education for Solidarity of psychologists and educators” (PIE10-127, Call for Educational Innovation Projects, 2010-2012) coordinated by Dr. Francisco Manuel Morales Rodríguez University of Malaga. This project aims to promote general skills development solidarity, volunteering to people with disabilities and awareness in the university. **The objectives of the present study are as follows:** (a) To present the structure of the innovative educational project “Cross-curricular Education for Solidarity in the Training of Psychologists and Educators” (PIE10-127); (b) To conduct an analysis of moral values and attitudes in a sample of university undergraduate and postgraduate students; and (c) To assess the impact and satisfaction reported by these students in relation to a number of educational activities for solidarity, framed by the present project.

Sample of Research

Participants were a sample of 945 university students aged 18 to 57 years old, 35.2% men and 64.7% women, attending the Faculty of Psychology and Education at the University of Malaga (Spain). The questionnaire was completed collectively as a whole class. A non-probability-based incidental sample was used. Although there are data from a sample of over 1500 college students from different courses and qualifications, the evaluation priority interest lies in this sample of students given the recent implementation the new degree programs and graduate at the University of Malaga. In that sense, in our context, from the University of Malaga is a priority this assessment to plan training activities from the beginning in this program to enable the promotion of ethical responsibilities related to the exercise of a committed and responsible European citizenship socially.

Instrument and Procedures

The instrument used was the *Questionnaire on Moral Values and Attitudes* (VATM in Spanish) (Trianes, 2002), which was originally created for this purpose. It consists of 11 closed items with a Likert-type scale for responses, where students are asked to decide to which degree they agree with a number of statements. Additionally, there are two open questions (12 and 13) aimed to find out students’ potential involvement in a non-governmental organization (NGO) or a solidarity activity (*i.e.* an activity without a financial reward), as well as their reasons for

doing so. The reliability and validity analysis of this instrument presented satisfactory results. A self-satisfaction scale was also used to ask participating students for their degree of satisfaction in relation to the solidarity educational activities which they undertook.

Participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily and data was introduced into the SPSS for analysis. Questionnaire responses were carefully checked and recorded before entering them into the SPSS. With regards to the administration of the different tests, students were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and that confidentiality of data was guaranteed at all times. Students had unlimited time to complete the questionnaires and were allowed to ask for clarification with regards to their answers or how to answer the questions. This study has been approved by the corresponding Ethics Committee of the institution conducting the research.

The administration of the tests was carried out by two researchers who were trained to explain the objectives to teachers as well as to give the appropriate instructions to students. They explained the objectives to students and gave them instructions to help with completing the questionnaires. Students completed them as a whole class in the different classrooms.

Data Analysis

The study has conducted descriptive analyses to reflect percentages, means and standard deviations. Additionally, the Student's t-test was applied on independent samples to find out if there were statistically significant differences based on gender in the assessment of attitudes and interests in moral issues. The data coding and analysis was carried out by means of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS 17.0.

Results of Research

As observed in Table 1, most students participating in the study highly agree to consider situations reflected in items 1, 4 and 7, as stealing, violent behaviour or trying to avoid a conflict (87.70%; 62.00% and 62.00% respectively).

76.7% of post-graduate university students are not involved in any NGO, the main reasons being lack of time or that they have not thought about it yet. Likewise, 58.9% of them are not involved in any solidarity activity, *i.e.* an activity aimed to help others, without a financial reward. The reasons for this are as follows: lack of information, lack of time, apathy, they had not been given the chance, they had not thought about it and they do not have enough money to do it.

Table 1. Attitudes, values and interests on moral issues (%).

	Strongly disagree	Partially disagree	Partially agree	Strongly agree
1. A teenager goes into a shopping centre, takes a videotape, hides it and leaves without paying. That is stealing.	2.6	1.9	7.8	87.7
2. A young person who is buying his house tries not to pay taxes by partially hiding his income. This is considered stealing.	3.4	8.8	40.7	47.1
3. Shooting a thief who had just broken into your house to steal is a violent action.	5.4	12.8	26.9	54.9
3.1. Shooting a thief who had just broken into your house to steal is a fair action.	29.1	31.7	29.5	9.6
4. A student, who had been beaten up by a group of teenagers outside high school, pulls a knife and injures one of them, who later dies. This is a violent action.	4.4	8.3	25.3	62.0
4.1. A student, who had been beaten up by a group of teenagers outside high school, pulls a knife and injures one of them, who later dies. This is a fair action.	29.6	32.7	30.2	7.5
5. If someone approaches you asking for money when you are out shopping you feel you must give it to him/her.	37.7	35.0	21.3	6.0
6. When you see NGO propaganda asking for help or money for projects to help disadvantaged groups you feel you must help them.	7.5	19.5	49.4	23.5
7. When you see that a conflict is about to erupt in your immediate environment (family, friends, classmates, etc.) you try to avoid it.	2.9	6.3	28.8	62.0
8. The death penalty is fair.	44.5	22.8	24.6	8.0
9. I agree that the local City Council should provide free accommodation to people who have suffered a tragedy that has left them homeless.	2.8	6.4	21.9	68.9
10. I agree that Europe should close its borders to immigrants from countries with fewer resources.	31.5	37.2	25.1	6.3
11. I am willing to intervene if I see someone has been treated unfairly.	2.6	8.7	52.7	36.0

Table 2 results regarding the students' degree of satisfaction in relation to the educational activities for solidarity show that such activities were very successful and may even have had an emotional impact on students (according to students' opinions), many of whom showed that they had deeply reflected on moral issues.

Table 2. Degree of students' satisfaction in relation to the educational solidarity activities carried out.

	Mean	SD
1. Participating in the forum "Education and Solidarity"	3.49	0.55
2. Film viewing "It all starts today"	3.81	0.44
3. Designing solidarity activities	3.86	0.45
4. Debating on the importance of solidarity action nowadays	3.63	0.64
5. Filling in questionnaires via the e-campus and analysing and discussing results	3.72	0.59
6. Making a wiki on solidarity news	3.70	0.89

Analyses of mean difference (Student's t-test) were conducted in order to determine whether there were statistically significant differences based on gender in the variable, "attitudes and interests in moral issues." Results obtained are shown in Table 3. Results show that there are statistically significant differences based on gender in attitudes and interests in moral issues. In general terms, men are more likely to decriminalize violence when acting in self-defence and they also show less predisposition for pro-social behaviour than women.

Table 3. Gender based differences towards moral attitudes, values and interests.

	Gender	Mean	SD	t
1. A teenager goes into a shopping centre, takes a videotape, hides it and leaves without paying. That is stealing.	Man	3.70	0.70	-3.66**
	Woman	3.86	0.52	
2. A young person who is buying his house tries not to pay taxes by partially hiding his income. This is considered stealing.	Man	3.21	0.84	-2.73**
	Woman	3.36	0.72	
3. Shooting a thief who had just broken into your house to steal is a violent action.	Man	3.19	0.98	-2.53*
	Woman	3.36	0.84	
3.1. Shooting a thief who had just broken into your house to steal is a fair action.	Man	2.31	0.97	2.64**
	Woman	2.12	0.95	
4. A student, who had been beaten up by a group of teenagers outside high school, pulls a knife and injures one of them, who later dies. This is a violent action.	Man	3.36	0.91	-2.32*
	Woman	3.50	0.76	
4.1. A student, who had been beaten up by a group of teenagers outside high school, pulls a knife and injures one of them, who later dies. This is a fair action.	Man	2.26	0.96	2.62**
	Woman	2.08	0.92	
5. If someone approaches you asking for money when you are out shopping you feel you must give it to him/her.	Man	1.83	0.90	-2.73**
	Woman	2.01	0.89	
6. When you see NGO propaganda asking for help or money for projects to help disadvantaged groups you feel you must help them.	Man	2.66	0.82	-5.64**
	Woman	3.01	0.83	
7. When you see that a conflict is about to erupt in your immediate environment (family, friends, classmates, etc.) you try to avoid it.	Man	3.40	0.77	-2.80*
	Woman	3.56	0.71	
8. The death penalty is fair.	Man	1.97	1.03	0.48
	Woman	1.94	0.98	

9. I agree that the local City Council should provide free accommodation to people who have suffered a tragedy that has left them homeless.	Man	3.45	0.78	-3.26**
	Woman	3.63	0.70	
10. I agree that Europe should close its borders to immigrants from countries with fewer resources.	Man	2.21	0.90	3.39**
	Woman	1.98	0.89	
11. I am willing to intervene if I see someone has been treated unfairly.	Man	3.13	0.74	-2.53**
	Woman	3.26	0.68	

Statistical significance. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

The general aim of this study has been to contribute with an analysis on moral values and attitudes on a postgraduate student sample, as well as to carry out an assessment of the impact and satisfaction that these educational activities for solidarity have had on students. Activities are framed by the innovative educational project “Cross-curricular Education for Solidarity.” As a background to the study, the structure and main features of this project are presented as follows. Participants of the study (framed by this project) were a multidisciplinary group of 24 members of teaching staff from 13 different disciplines (there are 34 university subjects taught across 13 different Psychology and Education degree courses. Teaching staff suggested to their students a number of cross-curricular educational activities aimed at promoting solidarity competences. Activities were adapted for each educational programme and included the implementation and adaptation of advanced learning methods to encourage autonomous learning, active participation and use of ICT. A total of 4304 students from 34 subjects have benefited from this project at the UMA.

With regards to the assessment of attitudes and interests in moral issues carried out by the present study, it is encouraging to see that a group of postgraduate students are able to consider that a violent action can be justified. Indeed, defending oneself against being mugged or being attacked by a group of teenagers, are situations that activate an extremely rooted response in our culture; that is, decriminalizing violence when acting in self-defence. Such decriminalization of violence in terms of self-defence clearly belongs to the personal sphere of morality (Turiel, 1983), whereas the consideration of a violent action as being inherently unjustified belongs to the sphere of universal morality, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Schaffer, 2000). Both spheres, also known as micro-morality and macro-morality respectively (Rest, Narváez, Bebeau and Thoma 1999a, 1999b) can be at odds which each other, especially in young people, who have not yet reached the moral identity that characterises most adults (Blasi, 1993). Today, pro-social behaviour is seen as a dimension with two different types of behaviour: at one end, selfish behaviour, and at the other, altruistic behaviour (Benítez, 2009). Considering that every altruistic act may involve some sort of benefit for the person carrying it out, the study has suggested university activities which have a benefit for others, even if the beneficiaries in this case are participating students. The results are useful in view of educating students in values such as solidarity, non-violence and social justice in the university environment.

In particular, the viewing of the films *It all starts today* by Bertrand Tavernier and *The class* by Laurent Cantet was especially interesting. In general terms, both undergraduates and postgraduates have been heavily involved in activities involving the use of multimedia. For example, a group of postgraduate students from the Secondary Education Master’s Degree course made a short film on solidarity and organized a discussion, involving the entire university community, as well as City Councils and other associations. Another group of students from the Speech Therapy degree course held “Conferences on Disability Awareness” in the Psychology Department’s auditorium, at the University of Malaga. This conference included lectures, a poster exhibition, murals, a viewing and discussion of the film *Miracle of love* (on autism),

games aimed to raise awareness, time spent with paralysed children, *etc.* Data showed how learning resources involving the use of images rather than only words, can facilitate reflection within the university educational system. As mentioned earlier, the viewing of films has been a particularly successful resource for most students; hence the need (and the opportunity) to use visual media, like films to address values education, such as solidarity, in a fun way (López-Barajas and Ruiz, 2000; Pereira, 2003; Vilanou and Colledemont, 2000). Moreover, digital skills are one of the skills that need to be promoted and given continuity, according to the European Space for Higher Education.

The New Model of Higher Education involves new methodologies, requirements and challenges, where attitudinal competences are one of the very basic and main competences to be promoted. Nowadays, volunteering, solidarity and interests in analysing social values in young people are aspects immersed in a context of accelerated development within the academic field (Moral, 2011); and university students can actually become one of the most important groups to develop educational activities for solidarity. Education in values such as solidarity needs to become the guiding principle of every educational process, focusing on students' comprehensive education, promoting ethical values and attitudes and showing, in educational programmes as well as in daily life, compliance with ethical and socially desirable values (Trianes and Fernández, 2001). In relation to this, the results of this study also show that this is a feasible project. In fact, a number of daily solidarity actions have already been carried out and have been applied in a truly practical way, benefiting the university community and its surroundings. What is more, students have already suggested and designed (with the supervision of their teachers) a substantial amount of solidarity acts; such as a successful Solidarity Concert, a photography exhibition on solidarity and a film made by a group of postgraduate students. The film relied on the collaboration of the University's Centre for Initiatives at the University of Malaga and the Department of Education, the Department of Education, Innovation and Science of the Regional Government of Andalusia. It is gratifying to observe how students have moved from a purely theoretical context, where a number of educational activities for solidarity were carried out in class, to the realm of truly practical applications within society.

In relation to gender, statistically significant differences were found. In general terms, women have shown to be less likely than men to decriminalize violence when acting to protect what is theirs. For instance, with regards to the item "you see a thief who had broken into your home to steal and shoot him", women are more likely than men to consider that this is a violent action, even if it is to protect what is yours. Likewise, with regards to item 4: "a student kills another outside high school in response for a beating he had suffered", participating women were more likely than men to think of such action as violent, and less likely than men to consider such action as fair. Women have also shown to agree less than men with the suggestion that Europe should close its borders to immigrants from countries with fewer resources, and are more willing than men to intervene if they see that someone has been treated unfairly. These results are consistent with results from other studies reporting more empathy, solidarity and moral reasoning in women (Carlo, Roesch and Koller, 1999).

Conclusions

As a final conclusion to the study, most university students participating in the study agreed that the situations reflected in the items could be considered as stealing or violent behaviour. They were also satisfied with the educational solidarity activities carried out. Additionally, men were more likely to decriminalize violence when acting in self-defence and showed less predisposition for pro-social behaviour than women.

With regards to the limitations of the present study, the use of more robust multivariate analyses is recommended for future studies, to reach more accurate and reliable conclusions.

It would also be advisable for future studies to analyse the associations between the assessed values and attitudes on the one hand, and other variables such as social climate, pro-social behaviour, empathy, self-concept and psychological welfare on the other. Finally, it would be interesting to analyse in depth the associations between the scores in attitudes towards moral issues on the one hand, and the variable “classroom climate” on the other.

In despite of such limitations, studies such as the present one are relevant for an early detection and assessment of interests and attitudes towards moral issues in view of a comprehensive education aimed to improve social coexistence. Such assessment will also allow for the design of an educational programme and activities that will contribute to the acquisition of cross-curricular competences, such as social and citizenship competences.

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