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# Advocating for Service-Learning as a pedagogical model in Physical Education: towards an activist and transformative approach

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** There seems to be a need to rethink education and shape the future to build more equitable societies. In line with this idea, Service-Learning (SL) has emerged as an educational approach to integrate curricular learning and the provision of a community service. Unfortunately, many SL implementations in Physical Education lack a concrete frame of reference to guide them.

**Purpose:** Using the model-based practice framework, this paper aims to make the case to consider SL a pedagogical model to put transformative and socially critical Physical Education discourses into operation in real contexts.

**Method:** The article is structured around two main parts. Part 1 includes the criteria that any advocacy for a model should present within the models-based practice framework. Part 2 is divided into different subsections to introduce the theoretical foundations of SL, the major theme, the teaching implications and learning aspirations, exemplification of a particular case, and critical elements and benchmarks. It also contains a review of the research findings and reference networks and organizations that, despite not seeing SL specifically as a pedagogical model, report its development in Physical Education around the world.

**Results and implications:** In addition to setting the general bases and criteria to make the case for a pedagogical model, the paper addresses the main instructional implications for Physical Education: learning outcomes and teaching strategies. The work suggests that by considering the experiential, critical and transformative principles of the model, its major learning impact is upon the affective and social domains, in connection with the major theme identified: 'learning by serving'. Another relevant contribution of the article is that it provides implementation guidelines through a 10-item checklist with benchmarks that typify SL's key features. This checklist could be of value, since it can help practitioners and researchers to describe and verify future implementations.

**Conclusion:** SL has the necessary elements to be considered an activist, transformative, trans-domain and inter-contextual pedagogical model in Physical Education. Its dual major theme (learning by serving) uncovers new perspectives on teaching and learning in Physical Education, promoting the students' social and affective domains. SL provides a connection between learning, teaching, content and context, requiring

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55 teachers and students to develop a commitment to the underlying philosophy of the model. Moreover, it occupies alternative spaces and locations to those traditionally used in Physical Education, and it can help develop genuine relationships between educators and students from schools and individuals and organizations from the community.

## 60 Introduction

Persistent inequalities have led humanity to live in increasingly complex and unstable societies (Kirk 2019). In these challenging circumstances, Service-Learning (SL) has emerged as a widespread pedagogical approach that aims to integrate academic learning and the provision of community services. However, SL has grown rapidly, becoming a ‘fashion’, and many implementations lack a clear frame of reference (Andreotti 2012; Furco 2011). While the educational intentions underlying SL seem to be clear, the ways of putting them into operation are not (Butin 2011).

65 According to Goodyear, Casey, and Kirk (2017, 1), ‘for a pedagogical change to be sustained, a practice architecture that relates to an innovation’s intended learning outcomes and the contexts in which it can be used needs to be created’. Therefore, a frame of reference is needed to facilitate and guide practical implementations of SL in PE. This article proposes the models-based practice approach and advocates for SL as a pedagogical model, outlining specific guidelines and features for particular contexts.

70 The contribution of this work is connected to the socially critical work carried out in PE (Rovegno and Kirk 1995), in which PE students are not only required to become consumers of physical culture, but they should also act in the community to address social injustice (Tinning 2019). Thus, in the context of PE, the aforementioned social inequities should lead educators to consider ‘transformative pedagogies’ in today’s schools. They have been defined by Ukpokodu (2009, 43) as ‘activist pedagogical approaches combining the elements of constructivist and critical pedagogy that empowers students to examine critically their beliefs, values and knowledge with the goal of developing a reflective knowledge base, an appreciation for multiple perspectives and a sense of critical consciousness and agency’.

80 However, ‘the ideals of transformative pedagogy require more than sophisticated theorizing, they also require getting our hands dirty in the messiness of practice and to learn what it actually takes to transform’ (Tinning 2019, 290). From our perspective, transformative pedagogies could be put into use in PE if teachers see SL as a pedagogical model that is capable of promoting an activist position that could translate the fundamentals into practice (Oliver and Kirk 2019).

85 Based on the above, this paper makes the case that SL should be considered a pedagogical model that is activist (involving concrete actions in particular social contexts), transformative (implying personal and social changes), trans-domain (promoting learning in different domains) and inter-contextual (whose scope goes beyond the class walls).

90 The idea of considering SL as a pedagogical model is based on the premise that only after the prototypical model is implemented and tested in particular contexts and revisited theoretically can it be categorized as one (Casey 2017). To achieve this goal, the article follows the same structure used in previously published studies advocating ‘new’ pedagogical models (e.g. Barker et al. 2018; Haerens et al. 2011; Williams and Wainwright 2016). First, we present the essential criteria of the models-based approach and then we address the case of SL. To support this particular section, we analyse the foundations of SL, including subsections such as its conceptual definition, pedagogical groundwork, major theme or idea, teaching implications and learning aspirations, exemplification of a particular case, and critical elements and benchmarks. Then, we provide evidence from SL research and information about reference SL networks and organizations that reveal its solid growth. Finally, we add some remarks.

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## Criteria of the models-based approach

105 Reviewing the foundations and criteria of models-based practice, we used the vision shared by Jewett, Bain, and Ennis (1995), Casey (2014, 2017), Metzler (2017), Lund and Tannehill (2010) and Kirk (2010). This approach envisions the use of several models with unique features and specific learning outcomes (Haerens et al. 2011). Among the wide range of terminology used, to ensure greater clarity in our writing, we have used two umbrella terms suggested by Casey: ‘model(s)-based practice’ and ‘pedagogical model(s)’. Casey (2017) defined models-based practice as:

110 a mechanism or pedagogical approach through which to move away from privileging physical education subject matter (i.e. curriculum) or the teacher (i.e. instructional) and instead aligns outcomes with students, needs and the teaching/instructional style (p.55).

Aiming to highlight the necessary connection between teaching, learning, subject matter and context, Kirk (2013) referred to pedagogical model as follows:

115 A models-based approach to physical education would make use of a range of pedagogical models, each with its unique and distinctive learning outcomes and its alignment of learning outcomes with teaching strategies and subject matter, and each with its non-negotiable features in terms of what teachers and learners must do in order to faithfully implement the model (p.979).

120 Therefore, pedagogical models emerged from the combination of context, subject matter, and teachers’ and students’ expectations and behaviours, conceived as a whole construct (Casey 2017). The confluence of these elements forms the axis around which PE is organized, considering the process of planning, executing and evaluating the implementation of tasks (Haerens et al. 2011). A pedagogical model provides a general plan to establish programme designs based on a conceptual framework that includes learning goals, selection and systematization of content, and teaching and learning procedures (Jewett, Bain, and Ennis 1995).

125 With the ongoing conceptualization of pedagogical models, the current list includes various well-established proposals (Lund and Tannehill 2015; Dyson, Kulinna, and Metzler 2016) and a number that are yet to be acknowledged (Casey 2014; Casey and Goodyear 2015; Harvey and Jarrett 2014; Hastie, Ojeda, and Calderon 2011). However, there is still a long way to go, since most publications have revealed the gap between model-makers and effective curriculum praxis (Casey 2014). In the same way, several authors have argued that no single model is capable of covering the entire breadth and depth of PE, advocating for a multi-model approach (Casey and MacPhail 2018; Lund and Tannehill 2010; Haerens et al. 2011).

130 In order to construct a prototype pedagogical model within the framework of models-based practice, certain criteria need to be met (Haerens et al. 2011; Williams and Wainwright 2016). We will therefore present the successive sections of the article in accordance with these criteria, according to the following logical structure. We will start with a solid rationale based on the *theoretical foundations* of the suggested model. These will help outline the *conceptual delimitations*, the *pedagogical groundwork* and the underlying idea or *major theme* of the model, defined by Metzler (2017) as the means of reconciling the relationships between the various domains involved. This major theme or idea will enable us to identify the learning goals or desired outcomes, situated within particular value orientations in PE (Jewett, Bain, and Ennis 1995). From the theoretical foundations and the resulting major theme, a number of particular *teaching implications and learning aspirations* will emerge. These teaching and learning procedures incorporate the theoretical and scientific assumptions to implement concrete programmes, engagement patterns for learning, teacher and student roles, tasks and responsibilities, and assessment. Furthermore, according to Jewett, Bain, and Ennis (1995) and Haerens et al. (2011), actions for reflection on practical implementations will be presented to guide and adjust. In this regard, it is crucial to evaluate whether the procedures are being implemented in ways that are faithful to the model. Therefore, the critical elements and *benchmarks* of SL will be identified and described in order to verify the model. Finally, since *research evidence* is another fundamental criterion to support the model’s effectiveness, we

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will outline the main results of several systematic reviews and meta-analyses related to the implementation, development and/or learning effects of SL in the different domains. In this sense, the steady growth of the model in schools and/or other settings will be reviewed to reinforce the initial claim. In the following section, we will detail each one of these elements (Figure 1).

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### Putting the SL model in the big picture

SL shares several features with other well-established trans-domain, non-exclusive PE pedagogical models such as Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility (Hellison 1995), which are oriented towards integration, transfer, empowerment and teacher-student relationships, or Cooperative Learning focusing on pupils learning with, by and for each other (Metzler 2017). Likewise, there

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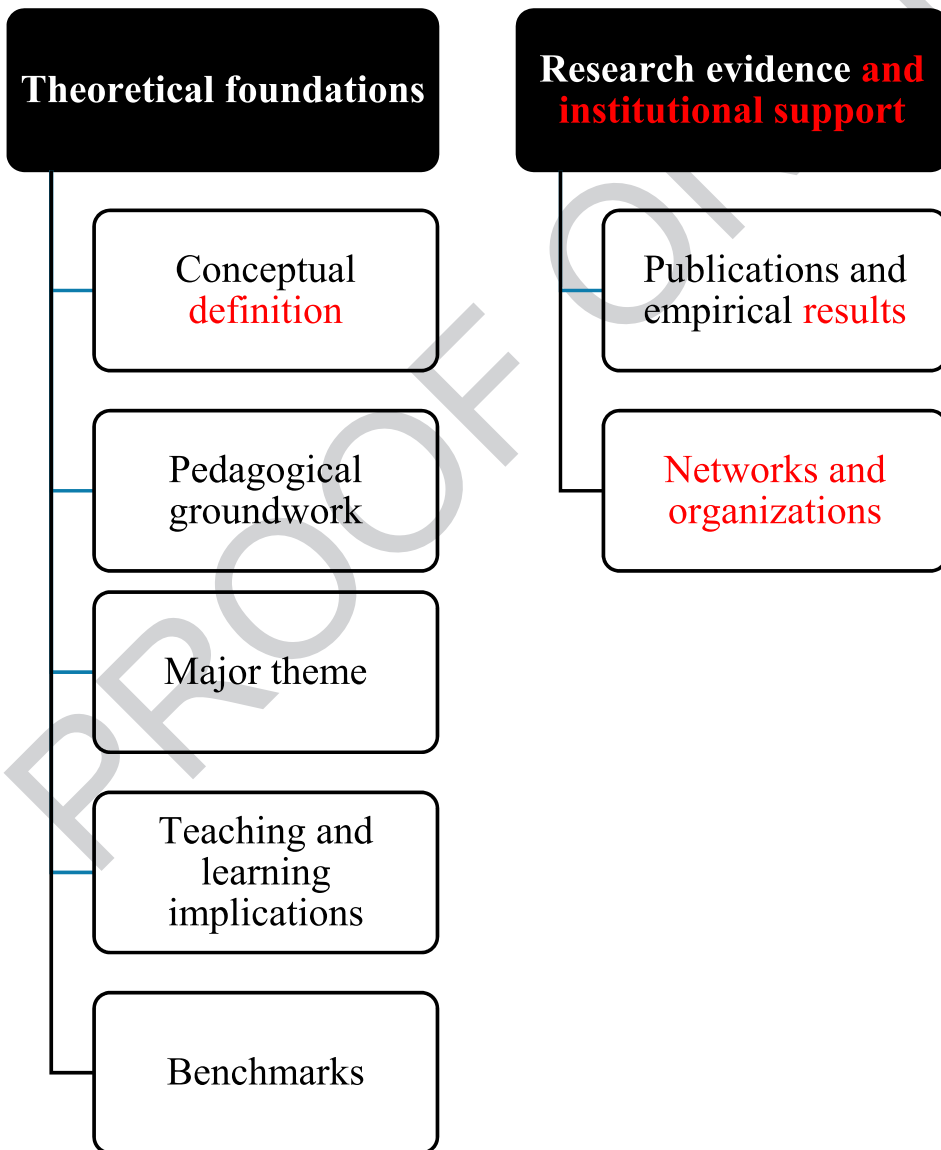
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Figure 1. Flow chart for the construction of a prototype pedagogical model within models-based practice.

are several specific PE models that share features with the SL model proposed here, such as Positive Youth Development (Ward and Parker 2013) or Sport for Peace (Ennis et al. 1999). However, as we will argue in the forthcoming sections, SL presents enough critical elements to be considered a genuine activist, transformative, trans-domain, inter-contextual pedagogical model.

## Theoretical foundations

### Conceptual definition

The term SL has been firmly rooted in the pedagogical arena for decades. Although it comes from the evolution of previous teaching approaches, the term was first coined as an educational practice in 1967 (Gotari 2005). There are currently numerous definitions of SL. Nevertheless, the underlying common denominator is a dichotomous process that simultaneously focuses on the synergistic interaction between the students' learning experience and an unmet need in the community (Cress 2005). A widely recognized definition to date is that of Bringle and Hatcher (1995, 112):

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

In addition to this landmark definition, a more concrete definition that we would particularly like to highlight is that of Howard (1998, 2), who presents SL as a 'model that intentionally integrates academic service learning and relevant community service'. This mutual interdependence between the service and the learning is represented by the hyphen in the wording of SL. The use of this script is not arbitrary but rather an intentional act that denotes the necessary relationship between the service and learning processes.

### Pedagogical groundwork

SL is grounded in several pedagogical traditions and theories, the first being John Dewey's experiential learning (1938), historically known by the motto: *learning by doing*. Dewey held that individuals reflect and use prior knowledge from personal experiences to achieve authentic learning. This idea led to new ways of seeing education as actively connecting knowledge to experience through engagement and reflection on the world beyond the classroom. Dewey also linked the purpose of education to the promotion of democratic educational practices towards a more egalitarian society. Dewey's principles were later popularized in Kolb's (1984) four-stage model of the experiential learning process, based on the importance of experience and conscious reflection as the core of all learning. Kolb's model connected the action of concrete experience to reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and learning transfer via active experimentation. This four-component learning cycle has been widely used to develop SL curricula (Jacoby 2015). In addition to Dewey and Kolb, the theoretical insights of Schon (1987) on the role of reflective thinking in experiential education have influenced SL, leading to the inclusion of reflective activities in SL implementations.

The foundations of SL are also influenced by Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning (1978), grounded on personal experience as a key part of the learning process. Transformative Learning is built on the validation and reformulation of the meaning of experiences. Individuals need to understand their own world to act on it for their own purposes. SL emerges as an educational proposal based on experience and critical reflection with a solid interest in personal and social growth. Transformative Learning involves key elements related to critical discourse and action such as personal experience (e.g. hands-on practical activities related to the service provided), critical reflection (e.g. discussion about social inequities) and emotions (e.g. developing empathy) (Merriam, Caffarella, and Naumgarter 2007). This approach considers that learning is necessarily an educational practice connected to real situations, which, assisted by reflective processes, give meaning and authenticity to learning.

In addition to experiential and transformative learning models, other related theoretical constructs such as critical pedagogy are connected to SL (Mitchell 2008). For critical pedagogy, the fundamental role of education is the liberation of human beings and social groups subjected to relationships of control, injustice and exploitation (Freire 2015). Thus, educational practices must provide students with tasks full of debate, discussion and dialogue about real situations to expand their possibilities of understanding reality, and a commitment to interact within the social context. This approach points to the importance of positioning learning in context with social problems and challenges, making SL an activist approach that is capable of materializing some of the goals of transformative pedagogy.

Based on the frameworks revisited, two views on SL have been identified: (a) traditional: the goal is to provide a service without focusing on social inequality and oppression and (b) critical: it aims to criticize the current system and its power distribution to transform society in order to achieve social justice (Mitchell 2008). To provide an approach that encompasses both of these two views, Chiva-Bartoll and García-Puchades (2018) suggested that any SL contains some type of social change that ranges from 'hardly transformative' to 'very transformative', according to how it affected the discourses, practices and relationships of the agents involved (Kemmis and McTaggart 1998).

Over the last decade, there has been a steady development of PE-related proposals aligned with this socially critical rationale (Fitzpatrick 2019). This interest not only urges us to link what happens in PE to wider social problems outside the school, but also calls for social action (Felis-Anaya, Martos-García, and Devís-Devís 2018). Therefore, although we admit that it is not possible to know how our educational actions might affect our students (Kirk 2019), advocating for SL in PE seems to be a good option to bring about changes.

### *The major theme/idea of SL*

The overarching idea that forms the basis of the SL model is the intentional combination of academic learning and community service. Hence, we could consider this unbreakable concept (*learning by serving*) the major theme, since it involves students actively learning course contents while meeting a social need (Bringle and Hatcher 1996). In other words, 'the ultimate goal of genuine SL curricula is to concurrently benefit both the community needs and student learning by integrating academic course objectives with the community service' (Cervantes and Meaney 2013, 333). In SL, the relationship between service activity, course content, community needs and student outcomes is crucial (Mitchell 2008). SL has the potential to transform the teaching and learning process and to help students acquire social values and critical-thinking skills based on the understanding of a social problem (Chiva-Bartoll, Capella-Peris, and Salvador-García 2020). SL benefits both the community members and the students involved, unlike volunteering, social services, student internships or other field experiences. Thus, in SL the benefits are not one-sided, but reciprocal (Furco 1996). Not only does it facilitate the students' engagement with the community, a favourable scenario for improving ethical and social values and attitudes, it also offers a wide range of critical-thinking opportunities to develop problem-solving skills, all inextricably tied to an academic discipline (Verducci and Pope 2001).

### *Teaching implications and learning aspirations*

Far from understanding the model as a rigid and non-negotiable ensemble of boundaries (Stolz and Pill 2014), having a prescriptive approach can generate a more comprehensible understanding of the teaching and learning implications (Barker et al. 2018). Nevertheless, prescriptive approaches would have a place as long as they 'allow for numerous variations to occur when implemented in particular settings' (Casey 2017, 59). Bearing this in mind, this section addresses some prime teaching implications and learning aspirations of SL, considering its pedagogical foundations and using Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning as a thread.

Any pedagogical model needs to have essential conditions such as teacher expertise and student readiness to have any chance of working (Metzler 2017). Thus the first step in SL should be to analyse the participants' capacities, aspirations and skills, as well as their moral reasoning and dynamics in terms of leadership, roles and conflict management. Unfortunately, Cipolle (2004) warns that students are often unprepared for the SL experience and points specifically to a lack of knowledge or understanding of the community's problems. Therefore, it is very important to ensure a progressive entry based on a first phase: *concrete experience*, consisting of being in contact with both the PE content to learn and the social context where the programme is going to be implemented. The teacher must provide the students with many opportunities to act and test themselves, experiencing possible social needs by putting themselves in the place of the other (the vulnerable group) and experiencing reality from another perspective first-hand. This first contact could involve, for example, visiting and/or contacting social entities in order to create alliances, organizing outings to observe the community's particularities and help students recognize potential social needs related to the PE content, or bringing people from social entities into class and making students aware of potential social injustices.

Only then can students move on to a second phase: *reflective observation*. This requires the teacher to set reflection tasks about the events experienced in the previous phase, giving the students enough time to exchange opinions and contrast the compiled information in order to suggest the SL programme's goals. At this point, the teacher should make sure that both learning goals and community-service goals are legitimate aspirations that are closely connected to enrich one another (Furco 1996), helping participants guarantee that neither individual involved (student or participant from the vulnerable community) is neglected. Then, students and community members must work together as much as possible to schedule the tasks to conduct, the collaboration model, the group organization, the operating rules, etc. This reflection process should continue throughout the SL programme, helping raise the students' awareness and giving meaning to the learnings, considering both their own development as critical and socially responsible citizens and the PE curricular contents. There are a wide variety of reflection instruments to choose from depending on the characteristics of the group and the educational level: readings, classroom discussions or writing assignments can encourage students to link the service with the learning in a critical way. Furthermore, bringing community members into the classroom or engaging teachers in the service experience alongside the students can help all community members develop important skills (i.e. problem solving, critical thinking, communication) (Mitchell 2008).

Once the social need to be faced has been defined and the SL programme has been outlined in terms of service and learning purposes, a third phase can be conducted: *abstract conceptualization*, which is based on the students' cognitive involvement through their conceptual and theoretical knowledge of PE. Students must feel intellectually challenged and understand the true purpose and the sense of the service and its relationship with the PE curriculum. Thus, it is important for students to organize and conceptualize the ideas to be used during the programme, since it must be inextricably tied to PE (Bringle and Hatcher 1996).

Another essential phase of SL is *active experimentation*. The aim is to integrate PE skills and contents in real contexts (e.g. conduct lessons or workshops of PE contents for vulnerable groups, designing and/or using PE activities for individuals at risk of social exclusion). To do so, students must have an educational setting that provides opportunities to test and integrate the effectiveness of the new acquired knowledge. During execution of the programme, the teacher should be visible to ensure that the programme runs smoothly, seeking to build positive relationships with participating students and community stakeholders (Carson and Raguse 2014). For their part, students are expected to focus critically and socially on understanding the values associated with the PE contents.

Finally, as in any other pedagogical model, it is necessary to *reflect on and assess the process* to contrast the outcomes with the planned goals. On the one hand, SL assessment has to address the academic learning consolidated from the experience. Particularly important here is the use of formative assessment that integrates assessment for learning (on an ongoing basis to support teaching



and learning) and assessment of learning (formal procedures) (Chróinín and and C 2013). In both cases, the students' active participation is essential. On the other hand, the reflection also has to explore the evolution in the individual and social sphere in relation to emotions, feelings and understanding of social structures. An ideal task to finish a SL programme is to hold a celebration/recognition event for the students (e.g. a closing ceremony), since the very essence of SL calls for the need to acknowledge the changes triggered in the community for the students to become aware of the work done.

### *Exemplification of a particular case*

In this subsection, we will describe an example of SL conducted in PE Teacher Education (PETE). In this particular case, while the students were expected to learn curricular contents by designing, teaching and assessing PE tasks for children at risk of social exclusion, the purpose of the service was to promote the social inclusion of these vulnerable children. Considering Hastie and Casey's (2014) scheme for describing pedagogical models, in this exemplification we will emphasize the (1) *contextual*, (2) *curricular* and (3) *implementation* features of the particular case. The intervention *context* (1) brought together a vulnerable group of children (migrant children and refugees) who were at risk of social exclusion. All of them came from different associations or social organizations in the region that had no possibilities of providing appropriate PE experiences. The main *curricular* learnings (2) involved in the PETE programme were: (a) to design, execute and assess lesson plans related to physical activity and sport, considering the participants' individual and contextual features; (b) to design and execute outdoor and recreational physical activities; and (c) to promote and encourage the participants' long-lasting, autonomous physical activity and sport habits. Concerning the *implementation* features (3), concrete experience actions were conducted by the PETE students, establishing initial contact with the vulnerable children to understand their needs. Several visits to the social organizations involved were scheduled to observe the community's characteristics. The SL programme included reflective and critical reasoning processes where the PETE students considered the social inequities experienced by the vulnerable children they worked with. Reflection and critical-reasoning activities continued throughout the whole intervention programme. The next phase included a theoretical approach to the curriculum that allowed students to design specific PE proposals adapted to the children's needs and interests. Under the supervision of their educators, the PETE students proposed, discussed and tested activities in their classes. Finally, the SL programme involved active experimentation sessions where the service planned for the children was put into practice. Therefore, during the academic semester, the PETE students implemented and assessed PE sessions aimed at promoting the migrant children and refugees' social inclusion through physical activity. Several formative assessment tasks and a final curricular learning assessment task were conducted. In addition, a global evaluation of the programme was completed to assess participants' satisfaction and perceptions of social transformation. It should be noted that it is challenging to integrate an SL programme into tightly managed PETE programmes. For instance, locating the educational setting outside the traditional teaching-learning space comes with challenges in terms of time and space management.

### *Critical elements and benchmarks*

This subsection aims to highlight several critical elements of SL to provide guidelines for the model's correct implementation. It feeds into ideas from general SL publications and organizations (Howard 1998; Kasinath 2013; National Youth Leadership Council 2008), as well as reference works from the PE and sport pedagogy literature (Carson and Raguse 2014; Cervantes and Meaney 2013). They all agree on a number of key elements that determine whether the essence of SL has been successfully applied (Figure 2): (a) *curricular connection*: SL must link the service experience to the learning objectives; (b) *meaningful learning*: students are expected to connect learning and course content with actual life experiences; (c) *community voice and quality service*: the programme calls for a need to acknowledge the interests and aspirations of the community members involved in



**Figure 2.** Critical elements of SL in practice.

order to achieve a quality service that really meets their needs; (d) reciprocity: the plan must promote reciprocal relationships between the students and the community members being served; (e) reflection: students must become aware of their own personal, social and curricular learning processes; and (f) problem-solving and decision-making tasks: the experience must promote students' empowerment to critically and creatively deal with authenticity and reality, as well active participation to transform the context.

As noted by Metzler (2017), each model has critical elements that can be verified. Therefore, to assess the fidelity of an SL implementation, a 10-item checklist with benchmarks that represent its prime features is presented in Table 1. This checklist offers several elements that can help practitioners identify their strengths and weaknesses when implementing SL programmes, thus offering basic criteria that will help them to improve and feel confident. If these elements are well implemented, the assessed programme could be considered close to what SL looks like when its essence is fulfilled.

**Table 1.** SL benchmark 10-item checklist.

<p>The service must be related to the curriculum and fully linked to the goals of PE, providing meaningful learning.</p> <p>There must be mutual involvement and agreement between participants (students, community, educators) when identifying and defining the social need.</p> <p>Appropriate training is needed before participants can provide the service.</p> <p>Formal and informal reflection must be conducted before, during and after the service.</p> <p>There must be a clear procedure to assess the progress and outcomes of both learning and service goals.</p> <p>The SL programme must address a real need, avoiding conflicts with private companies providing similar services.</p> <p>There must be tasks to make the work done by the students visible to obtain social recognition.</p> <p>The result of the project must involve social transformation, bringing equity and social justice to the community involved.</p> <p>The SL programme must emerge from well-grounded planning, where the learning and the service goals are perfectly defined.</p> <p>Whenever possible (depending on the students' age and autonomy), decision-making must be present in all phases, on an ongoing basis.</p>
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Note. SL = Service-Learning; Items 1, 4, 5 and 10 are related to learning and the students; items 6, 7 and 8 refer to the service and the community; and items 2, 3 and 9 embrace the whole programme.

## Research evidence and institutional support

### Publications and empirical results

455 There is well-developed research literature around SL, both in and out of PE and sport pedagogy. Although this research does not regard SL specifically as a pedagogical model, it does show it to be a widespread educational approach. The increase of SL practices over the last decade has sparked research interest at all educational levels and in all academic disciplines (Warren 2012; Yorio and Ye 2012). The meta-analyses conducted by Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki (2011), Conway, Amel, and Gerwien (2009), Warren (2012), White (2001) and Yorio and Ye (2012) display a panoramic overview of SL implementation and research in different educational contexts.

460 In PETE, Cervantes and Meaney (2013) conducted a systematic review addressing SL's theoretical frameworks, its impact on PETE students and community, and recommendations and considerations for implementation and research. They found that SL enhanced PETE students' cultural and diversity awareness, as well as their confidence and ability to implement a variety of teaching strategies (Meaney et al. 2008), moral reasoning and decision making (Cutforth 2000), cultural competence for teaching (Meaney et al. 2008) and positive attitudes toward interacting with children with special needs (Romack and Hsu 2011).

465 Likewise, Carson and Raguse (2014) reviewed research in youth population settings and found that, while stimulating social inclusion of youth populations by promoting physical activity, the PE and sport pedagogy students involved in SL gained in personal, social, professional and academic outcomes (Eyler et al. 2001), reduced stereotypes, increased cultural understanding, improved social responsibility skills and heightened academic learning, application and problem solving (Gray et al. 1998). However, this review also reported that some researchers and practitioners did not fully understand SL's essence, confusing it with a field internship or practicum.

470 Another recently published systematic review (Chiva-Bartoll et al. 2019) included descriptive and empirical works, providing recommendations for implementation and research in PE and sport pedagogy settings. On the one hand, the results showed how SL helps enhance the students' social and civic development, helping deconstruct prejudices on certain groups at risk of social exclusion (Gil-Gómez, Chiva-Bartoll, and Martí-Puig 2015; Richards, Wilson, and Eubank 2012). On the other hand, SL seemed to provide a proper instructional framework in which to achieve professional skills related to PE and Sports Science (Mumford and Kane 2006; Wilkinson et al. 2013), which is consistent with the previous reviews. This analysis warned that SL programmes and research methodologies are very varied and, in some cases, not thoroughly described, pointing to the need for a unified framework.

475 Finally, several recently published studies have explored SL in these contexts and their outcomes are consistent with those described in the previous literature reviews, supporting and reinforcing the positive impact of SL on teaching and academic skills (Capella-Peris, Gil-Gómez, and Chiva-Bartoll 2020; Chiva-Bartoll, Capella-Peris, and Salvador-García 2020), students' well-being and personal growth (Chiva-Bartoll, Moliner, and Salvador-García 2020; Chiva-Bartoll et al. 2020), critical views of the students' learning processes (MacPhail and Sohun 2018) and students' in-class behaviour (Marttinen et al. 2019).

### Networks and organizations

495 In addition to empirical research evidence, there are various international networks and organizations that support the importance of SL. In the field of PE and sports pedagogy, a slow but steady growth of SL experiences and related documentation has emerged, mostly described in journal publications and conference presentations (Carson and Raguse 2014). Moreover, there is an international network including Latin American and European universities, the *Research Network in Service-Learning in Physical Activity and Sport for Social Inclusion* (RIADIS), aimed at investigating SL experiences in PE and sports activities.

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Likewise, there are various community-based and institutionalized SL centres with a multidisciplinary and multilevel approach, such as the *National Youth Leadership Council* in the USA, the *Latin American Centre for Learning and Solidarity Service* (CLAYSS, 2002) and the Latin American Network of SL (2005) in Argentina. In Europe, most countries have their own SL associations and networks, but it is at university level where they are more consolidated through initiatives such as the *Europe Engage project of the European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education*. In Australia, interest in SL has led to a wish to include it more broadly in educational contexts. To capitalize on this growing interest worldwide, an SL summit was held in 2019 (Partick et al. 2019). In addition, there are several specific SL journals in different areas and languages that show the solid corpus of existing SL experiences (e.g. *International Journal for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, *Ibero-American Journal of Service-Learning*). Finally, a recent publication by the global institution UNESCO entitled *Humanistic futures of learning* devoted a specific chapter to promoting SL as an educational proposal aimed at achieving social transformation (Martínez-Usarralde and Chiva-Bartoll 2020).

All of the above indicates that SL is used by many different institutions all over the world (from local to global), with extensive documentation and evidence that it is widely spread. Therefore, there seems to be a need to support all this activity under the conceptual umbrella of a pedagogical model to unify ideas, frameworks and efforts.

### Concluding remarks

In response to the need to establish a frame of reference that facilitates and guides practical applications of SL in the field of PE and Sport Pedagogy, this work builds on the models-based practice framework to advocate for SL as a pedagogical model. It provides a promising interdependence of learning, teaching, subject, content and social context, requiring teachers and students to develop a solid commitment to the underlying philosophy of the model if they are to implement it successfully. Based on the information provided throughout the article, we truly believe that SL has the necessary elements to be considered an activist, transformative, trans-domain, inter-contextual pedagogical model in PE. Its major theme 'learning by serving' uncovers new activist perspectives on teaching and learning in PE, promoting the students' social and affective domains.

However, the implementation of SL is not without difficulties, since it breaks with many of the traditional educational frameworks, like the well-established hierarchy between teacher and students, to generate new horizontal communication channels (Mitchell 2008). Moreover, it occupies alternative spaces and locations to those traditionally used in PE, and it can help develop genuine relationships between educators and students from the school and individuals and organizations from the community. In this regard, particular elements of the context such as the environment, the teacher, the curriculum, the learners' and community members' previous experiences, etc., could influence the contextual manifestation of the SL model, but they do not go against its underlying theory (Hastie and Casey 2014; Kirk 2013).

Emerging research on SL continues to grow and these studies will provide extra support for the case to consider it a true pedagogical model. Therefore, it is crucial to keep assessing the previously introduced key theme and critical elements of SL to refine the framework and make it adaptable so that it is useful in any socially vulnerable setting.

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