

Verónica Sierra, María de la Hoz Bermejo and their team

"Research and knowledge must not remain only in the classroom but go beyond; in society and in the streets."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Verónica Sierra is a professor of Social History at the University of Alcalá. Both Verónica and María de la Hoz Bermejo are historians with a common PhD specialization in "Cultural History."

Both researchers are members of the interdisciplinary LEA Research Group (Reading, Writing, Literacy) which focuses its research on the social history of written culture and specifically targets activities that emphasize knowledge transfer and impact.

During the COVID-19 lockdown when both students and teachers were forced to stay isolated at home, they came up with the idea for #YoxTiLeo ("Iread4you"), a project of bibliotherapy aiming to send a message of encouragement through books.

Bibliotherapy – sharing reading experiences to cope with COVID-challenges

As a consequence of the COVID-19 lockdown, many students were dealing with sadness and fear. This led Verónica Sierra and María de la Hoz Bermejo to come up with the idea to share encouragement through books by starting the project 'YoxTiLeo'. The initiative relies on the concept of bibliotherapy – and is based on the interdisciplinary research conducted by the LEA-group in which Verónica is the co-leader.

Students upload short videos to social media platforms, explaining about the book they have chosen. Originally it was created as a teaching initiative, but it has now been turned into a citizen engagement process open to everyone.

The goal of 'YoxTiLeo' is to make a positive impact on people during the pandemic: To increase the level of motivation and decrease the level of depression among citizens by using bibliotherapy.

Through most of their work, Verónica and Maria have applied their research in society where it has been directly accessible to the public sphere – for example via exhibitions, or through television advisory and open seminars.

They highlight the importance of knowledge transfer: That research and teaching goes hand in hand, and that results are exhibited both to students and to society. They also note, that disseminating the research to the public usually requires a lot of extra resources, both financially and time wise. Tasks like managing social media and doing graphic design are essential parts of spreading scientific knowledge to the public arena. However, it takes time away from the actual research work, and also requires skills that do not automatically come with being a researcher.

Both students and citizens have shown large engagement in the initiative and the feedback has been very positive. 'YoxTiLeo' demonstrates how a portfolio of solid existing research can be applied to fit the acute need of a spontaneously occurred crisis such as the pandemic.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

& ADVICE

Include a budget item for communication and knowledge transfer activities in the planning of any project.

Communicating projects via professional graphic illustrations is important as it can help attract the public's attention. Calculate the time and finances for this in your budget.

Set aside time and resources for **understanding and managing social media** and networks.