Learning and collaboration in pre-service teacher education: Narrative analysis in a service learning experience at Andalusian public schools

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Highlights

- The Service Learning project bridges teacher preparation program and schools.
- Pre-service teachers learn by participating in a school community and interacting with others.
- Theory and practice are not separated, but, rather, in dialogue.
- Narratives allows pre-service teachers to reconstruct their learning path.

Abstract

In this article we take up the task of presenting and analyzing a Service Learning experience developed in a class of the major in Primary Education Teaching at the University of Malaga, in Andalusia, Spain. It consists of a narrative analysis of autobiographical texts –final reports and online interviews – produced by pre-service teachers. We aimed to understand how participants learned about the teaching profession throughout their trajectory in the project. The results indicate pre-service teachers (1) learn by feeling, (2) learn by belonging, (3) learn by placing action in a social perspective, and (4) learn by sharing experiences with others.

Keywords: Teacher education – service learning – narrative analysis

1. Introduction

For over a decade, the research group Teaching, Communication and Educational Research (Procie)[1] from the School of Educational Sciences at the University of Malaga, in southern Spain, has worked to contribute to pre-service and continued teacher education. The group has carried out a variety of autobiographical and narrative investigations of the school experiences of different stakeholders' in public schools – teachers, students, students' families and pre-service teachers (PSTs).

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[1] More information at http://ofertaidi.uma.es/institucion-educativa.php, last consulted on 03/16/2020. Acronyms used henceforth: pre-service teacher (PST); Service Learning (SL); Learning Communities (LC); Online interview (OI); and reflective journal (RJ).

Research with PSTs from the Primary Education Teaching Degree has given us a perspective of the impressions, experiences and beliefs that they have constructed about the teaching profession in their trajectories as students. In their narratives, they suggest a school that is predominantly segregating, competitive, bureaucratic, resistant to change, and oblivious to its surroundings (Rivas, 2014; Author 3 et al., 2014). PSTs experiences include having been mocked or bullied, punished, despised, ridiculed or simply ignored by teachers (Author 2 et al, 2014).

In our analysis, these narratives demonstrate the need for different ways of learning in the teaching profession. One of them is the engagement in communities of practice where both emotional bonds and critical knowledge could emerge (Wenger, 2001) and where PSTs could experience life as teachers from within the profession. This kind of community is what we will refer to as communities of praxis for teacher education (Anderson & Freebody, 2012). We understand them as communities where teacher development can be "centered on student learning and in the study of concrete cases, having schoolwork as its main reference" (Nóvoa, 2009, p.1)[2].

The project "Ecologies of learning in multiple contexts: analysis of expanded education and citizenship projects" has allowed Procie to develop a new model of PST education in different courses of the Primary Education Teaching Degree[3], one that is aligned with the perspective of communities of praxis for teacher education. Ecologies of Learning (Fernandez & Anguita, 2015) indicate constructivist and dialogic theories that conceive of learning contexts as complex, interconnected, and interactive. Ecologies of Learning understand knowledge in its dynamic aspect by focusing on the relationship between experience, action, and thought in formal and informal contexts[4].

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[2] "[…] centrada na aprendizagem dos alunos e no estudo de casos concretos, tendo como referência o trabalho escolar", our translation.

[3] This proposal emerged from an earlier project of educational innovation named "Ecologies of Learning, education and community participation in higher education: articulating academic knowledge and experience".

Under the scope of this project, thus, we developed a model of community of praxis for teacher education. On the one hand, we established horizontal partnerships with several public schools in and around Malaga to foster volunteering, or, as we understand it, Service-learning (SL) contexts for our students. On the other, we redesigned syllabi so that classes would involve volunteering in public schools and appropriating these experiences as material for academic reflection.

The model has three defining characteristics. First, it stimulates PSTs to learn by participating in the Learning Communities (LCs, explained in the following paragraphs) and contributes to transformation in partner schools. Second, it promotes collaboration between university and schools; by this token, it fosters pre-service and continued teacher development. Third, it aims to enhance education by supporting public school projects that contribute to social transformation (Puiggrós et al, 2010).

The LCs consist of a network of public schools run by the Regional Government of Andalusia, aiming to open schools up to community participation (including PSTs and students' families) and to create a network of pre-service and continued teacher development. All schools that have engaged in the LC project follow the same guidelines: (1) learning is the central axis of all activities inside and outside school, and all activities are oriented to learning by interacting in heterogeneity; (2) positive expectations about the possibilities of every student is the basis for relationships and for learning; and (3) the project is in continuous progress and is permanently being evaluated and rethought. The main actions in the LCs are interactive groups[5] in class, family education, mixed organizational commissions, dialogic gatherings, and dialogic conflict resolution models.

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[4] In Spain, this has been the work of the Network REUNI+D (University Network of Investigation and Educational Innovation) and the projects of three Spanish groups financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, focusing especially on the analysis of face-to-face and virtual communities of practice (Martinez and Fernandez, 2018).

The present model of community of praxis for teacher education aims to support public schools that have opted in the LC project by sending volunteers, PSTs from the university, to participate in an array of school activities. The work experienced in schools converges with classwork at university through reflection seminars mediated by university faculty. It involves increasing PSTs' learning opportunities within environments that have an inclusive perspective, while enhancing PSTs' participation in all areas of schools (educational, organizational, social, and cultural) to promote values of inclusion, equality, and democracy (Elboj et al., 2002; Author 2 et al, 2015). Our collaboration as university faculty happens in several spaces. We coordinate the operation of the group of university PSTs based on the needs and demands of the schools. Moreover, we design and develop a classroom curriculum that is coherent with this experience.

The SL project emerges from a continuous co-assessment based on dialogue with school stakeholders and analysis of narrative texts produced by PSTs in class from an ecological perspective. In this assessment, we value PSTs' perceptions of what is necessary for establishing relationships and constructing their identities as teachers in the ethical-political perspective of action (Morin, 2005).

The ecological perspective is situated within the paradigm of complexity (Morin, 2005). The concept of action ecology (Faltoni, 2016) leads us to conceive of a model of teacher education oriented to the construction of complex thinking and that breaks with the dichotomy theory⁄practice. The world of action is complex and mobilizes a multitude of mechanisms.

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[5] An organizational strategy of the LCs based on inclusion and dialogical learning to contribute to student success. Class is organized in small heterogeneous groups of four or five students with different levels of learning, different genders, etc., who have to do an activity collectively. It is important that everyone contributes to the task. Each group is energized by a volunteer, who can be a university student, a relative, a neighbor, a high school student. Normally four or five different activities are planned so that the students rotate through the groups, developing the proposed activity in every group (Author 2 et al, 2015; Author 3, Author 2 et al, 2018).

Complex thinking presupposes taking into account the sociopolitical effects of our actions – in both micro and macro perspectives – because every action resonates in the world. Moreover, actions both support and are supported by ethical and political choices, which are subject to risk and uncertainty. The strategy of action (Morin, 2005) presupposes getting away from a program based on formulas and anticipated results. This is why the strategy of action puts into play the unpredictability of life – contexts, relationships, and interactions (Morin, Roger & Mota, 2005).

The present investigation consists of a narrative analysis of texts of narrative and reflective nature produced by PSTs who did SL in the project developed in a class of the Primary Education Teaching major at the University of Malaga. In these texts, participants talk about their learning throughout the semester. We were interested in how participants' learning unfolded throughout their trajectory in the project.

This paper contributes to the discussion regarding pre-service teacher education by providing an account of a situated SL experience grounded on the partnership between university and schools. STs learn by servicing a community in need and reflecting upon the experience of having served. Thus, service and learning, action and reflection, are integrated in the curriculum.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Experiential teacher education

The new millennium has brought teacher education back to the avant-garde of debates regarding educational enhancement after decades of relative ostracism. Work anchored in various theoretical as well as political perspectives from all around the globe has discussed pre-service and continued teacher education (Nóvoa, 2019; Kitchen & Petrarca, 2016;

Russell & Martin, 2016), besides reports produced by international agencies focusing on the same issue (AEE, 2014; EU, 2013; OCDE, 2006).

This renewed emphasis on teacher education[6] consists of a long needed "appreciation of teachers' work and promotes the concept of teaching as a profession" (Villegas-reimers, 2003, p. 7). Professional development includes formal experiences (e.g. attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring) and informal ones (e.g. reading professional publications, watching television documentaries related to an academic discipline). Examining professional development, thus, requires analyzing the processes by which it occurs and the contexts where it takes place (Gasner, 2000), some of which are more conducive to learning than others. Several teacher educators have claimed for paradigms that cater for the experiential dimensions of professional learning in both curriculum and research (e.g. Nóvoa, 2009; 2019).

Similarly to Avalos (2011), we understand teacher development as a complex process that requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers, individually and collectively. Additionally, it involves the capacity and willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs; it also involves the perusal and enactment of appropriate alternatives for transformation.

In this direction, Nóvoa (2019) has proposed an approach that shifts focus from a perspective that is predominantly centered on the academic dimensions of teacher education (areas, curricula, courses) to one that is more centered on the professional domain where teachers do their work. Thus, the author calls for a more praxical teacher education, based on the articulation of teaching practice in real schools and systematic reflection upon such practice; in other words, based on the relationship between action and reflection. This includes confronting teachers with investigation and production of original knowledge.

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[6] The term "formación de profesorado" is lost in translation. It caters for both the dimensions of teacher education (usually pre-service) and teacher development (usually continued). We adopt teacher education and teacher development interchangeably.

Ultimately, teacher development has to do with becoming a particular person in a particular social context, that is, developing a teacher's identity (Nóvoa, 2009; 2019).

Identity construction is a never-ending process that stems from a double transaction: (1) a biographical one, between the individual and himself; and (2) a relational one, between the individual and his or her development scenarios. The biographical transaction is a tension between what the individual has been and what he wants to become; the relational transaction, conversely, calls for agreement between identity ideals and context conditions, which may or may not match. Thus, teachers "can either adapt themselves to context conditions or adapt context conditions to their own ideals. Professional identity construction, thus, arises from this dynamic and continuous process of negotiation between wishes, opportunities and constraints" (Lopes & Pereira, 2011, p. 19)[7].

Conceived as identity construction, professional development is a complex process elaborated from (1) the construction that subjects do about what the institutional settings are and about how these institutional settings work; (2) their biographical experiences in the institutions and in other social, cultural, political and affective instances; and (3) the reflections they make along the way. In this sense, teacher identity is a process of constructing narratives that "sediment" to form the way teachers think and act in their professional domains (Rivas, 2014).

Identity construction, as a process, involves learning to participate in a given community (Wenger, 2001), in a continuous process of realignment between individual and communities' values, beliefs, ways of thinking and acting, etc.. In understanding this process, the concept of personal practical knowledge is quite relevant. The concept can be understood as the teacher's "past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions […]" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25).

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[7] This is by no means a deterministic relationship as individuals use creativity to cope with contextual constraints and construct their own versions of what can be accomplished. See Holland et al. (1998) and Holland and Lave (2001) for an extended discussion on identity.

To examine teachers' personal practical knowledge, researchers collect and analyze field texts (records made and⁄or collected in the field) in order to develop a number of conceptual terms – images, rules, principles, personal philosophies, metaphor, cycles and narrative units (Connelly, Clandinin & He, 1997). Therefore, contexts where teachers learn their personal practical knowledge, which Craig (1995a) has termed knowledge communities, are quite relevant to understand teacher development.

Knowledge communities consist of safe places where teachers share their stories and make their personal practical knowledge explicit to themselves and to others (Olson & Craig, 2001)[8]. The way we understand it, knowledge is not something people have; rather, it is "something narratively embodied in how a person stands in the world. Knowledge as attribute can be given; knowledge as narrative cannot. The latter needs to be experienced in context" (p. 157). Research, thus, does not discover the truth. Rather, it constructs interpretations regarding stories participants bring to the table, developing "a language and ongoing themes that made it possible to construct connections among apparently dissimilar experiences" (Craig, 1995b, p. 139).

In short, we conceive of teacher development as the production of teachers' identities in educational contexts. It involves acting in an educational setting and reflecting upon these concrete experiences. Through reflection, experience sediments on subjects who are able to respond to present and future demands as teachers. This kind of teacher development is only possible in communities where teachers can undergo experiences in context, share experiences with others, and reflect upon their trajectories – who they are, who they are becoming, and who they want to be.

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[8] Craig (2009, p. 603) has unearthed a number of differences between knowledge communities and the concept of Professional Learning Community (DuFour, 2004). The former is fueled by a practical view of knowledge (organically lived; can be found or made; commonplaces; relational among individuals and across groups; may occur with teachers who interact for their own purposes; accounts for practice). The latter is driven by a formal view of knowledge (administratively introduced; expected to be present; focus on learning rather than teaching; collaboration anticipated at the outset; accountable for results). Our version of community of praxis for teacher education has more in common with knowledge communities.

The biggest challenge resides in setting up communities where both action and reflection are not only possible but also motivated and nurtured. In the next subsection, we discuss that.

2.2 Community-centered approaches in teacher education

Different types of community-centered approaches for experiential teacher education in school communities have been described in literature. In the U.S., it has included "SL projects (Hallman & Burdick, 2011; Lake & Jones, 2008; Kinloch & Smagorinsky, 2014); community inquiry projects (Burant & Kirby, 2002); diversity study circles (Moss, 2008); and cross-cultural immersion projects (Sleeter, 2001)" (Barnes, 2017, p. 220). Combined with narrative inquiry strategies, SL has been used in Canada, Kenya and Turkey (Mitton-Kukner, Nelson, & Desrochers, 2010). In Australia, education research and practice through SL (Chambers & Lavery, 2012) as well as through communities of praxis (Mycroft, 2016; Wright, Watkins, and Grant, 2017; Arnold & Mundy, 2020) have been described.

In Spain, community-centered approaches to teacher education have received attention. SL experiences in Primary and Secondary Teacher Education programs have been carried out and examined all over the country (Redondo-Cordobado & Fuentes, 2019). In Andalusia, university volunteering in LCs began in an organized manner with the constitution of the Sub-Andalusian University of Learning Communities. The group, created by university professors with links to LC schools, felt the need to coordinate their efforts with a dual purpose: promote the improvement of the LCs and develop teachers and community members; and deepen the evidence-based study of school progress and student enhancement at LC schools. The experiences of the universities of Malaga, Seville, Córdoba and Granada have also been described (Author 2 et al, 2017; Rodríguez-Gallego & Ordóñez-Sierra, 2015). Additionally, Spanish scholars working with LCs have also underscored the compatibility of the work that they do with PST volunteers and the paradigm of SL (Rodríguez-Gallego & Ordóñez-Sierra, 2015; Alvarez & Silió, 2015).

By this token, SL emerges as an effective paradigm for teacher development because it introduces a practical component to teacher education, a political commitment to communities' needs (Chang, 2015; Gao, 2015; Kirkland, 2014; Cervantes & Meaney, 2013), an ethical paradigm to teachers' identities (Lopes & Pereira, 2012), and a reflective dimension (Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1987) to teachers' professional thinking. We discuss that in the next subsection.

2.2 Service learning in teacher education

In SL, future teachers can develop trajectories that could help them construct professional identities (Nóvoa, 2019; Gao, 2015) articulated with the reality that they will encounter in public schools. SL has a stated interest in working for the common good and for the benefit of underprivileged communities.

In general, SL literature in the field of teacher education resorts to the work of Dewey (1938), who claimed that learning occurs through concrete experiences (Cervantes & Meaney, 2013; Kirkland, 2014; Al Barwani, al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratan 2013). Kolb (1984) proposed a four-component learning cycle for experiential learning that has been widely used to develop SL curricula and has influenced the way SL entered teacher education.

SL is a process that "simultaneously focuses on a synergic interaction between the learning experience of the student and a tangible need in a community" (Cervantes e Meaney, 2013, p. 333), paying equal importance to both the service and learning components while sustaining a horizontal relationship between those serving and those being served. The main goal of SL is to integrate coursework with community service in a way service enhances academic learning and vice-versa.

SL gives PSTs a hands-on experience in communities situated outside their comfort zone. By interacting with people whose life stories differ from their own, PSTs may shift their understanding of who they are in the world (Mitton-Kukner, Nelson & Desrochers, 2010). Ganno (2010) borrows Bhabha (1990)'s "third spaces" metaphor to argue SL provides PSTs with a position of liminality that instigates awareness of alterity and otherness. This way, they may shift their perceptions by brushing against subjects who are different from them. Most SL experiences reported in the literature happen in underprivileged school districts and neighborhoods. For this reason, research has found SL to be a powerful tool in PST education, since it is at the same time an educational philosophy, a pedagogical approach, a community development model, and a curriculum design method (Al Barwani, al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratan, 2013).

SL programs are often based on six components: (a) quality service to the community; (b) integrated learning between the service activity and classroom instruction; (c) reflection by the students to integrate service experiences with academic reflection; (d) student participation in planning and implementing the learning activities; (e) collaboration to ensure benefits for all stakeholders (students, community, and university); and (f) evaluation to check if both learning and service goals have been attained (Cervantes and Meaney, 2013).

Methodologically, SL projects have four stages: preparation, action, reflection, and celebration/demonstration (Wade, 1995). Preparation gives room for the service goals to be planned in articulation with the learning goals. At this stage, all stakeholders delineate program responsibilities and outcomes. Still at this stage, local stakeholders communicate their needs and desires for the project.

Action involves students in challenging experiences for community's common good while providing local stakeholders with the opportunity to communicate their needs as well as to participate in the design and conduction of the project. At this stage, PSTs interact the most with the community and get to observe and intervene. We could say it is the core of the project.

Reflection instigates PSTs to think about their service experience critically, while sharing their thoughts regarding the project individually and collectively. At this moment, PSTs produce the narrative reports and class presentations, where they reflect upon their experience and learning processes. Finally, in celebration/demonstration, PSTs share contributions to promote collective reflection; it also gives stakeholders a sense closure (Galvan and Parker, 2011).

Therefore, SL provides a framework to design a teacher education curriculum aligned with our views. It provides PSTs with hands-on experience and opportunity to participate in social transformation, while enabling them to read pedagogical literature, share experiences with peers, and reflect upon lived experience. In the next section, we discuss the methodology used in the present study.

3. Methodology

Qualitative research is broadly situated within interpretivist, reflexive or constructivist paradigms. It aims at producing intelligibilities, explanations, and arguments by attending to the richness, depth, nuance, context, multidimensionality and complexity to explain how things work in particular contexts (Mason, 2002, p. 1). In this tradition, data analysis consists of the process of making sense out of the data (Merriam, 2009). The researcher interprets texts generated or collected in the field to identify patterns, images, metaphors, themes or narratives that help make meaning of data.

According to Riessman (2005), narrative analysis is a form of qualitative analysis shared by a number of different disciplines (e.g. literary theory, folklore studies, health sciences and psychology, and education) and research approaches (e.g. thematic analysis, structural analysis, interactional analysis, and performative analysis).

This study took a qualitative narrative approach and placed an emphasis on understanding the narratives of participants in depth to develop a comprehension of whether and how participants had learned in the SL experience. It aimed at reconstructing participants' identity construction by developing intelligibilities that explained how it unfolded in the stories, identities and relationships that they brought to the table to account for the SL experience.

3.1 Contextualizing elements

The present investigation was carried out in a course named "Educational Intervention and Sociocultural Diversity" in the Primary Education Teaching Degree at the School of Educational Sciences of the University of Malaga. At total seventy-two students enrolled in the course and regularly participated in its activities.

PSTs had the opportunity to volunteer in seven primary schools in the city of Malaga and outskirts as part of their classwork. The project was presented in the first weeks of class by the professor[9]. Moreover, the professor discussed with PSTs the epistemological issues underneath the LC project and underscored the necessity for praxical experiences in their professional preparation.

The seven partner schools were then introduced to the class. All of them were in the LC project, albeit in different stages of implementation of the LC's actions. Most of them faced particular kinds of challenges (a low number of enrollments, many cases of conflict, low student performance, etc.) and had joined the LC program to enhance their work and, in some cases, avoid being shut down[10]. Most LC schools are in neighborhoods with low-income and diverse populations (Romani populations, immigrants or refugees).

All seven schools had a prior relationship with Procie. They had been approached by Procie's members to construct partnerships for volunteering, research, and continued teacher development (Author 2 et al, 2017). At the time of data generation, four faculty members and one doctoral student were responsible for brokering the relationship with the schools. They visited the schools regularly to help direction and faculty familiarize with and implement the LC's principles and strategies.

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[9] Author 1 taught this class as the main instructor in collaboration with author 3.

[10] The LCs have proven effective in mitigating these issues (Author 2 et al, 2017).

Furthermore, the rules regarding the SL project were explained. PSTs who did volunteering would not have to attend every class: they would have to present the seminars and do the evaluations (presentations, a pedagogical intervention, and a final report).The others had to attend classes regularly and do all evaluations. Those who did not engage in SL, instead of a final report, had to carry out interviews with teachers and write a reflective analysis of these interviews. In other words, PSTs could use class time to acquire practical knowledge in schools contexts.

At the schools, volunteers first observed institutions' activities, including classwork, and interacted with direction, faculty, staff, students, and families. After a period of observation, they collaborated in a variety of class activities for different age groups and levels of Primary Education[11], which included planning and implementing a pedagogical intervention with students.

At the university, classes consisted of roundtable discussions with assigned readings regarding teaching in general and the LC experiences in particular. In the middle of the term, there was a small seminar. At the end, there was a large seminar with members from the schools (faculty or direction) and all PSTs. In this seminar, PSTs presented in groups the result of their work as volunteers and gave feedback to other groups of SL[12]. Finally, PSTs delivered individual reflective reports produced during the semester.

3.2 Participants

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[11] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-education-system-and-its-structure-79_en, last consulted on 07/30/2020.

[12] Direction refers to principal, adjunct principal, pedagogical coordinator, etc. Some of the data would suggest a community of producing knowledge (Craig, 1995a; 1995b).

Fifty-five PSTs engaged in the SL project. Those who engaged had to choose their school and get together in groups. Most PSTs chose schools based on their schedule compatibility (most institutions had specific days for volunteers) or the geographical location of schools. Only these fifty-five students were invited to participate in the study. Researchers explained that participation would not entail extra work nor benefit their grade. Moreover, researchers explained that their anonymity would be protected. All of them accepted to participate and signed consent forms.

3.3 Data sources

The data for the present investigation consists of narrative and reflective texts produced by the students who participated in the SL project, obtained through (1) written interviews done online[13]; and (2) the final reflective reports handed in individually[14]. All PSTs engaged in SL responded the online interviews, which were not a requirement for passing the class. Additionally, two reports of volunteers from each school were randomly chosen and analyzed. This amounted to fourteen reports and around 300 hundred pages and was a necessary measure for an in-depth analysis of the reports.

3.4 Data analysis

The research question guiding this investigation was – how do we learn as we participate in the SL experience? What experiences, interactions and reflections are involved in the process?

We treated the analytical process in an iterative manner – we revisited the sources of data multiple times, sorting and organizing them, identifying and refining themes. We used the software of qualitative research Nvivo 12 as an organizational tool, that is, to organize the texts as well as to create, organize, and refine the themes.

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[13] The questions participants were asked in the online interview: (1) In what ways do you participate in the school community? (2) Do you feel you learned through your participation? How? (3) Narrate a moment when you felt that were learning something relevant. How was it? What were you doing? Why do you think it was relevant learning? They responded to it in writing and they could write as long answers as they wished in a Google Drive Form.

[14] PSTs wrote a journal during the SL period. Then, they delivered a final narrative and reflective report in which they revisited their journals and reflected upon, and synthesized their experience.

The narrative analysis process consisted of five steps: (a) organizing and preparing the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) indexing data, (d) creating and refining categories or themes, and (e) interpreting the data. We present and discuss the results in the following section.

4. Results and discussion

In this section, we present and discuss the results of the analysis. The figure below summarizes the overarching themes:

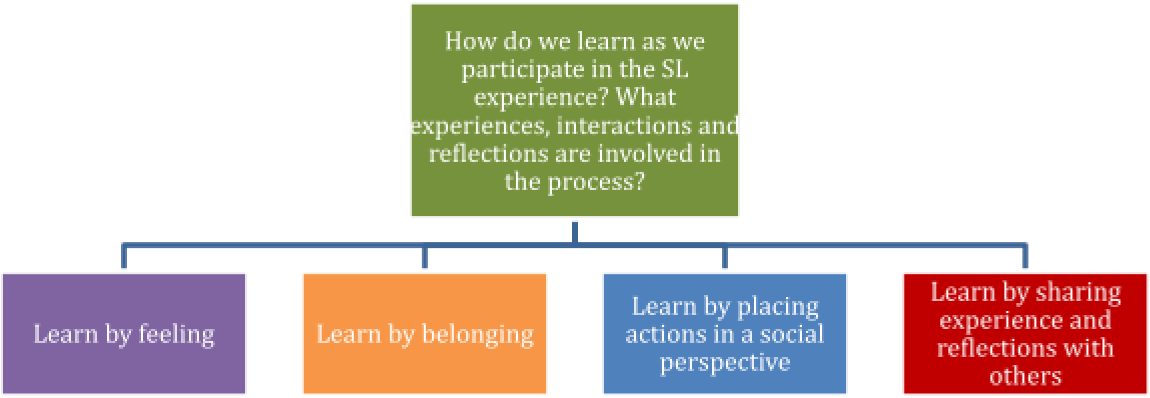
How do we learn as we participate in the SL experience? What experiences, interactions and reflections are involved in the process?
Learn by feeling
Learn by belonging
Learn by placing actions in a social perspective
Learn by sharing experience and reflections with others

Figure 1: Summary of themes

As the figure above shows, four main themes emerge as a response for the research question. PSTs (1) learn by feeling, (2) learn by belonging, (3) learn by placing action in a social perspective, and (4) learn by sharing experiences with others. We discuss each one below.

4.1 Learning by feeling: from personal to community

When analyzing participants' descriptions of their learning experiences in the LC project, we discover that most texts point to a personal dimension of learning, with a myriad of sensations, emotions and feelings, such as surprise, joy, happiness, anxiety and gratitude. The feeling of transformation over the semester, however, stands out:

> I have no doubt that I have learned, not only academically but also on a personal level. […] When I think it through, I notice it has opened my mind. In other words, it has enhanced my desire to see new things and to live life. If I had not taken this class, my destiny would have certainly changed 100% towards another direction. This opportunity to participate has allowed me to rethink many questions, which for me are the engine of learning, and to contrast theoretical foundations with my experience, which I have learned to value as time passed. I thank you for offering me a space for reflection and change/dis-placement in my professional and personal life (OI).

The participant emphasizes their transformation. As they[15] point out, the experience opened their mind, enticed their desire to see new things, and got them to rethink many questions. As we understand it, learning is achieved through the transformation implicated in participating in a community and growing an identity whose values are aligned with it (Wenger, 2001). This happens through participation –reflection (Nóvoa, 2009; 2019), that is, in a praxical manner.

Praxical education stimulates PSTs to recognize themselves in their actions, feelings and words. Rooted in an ecology of relationships that connects PSTs with their emotions, praxical education stimulates them to learn to think in a contextualized manner, while becoming ethical and political subjects (Morin, 2005). This happens due to the capacity of the dyad action—reflection to illuminate the resonance of their actions in the community, especially towards students:

> This Wednesday, I had the opportunity to work in interactive groups, where clearly the principles of solidarity and equality in difference were present in the classroom. It happened in 6th grade of Primary School. One of the groups had a

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[15] Gender neutral.

> student from Syria, who had recently arrived in Spain and didn't know anything about our language, so communication was very complicated. Even so, the classmates didn’t give up on him, they explained it in a thousand ways, they made him participate at all times, they even helped me communicate with this student. This is why I came to believe interactive groups promote inclusion: to carry out the activities we must all participate and do our bit to make it perfect (OI).

This way, they “come to believe” in interactive groups through participation in concrete situations that they experience in the community. These experiences often bring about surprises, shocks, and contradictions to their beliefs:

> One day, when I was conducting interactive groups with my peers, a student did not know how to do the activity, but, with the help of his classmates, who helped him understand it, he managed to do the activity. I was very surprised because the students, instead of solving the activity as soon as possible in a competitive manner, worried their peer also understood it. It was a learning situation for me because I was surprised by the camaraderie that emerged in the interactive groups, which was something new for me (OI).

The texts place learning as something related to commitment with the community and responsibility for oneself and others. Aligned with what Morin (2016) refers to as planetary sense, participants extend this sense of commitment to everyone else as a universal good:

> It is essential that we indulge ourselves the opportunity to learn and contribute, because it’s how we enrich ourselves, become empowered, and appropriate the right and the duty to educate others and ourselves. I also want to highlight that the strategy is very fruitful for cooperation, but I think it could go further by working with content that starts from the interest of the students instead of the tedious

> content of the curriculum; this way, they can really feel that they are protagonists of their learning (OI).

Participants, therefore, feel displacement and transformation by reflecting on their experience, which moves from an individual stance (feelings, sensations, perceptions) to an increasing awareness of the other (students, teachers, families). This, as we argue in the next subsection, creates a sense of belonging in the community.

4.2 Learning by belonging: ecologies of learning in community

Learning also emerges from belonging in the school community where participants did service work or in the community that they formed with their SL group. This way, participants break away with the idea of learning as a unidirectional process and started to see it from an ecological dimension. Additionally, they begin to see their professional development as a praxical experience where formal and informal learning intermingle (Nóvoa, 2019):

> The first thing that appears in this document is a series of basic concepts and ideas that will help understand this journal. Secondly, you will see some reflections that were made possible by the things I lived at the school. It is important to note that these reflections were possible by contrasting knowledge from different sources – a variety of readings from this semester and from previous classes as well as my experiences at the school (Adara Ahmadi, RJ)[16].

As the segment above shows, the participant built knowledge by contrasting experiences in the school with readings, classes and reflections, that is, in a praxical experience. Learning happens in a space of multi-directional relationships, where participants learn from interacting with others – students, families, teachers, school staff, etc. Furthermore, participants learn in an interconnected way, constructing and reconfiguring networks of solidarity through collaborative learning processes in everyday life (Martínez & Fernandez, 2018):

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[16] Pseudonym, as all proper names henceforth.

> Pepe, the custodian, and Nardi, the school janitor, know the kids deeply and always offer everyone smiles, kind words and help; yet, they go unnoticed. For me, they should enter the classroom; not when nobody is there, as they do, but when the kids are in it, during class, because there is a lot both can offer. They have shown me more about LCs than all the teachers I have met there: inclusion, listening, dialogue, help, observation, empathy, attention, equality, etc. Yet, even if you give them the chance to stand out, they decide to stay in the background because society has made them feel this is where they belong. Therefore, I can only thank all the schools that open their doors (and classrooms) to many Pepes and to many Nardis. (Emiliana Fuentes, RJ).

Action strategies and soft skills emerge from the values, emotions and practices that acting in the world brings about. This appears in participants' texts: "I feel my learning has been immense, because in this adventure I have learned from everyone (teacher, students, families)"[17]. Moreover, learning happens when STs break stereotypes about the contributions of families, especially disadvantaged ones, and think of learning in a more horizontal way:

> A relevant learning moment I experienced was with a student's family in a roundtable. My colleagues and I got to participate in a space where we explained to them about the practice of interactive groups. We shared experiences, difficulties, success, feelings, and emotions. Certainly, we created a common learning environment where everyone learned from and got feedback from each other (OI).

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[17] OI.

As pointed out before, community experience binds formal and informal learning and pushes beyond the false dichotomy theory⁄practice. Thus, such experiences should be deliberately created (Olson & Craig, 2001). Praxical teacher education builds up from observation and reflection of what PSTs learn in diverse temporal and spatial arrangements of personal and professional life. Reflection – especially in a context of social transformation– may provide PSTs with elements for personal and collective awareness, where the reality they live in can shape the content of the teacher education (Cobo and Moravec, 2011; Freire, 1997). As a student wrote, “I have learned from the pedagogical literature I read, from class seminars, and, of course, from the interaction with the children. I began learning how one educates in community so that everyone has the same opportunities to learn”[18].

An important element in praxical community learning is its transformative and democratic nature, which transcends the context of immediate action to take on complex social nuances. It involves analyzing real contexts from a socio-political stance that encompasses both its micro and macro levels (Freire, 2011a). As a participant wrote: "It has helped me realize another school is possible, where everyone, regardless of sex, religion, ethnicity or handicap, are included and considered equal"[19]. Thus, the value of inclusion and solidarity unfolds as a community value and as a way of learning. This is particularly important over individualistic, segregated, and competitive learning processes. As a participant said: “As a volunteer in the interactive groups I realized how children can learn through research: they learn on their own without having to listen to the teacher. Also, when they didn’t understand something, they first helped each other and, if they didn’t get it, they came to me”[20].

Commitment to this transformation process involves paying attention to how their actions reverberate on others’ emotions. This includes the use of language:

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[18] OI.
[19] OI.
[20] OI.

> […] yesterday I learned about something that has haunted me for a long time – the way I express myself. After closing the first interactive group session with the mothers, I told them to share their concerns with the teacher so she would have feedback. Everyone agreed there was a girl who did not want to work with the team. At that moment, I said "well, then, the three of you agree this girl has a problem ..." Just when I said "problem", a mother interrupted me and told me this girl had no "problem", making it clear she did not like my way of expressing myself. My intention was to say that all three agreed there was a student with some kind of difficulty for working in a group. Thanks to this feedback, the teacher can work better with the student to develop her teamwork skills, and the three mothers could also take into account the importance of encouraging the student to work in a team in the next interactive group session. Although my intentions were good, I know I did something wrong […] I don't want this girl to be labeled as having a socialization problem when she doesn't; so I will try to never use the word "problem" when I want to refer to some kind of challenge or difficulty (OI).

One of the purposes of SL is that volunteers participate in a community that has a transformative nature and, thus, has values that are aligned with the construction of professional identities driven to social justice, equality, and an ethical-political commitment to the common good. This type of community is possible when it emanates from horizontal relationships between teachers and other agents of the community. This is compatible with the goals of the LC project and visible in participants' texts:

> […] the concierge participated once during my experience in an activity that was very enriching for everyone, offering the contribution that he could. Also, a mother who was in my class made me see how you need not be an expert in

> something – we can all participate and our differences will be valuable. Solidarity, love, dialogue... I have been able to appreciate all this and more during this experience (OI).

During the SL experience, PSTs formed a collective dimension with their groups, sharing sensations, emotions, thoughts, opinions, etc. This space enabled them to express their own points of view in relation to current and previous experiences as well as ideas for pedagogical interventions, tasks, etc., in a collaborative and dialogical way:

> I really consider that throughout the process I have been acquiring relevant learning […] through information I read and from the classrooms where I have intervened. I would also add that I have learned a lot from my colleagues, since they had many ideas that made sense to me. Perhaps the key moments were when we met to discuss our different perspectives and discussed how to promote peer learning with these 3rd graders (OI).

In short, the importance of belonging to these communities is the second theme identified in the data. Participants underscore the relevance of this sense of community belonging for building teacher practical knowledge in a collective level. In the next subsection, we focus on how this sense of community belonging sediments into an ethical-political dimension of action.

4.3 Learning through social action: learning emerges from the ethical-political sense of joint action in a transformative context.

In the present experience, PSTs' actions are part of a transformation project with a democratic and inclusive intention. The context provided by the project is key to thinking about ethics as a central element to the transformation PSTs experience as educators (Freire, 2011a). In this context, PSTs' ethical-political consciousness becomes central to their actions and narratives as they act in the world to transform it (Freire, 2011b). Morin (2005) explains ethics in action as the ethics of complexity, which includes a contingent and situated dimension as well as a broader one, which points to the construction of a planetary sense of ethics.

"Others" is not a term that distances us. On the contrary, it brings us closer. I exist in relation to others, and the existence of others constitutes me as a subject:

> I would like to highlight what I have learned from the 2nd grade teacher, who explained to me the difficulties children have and how to deal with them, attention to diversity, how to deal with parents... I think this learning was relevant because in my career I had not been told about these things and they are fundamental; now, seeing them, I have felt closer (OI).

In this sense, having formal and informal relationships in contexts of diversity (social, cultural or functional) opens up new horizons to think about the complexity of social justice:

> […] if I had to highlight one [moment I learned something], it would be when I helped students with disability. I am used to dealing with people with disabilities at home, but I had never gotten to help disabled children learn. I believe this has provided me with essential learning, since we have to fight for real inclusion in our classrooms, but this cannot happen if teachers are not educated for it and do not work for it (OI).

Nussbaum (2011) underscores the importance of training PSTs in democratic emotions, that is, in the capacity of distancing from one's own viewpoints as a way to understand the vulnerability and difficulties of others (people and social groups), as well in the construction of spaces for dialogue and respect. In this investigation, we found that learning often emerges from democratic experiences in the LCs (Mitton-Kukner, Nelson & Desrochers, 2010; Ganno, 2010):

> If I have to tell my experience of a specific day, I think I can talk about Halloween. Both the faculty and the parents of the children were mobilized at the school to create Halloween-themed interactive groups throughout the center on this day. It was gratifying for me, in particular to be able to see emotion, desire, effort, and the enormous commitment of each one of the members of the center so everything goes ahead. (OI).

Praxical teacher education with ethical-political ambitions involves engaging PSTs in building fairer realities. Introducing volunteers to the sense of common good in the LC project puts them in the privileged position of being a competent listener and speaker (Yuren, 2013).

In short, understanding action from a social justice and democratic perspective is the third theme found in the data. We turn now to the last theme.

4.4 Learn by sharing the experience

According to Richert (2001), to learn from experience, you have to reflect about it and make sense of it. Narrativity is the process of re-telling what was lived and reflecting about it. It consists of building a space where the shared experience becomes grounds for reflection, dialog, and learning.

In our interpretation of participants' texts, learning emerges from the reflection of the SL experience throughout one's trajectory in the project, focusing on both important moments in the trajectory or their experience as a whole. In the texts, participants recreate themselves in metaphors of their experiential learning:

> I would not know how to choose a specific moment because I became aware of what I was learning when I wrote the journal at home and recollected everything that had happened to me throughout the morning. Above all, I felt I started to see some experiences or concepts I had contemplated throughout my life from another

> point of view, since I was figuring out there does not always have to be an interpretation of a situation. This has opened my mind is becoming more open and receptive (OI).

The narratives of experience entwine the feelings that shape practice and the questions PSTs ask themselves as they make sense of what they lived:

> To highlight again what I commented in the Seminar, my emotions: because I needed to tell them, express myself and say I was not experiencing what others were narrating. This made me nervous. Was I taking advantage of my time at the school? Why didn't I do any of what others were narrating? What was happening in my school? I think the seminar was essential, since I could see that the answer was the starting point. I realized I had to look at today and not tomorrow because my school was starting to work with LCs and my actions should align with this (África Gutierrez, RJ).

Volunteers' texts give context to reflection. In this sense, the possibility that participants see themselves in the stories that they tell helps them connect with their experiences and creates a learning opportunity as well an avenue for the construction/negotiation of identities narratively:

> I feel that my learning was enriched by my participation in the learning community. I have been able to contrast all the theory I had in class with practice, which is why I feel I had a thorough learning experience, based on reality, observing and experiencing difficulties that I might face in my future teaching practice. Likewise, interaction with the children and the rest of the school community was truly rich […] In conclusion, today has been a very reflexive day for me because, little by little, I am relating it to various things that I am writing,

> whether they are from my past or present. I think we should never stop being surprised (Emiliana Fuentes, RJ).

Narratives constitute lived and told realities that open new spaces to think about teaching practice (Rivas, 2014). Identity is understood as something that is formed depending on the circumstances and the way in which the participants appropriate, internalize, question, and participate in the contexts that they navigate. Therefore, teachers are evolutionary and interactive beings that change to respond to the different demands of the profession. It is by narrating experiences that they sediment their identities, that is, their values, attitudes, dispositions and skills (Lopes & Pereira, 2012; Rivas, 2014).

Teacher identity construction involves reflective and critical dimensions. This is facilitated by writing narrative and reflective pieces where participants bind together past and present experiences and reflect upon them. This very reflection is what sediment their path towards their future aspirations as teachers.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the learning of the PSTs that participated in the SL experience to explain their learning in this trajectory. We used a narrative analysis of narrative and reflective texts produced by PSTs. The results indicate that participants (1) learn by feeling, (2) learn by belonging, (3) learn by placing action in a social perspective, and (4) learn by sharing experiences with others.

Our results point to the construction of a community of praxis for teacher education that binds formal and informal experiences, theory and practice (Nóvoa, 2009; 2019). In this type of work, it is necessary to create a space in which the meaning of practical teacher education is shared (Yuren, 2013) and collaborative action with the schools is interconnected with spaces for reflection and collective dialogue. In this type of work, the ethical-political sense of acting in the world is shared, while participants reconceptualize and attribute meaning to what they experience. This collaborative work with multiple stakeholders both in schools and in university breaks with the worn-out idea of the university classroom as the only space and time for teacher development.

Narrating and reflecting upon experience plays a central role in learning; therefore, it should be an integral part of SL projects. Narrating and reflecting allow us to assess impressions, observations, experiences of different contexts, times, practices, and complex realities, in an intricate process of collaboration between future teachers and projects of educational transformation.

This study converges with previous research grounded on the life stories of teachers (Lopes and Pereira, 2012; Rivas, 2014; Author 3 et al, 2020) in showing that the shifts PSTs experienced in praxical teacher education are oriented towards thinking of schools and universities from an emancipatory rationality, that is, away from technocratic assumptions and linear learning models.

It is important to note that participants in our study were motivated students who opted to participate in the project and were willing to engage completely. This is an integral part of our results; with a different, less motivated group, we would probably obtain a different outcome. PSTs have different responsibilities than the teachers in the school*s,* since reflection is typically not part of what teachers do. Teachers have little time for reflection and discussion with peers (Olson & Craig, 2001), so these results cannot be extended for other contexts.

Future research may include looking into the experiences of other stakeholders' of the LC (faculty or students). It could also include investigating, in the future, whether and how the present project might reverberate in PSTs' induction to the profession.

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