Service Learning: Citizenship Education through Social Engagement and Cognitive Experience

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Abstract

The article presents a part of an action research project undertaken by students and a small village's inhabitants, within a service learning approach. The project lasted for three academic years (from 2014/2015till 2016/2017). Its idea was education students' (members of Scientific Circle of Educational Media at Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn) engagement into voluntary activity in favour of a small local community (of village near Olsztyn in Poland). During the project students not only carried out the work for and with the members of local society but also they made a research with them (participative observation, surveys). To fulfil the agenda of action research students were also investigated (interviewed) by the protector of the Circle (author of the article), in aim to explore the meanings they gave to their activity, learning and research process and the way they perceived and experienced the changes which were the results of the project.

Key words: service learning, practice, action research, higher education

Introduction

The action turn (Reason, Torbet, 2010) announced in social sciences directs our attention to practice and its role in professional learning, knowledge and research. An idea that "mind, rationality and knowledge are constituted through action and interaction within practices" and through them social life is organized reproduced and transformed Schatzki (2001, p.2) found its rationality in social research and education. Practice was discovered as an essential category "that produce learning and learners, practices that involve agencies of an ontologically diverse kind" (Mulcahy, 2014, p.53). Such an idea is represented mostly by the advocates of action research and other active strategies in education (e.g. action learning, service learning) who postulate including subjective/civic engagement in resolving social problems into a research and educational processes.

Service learning becomes "a linkage of classroom with communities, theory with practice", activity with reflection in order to "improve students' academic achievements, enhance their cultural competence and foster a more inclusive and just world" (Butin, 2015, p. xiv). Service learning is "a pedagogy that links community service and academic study so that each strengthens and transform the others (Eyler & Giles, see: Simonet, 2008, p.2). Being engaged in service learning students have many opportunities for various forms of engagement: cognitive, social, behavioral, emotional (Simonet, 2008, p.3), so the link among "students' personal and social development with academic and cognitive development experience enhances understanding; understanding leads to more effective action" (Eyler, Dwight E. Giles, 2003). Such an education then has a holistic dimension, supports students' efforts to manage their own personal and professional development and raises the graduates' awareness of their role in the society.

Theoretical Background

Practice as a Central Category of Education and Research

During a few last decades there is a significant shift in educational practice and research concerning understanding professional learning and knowledge. Accepted before acquisition of knowledge, treated as "static" element of cognitive processes (Mode 1.) was, in

many investigations, analysis and educational practices, removed by dynamic understanding of knowledge (Guerriero, 2017; Bratianu, 2015; Tunison, 2016), "continuously emerging in experimental participation in practice itself" (Mode 2) (Fenwick, Nerland, Jensen, 2012, p. 5). "Practice, both as an enactment of and a medium for learning, has been argued to weave knowing together with action, conversation and affect in purposeful and regularized orderings of human activity (Fenwick, Nerland, Jensen, 2014 p.3). Practice has its dynamics, it is constituted as "complex relations and movements across multiple sites" (Ibidem, p.5). Learning then is perceived as an activity based on many actions and interactions characterizing people's presence in a world rich of meetings, ideas, things, processes. "It is practices that produce learning and learners, practices that involve agencies of an ontologically diverse kind" (Mulcahy, 2014, p.53). To be engaged in practice means to construct reality and a world around and to be (re)constructed through activity which – very often – demands taking an effort to overcome our intellectual, social, emotional borders.

Practice-based learning considers students experiences of participation in real conditions, in solving real problems, which belong to people living outside the university, in local surroundings. Process of knowledge constitution (knowing-in-practice) (Gherrardi, 2006) allows the participants to undertake their professional learning within real social context, in relation to real people's needs and students' efforts to fulfill them. The added value of such an education has a moral character – students can develop their engagement carried out for social purposes, through the experiences they rise their responsibility and sensitivity, in an activity for common good. Such understood learning „involves integrating aspects of knowing, acting and being within a broad range of practices" (Dall' Alba, Barnacle, 2007,

In relations to this „pragmatic" approach to education and learning some transformations in the theory and practice of social research were observed. At first it was "a linguistic turn" which was a result of "a tension" between empirical positivist view and a counter movement called postmodern interpretivism. This way a thesis that "all ways of framing and interpreting the world are human constructions framed by language in social interactions" (Reason, Torbet, 2001, p. 5) was underlined. Going further - because human being started to be perceived as an active and critical subject, social actor creating the world around - the "practice turn" was announced. Schatzki (2001, p.2) stated that "mind, rationality and knowledge are constituted through action and interaction within practices" and through them social life is organized reproduced and transformed. This approach has had some consequences for social sciences' research. According to Reason & Bradbury (2001, p.7) "the primary purpose of research/practice after action turn is practical knowing embodied in the moment to moment action of each research/practitioner in the service of human flourishing" (Reason, Torbet, 2001, p.7).

The purpose of inquiry then is to treat knowledge dynamically, as 'a doer" (Jensen, Lahn, Nerland, 2012, p. 14) as „situated, negotiated, emergent and embedded activity" (Gherardi, 2009, p.1), as a tool for improvement the reality investigated and transformed. Such a thinking is represented mostly by the advocates of action research and other active strategies in education (e.g. action learning) who postulate including subjective/civic engagement in resolving social problems into a research and educational processes. This way they have opened a broad space for explorations new areas of knowledge (practical, reflective, experiential) which is strongly connected with practice embedded in multi-contextual learning environment.

Service Learning and Its Role in Professional Education

The idea of practice as a "tool" which can transform our understanding and acting in education and social research was approved by many humanists. Some of them who are looking for a good solution to combine practice to educational processes (Butin, 2015; Kerins, 2016) pay attention to a "larger community movement in higher education" (Butin, 2015, p. xiv) They represent an active pedagogy and civic education in higher education. This movement is an exemplification of a search for "a new generation of scholarship that carefully and critically examines the gaps, limits and problematics of an incredibly complex practice (Butin, 2015, p. xiv). The movement embraced "a set of loosely interrelated practices and philosophies such as civic engagement, community-based research, public scholarship and participatory action research" (Butin, 2015, p. xiv). It also embraced service learning which "enhances students outcomes (cognitive, affective, ethical), fosters a more active citizenry, promotes a scholarship of engagement among teachers and institutions, supports a more equitable society and reconnects colleges and universities with their local and regional communities (Butin, 2015, p.3). Service activities are used as a 'text' that is interpreted, analyzed and related to the content of a course in ways that permit a formal evaluation of the academic learning outcomes" (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, p. 38).

Students participating in service learning are not only "serving to learn" but also "learning to serve", and this last aim is not represented in any academic curricula, so is treated as the "unique civic dimension of the pedagogy" (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, p. 38). What needs to be strongly underlined service learning is defined as "social -movement-phenomenon" (Butin, 2010, p.xiii) because of its implicit potential in activating and integrating social communities which take – together with students – the tasks for the good of community. For students it is an opportunity to develop their civic competences, not only they learn how to analyze and solve social problems but also they learn how to animate local groups of interests, how to encourage them to common cultural and social activity, how to strengthen the leaders in more responsible and autonomous engagement.

According to (Butin, 2015, p.xiii) there is no one thing called "service learning". Instead there are multiple, divergent and often contradictory modes of service learning by which this learning is accomplished in higher education. Theory of service learning is actually " a set of theories contingent on the embodied and experiential character of the service learning experience" (Butin, 2010, p.iiix)

The constitutive feature of service learning is students' engagement in the activity carried out in purpose to benefit others (Kerins, 2016, p.2). So, students leave classrooms and use their knowledge and skills taking tasks, projects, events, trying to answer the needs, expectations, problems of people (street children, older people, excluded persons, little village people) in their surroundings. Such an education can combine many educational aims. Students serve to the people who need help and becoming members of their community they can acquire many (social, communicative, professional) competences necessary for their future professions. They also have an opportunity to build their moral competences – values that arise from the service activity: responsibility, charity, respect for people in bad life situation (Kerins, 2016, p.2).

An integration of knowledge and experience gives students opportunity to develop better understanding of themselves being encouraged to reflection concerning their self-

development, participation in social change and their role "within a greater context of democracy" (Simonet, 2008, p.2).This, much bigger than traditional set of educational aims allows to perceive service learning as "a process that creates greater student engagement" (Simonet, 2008, p.1) which supports their successes and counteracts educational failures. Students "develop a sense of competence in using knowledge and are able to broaden, build and connect their understanding through application, dialog and reflection" (Simonet, 2008, p.1). They "become more confident, socially adept and versatile in applying creative solutions to complex problems" (Simonet, 2008, p.1). Their understanding of learning overcomes the borders of university, through the involvement in activity in favor of local communities they can also recognize a sense of learning lasting the entire life – lifelong learning.

Being engaged in service learning students have many opportunities for various forms of engagement: cognitive, social, behavioral, emotional (Simonet, 2008, p.3), so the link among "students' personal and social development with academic and cognitive development experience enhances understanding; understanding leads to more effective action" (Eyler, Giles, 2003). Such an education then has a holistic dimension, supports students' efforts to manage their own personal and professional development and raises the graduates' awareness of their role in the society.

Method

The research was focused on an educational project which lasted for three academic years (from 2014/2015till 2016/2017). The project engaged students into voluntary activity in favour of small local society (of village near Olsztyn in Poland). They were 8 students of education, the members of Scientific Circle of Educational Media at Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. It was an action research project with some elements of service learning so during the project students not only carry out the work for and with the members of local society but also they made a research with them (participative observation, surveys). To fulfil the agenda of action research students were also investigated (interviewed) with a semi-structured written interviews which were conducted with three, the most involved members of Students' Scientific Circle.

These 8 students were chosen intentionally to explore what meanings they gave to deep and personal engagement in service learning and in wider sense, in an activity of scientific circle (which is taken by rather small number of students) and how they perceived their participation in the project in their preparation to future pedagogical work. We wanted to identify how students perceived a role of such an intensive engagement in an activity of service (as a form of pedagogical activity) in the process of building their pedagogical knowledge and competences. Our aim was also to recognize the possibilities of including such "scholarship of engagement" (Butin, 2015, p.xv) in local society's renewal to educational practices of university. The article presents data gathered with a triple team of students in three-year project's duration (from 2014/2015till 2016/2017). From this (2017/2018) academic year we have started a new one, in two neighbouring villages.

During the project students were engaged in intergenerational meetings for celebrating events like: St. Adrew's Day, The Grandparents' Day, carnival balls, Easter workshops, Family festivals. For each meeting they prepared scenarios which contained many plays, competitions, games, quizzes, workshops trying to attract the inhabitants by various proposals of being, playing and working together. Throuh this way, students wanted to enhance them to

be engaged, to build their integration and readiness for the involvement in the activities taken for common good.

The service learning's incorporation in the framework of action research strategy was related to the aims of Students Scientific Circle, which were twofold: pedagogical and investigative. First one concerned developing students' social, civic and cultural competences through community engagement. Second - was connected to their role as researchers and reflective practitioners who investigated their own activity and the results achieved (or not achieved) in the project. They could thus build their personal knowledge based on personal and team research experience analysed critically and reflectively. The data of the research presented in the article exemplifies a meta-reflection students took up after the realisation of the project.

Choosing action research as a base for the project undertaken with students – members of scientific academic circle was related to special characteristic of this strategy of inquiry. Reason and Bradbury (2008, p. 3) stated that action research is "a set of practices that responds to people desire to act creatively in the face of practical and often pressing issues in their lives in organizations and communities". It is defined as „a democratic and participative orientation to knowledge creation. It brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern. Action research is a pragmatic co-creation of knowing with, not on, people" (Bradbury, 2001, p. 1) It is a space for „working with and towards knowledge in action" (Bradbury, 2001, p. 1), what means operationalization of knowledge as a dynamic phenomenon, mediated by widely contextual environment.

Action research is a kind of „co-operative inquiry", „grounded in an extended epistemology for researching human experience through participatory human inquiry" (Yorks, 2015, p. 256). This epistemology concerns many interconnected ways of knowing which encompass various ways of producing, expressing, using and sharing knowledge and holistic understanding the way human beings create their worlds. The extended epistemology concerns integration of four ways of knowing (practical, experimental, presentational, propositional ones), (Heron, Reason, 2008) based on evidence generation and expression of different forms of presentation.

Going through repeated cycles of action and reflection action research participants cooperate as co-researchers and co-subjects (Yorks, 2015, p. 256). Action research has a processual, multistage character. It is emergent and developmental (Bradbury, 2001, p. 6), the participants' involvement is motivated by the „questions that are professionally or personally developmental, socially controversial or require social healing on the part of the co-inquires" (Yorks, 2015, p. 256), it demands being personally „inside the experience" (Yorks, 2015, p. 256).

According to Peter Reason (2001) action research strategy has double objective, but except from the ones indicated above (leading to gather practical and research experience and knowledge) he underlined empowering the participants not only to produce "their own knowledge" but also to use it in a "process of self-awareness through collective self-inquiry and reflection" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, see: Reason, 2001). It means „consciousness raising or conscientization" of the „underprivileged members of our world" (Chambers, 1997, see:

Reason, 2001). Such an understanding of our activity was of a big importance for the students working with people in a small village.

Data Reconstruction and Discussion

The article presents a part of a service learning project undertaken with students and a small village's inhabitants, within an action research approach. The data received from students had a narrative and reflective character, they were reconstructed by codifying and categorizing (Saldana, 2016, p.31), in a search for students meanings, interpretation, transformations. Some questions, like: What are they doing? What are they trying to accomplish? How, exactly, do they do this? What specific means and/or strategies do they use? How do they talk about, characterize and understand what is going on? What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes? Why did I include them? (Saldana, 2016, p.15) were very helpful during these analyses. Gathering data we also included our "own reflective data" (Saldana, 2016, p.15). They were a source of our constant reflection on the research and educational processes. In effect of the indicated analytic processes four categories of reconstructed data were distinguished. They concerned the way students perceived personal and professional aspects of service learning, the results/changes emergent in the research fieldwork and the meanings given to service learning as an "education in action".

Personal Aspects of Participation in the Service Learning

Our first observation concerning the answers students gave during the interviews was their concentration and an effort to make a deep reflective analysis about their participation in the project. They uncovered many personal aspects of their activity. One of the woman (K) told us about their biographical motives of taking part in the project.

K: *I was raised in the village therefore I am aware that few activities are organised for local communities. (…) This knowledge and experiences of living in the village were crucial to make a decision to take part in the project".*

Other personal motives have developmental character.

A: *"It is an internal need to realise my own ideas, relating to local society's animation. So it was self-actualisation but not only. It also was an improvement of my abilities to pedagogical work (…), an opportunity of my personality development".*

K: *"I am glad I can develop my passions, work in favour of these inhabitants, help the local society and thereby derive many inspirations and learn from more experienced persons".*

A: *"I stimulate my imagination and creativity".*

Participation in the project was also perceived as a developmental task having very significant, even disruptive impact. One of the woman said:

M: *"Activation of the inhabitants was a precious experience which shaped a character and enriched internally. Therefore making a decision to undertake the activities has changed, to some extent, my past life, through the experiences of new things, exchanges of them. It was an occasion to share my time, knowledge with other persons, but it also was a way of gaining new, practical skills".*

She continued expressing her sensitivity and a determination to pursue voluntary working for helping people.

M:*"I think it is a kind of addiction, obviously in a positive sense. Who tries it once, he never gives up, and who does, he will come back after some time being stronger and having new ideas. For me it is a very important and incredible experience in my life.*

The strong motive of students' engagement was a satisfaction they experienced through the participation in service learning. But feeling this satisfaction was connected with a reflection („in-action", „on -action"), concerning the effects which were achieved. Students also expressed a pedagogical awareness of young pedagogues understanding the value of their work for themselves and for the people they worked with.

K: „*If the task which I planned give the intentional effects and the participants are glad I feel satisfaction. But I always analyze the events which took place and look for the situations I should improve next time".*

M:*"The awareness of time and efforts I sacrifice for helping others causes a satisfaction of my activities and I gain a self-confidence. I feel like I don't waste my time".*

A:*"I feel satisfaction looking at smile at children's faces, when parents take part in our meetings together with children, cooperating together, talking, rooting for each other".*

Telling their stories students indicated also social motives of their participation. They presented a strong will to help the inhabitants to overcome the problems of lack of engagement and passivity.

A: „*I would like to encourage both children, youngsters and adult inhabitants of the village to common activity, to teach them about the organization of spare time and alternative possibilities of spending it, to encourage intergenerational integration".*

M: *My guiding motive was a consolidation of an attractiveness and the improvement the quality of integrative meetings to cause the village to pulsate with life – integrating with each other".*

These narrations presented students' pedagogical responsibility and awareness, ability to diagnose the detected problems and readiness for taking even bigger engagement to help the village society to solve them. The source of this readiness was really extraordinary sensitivity.

M: „*Regardless of who they are we should selflessly help as much as we can, not necessarily financially, but supporting or taking care of others, motivating them to activity, presenting an idea that „together we can do a lot" and „nobody is alone".*

These data indicated students' strong motivational and emotional engagement. We think the way they connected their passions and interests leading to their self-actualisation with community service proclaimed a wide range of their personal educational outcomes.

Service Learning as an Opportunity for Professional Learning

Students – members of scientific circle strongly underlined the possibility of professional learning, of gathering experiences which would give them better preparation to a future pedagogical work. They also appreciated the recognition of their strong and weak sides

and thanks to such experiences to meet some inspirations for personal and professional development.

K: *"Thanks to a possibility to cooperate with wonderful people, I can learn a lot, observe social phenomena and regularities.*

A: *"Taking active part in these activities I have an opportunity to learn new things. Then I can recognize my possibilities and limitations during organizing the meetings, managing games and plays. I can develop myself".*

They also – more specifically – defined what they have learnt thanks to their engagement in service learning experiences. A process of personal knowledge constitution was underlined.

K: *First of all I have an opportunity to applicate theoretical knowledge gained during studies into practical activities and this way I can verify the knowledge.*

Some other aspects of professional experiential knowledge were presented, especially the ones considering developing social and interpersonal competences. A strong emphasis on social learning seems to be connected with the character of the tasks taken during the project which were focused on learning the group management, cooperation, skills of good communication and supportive leadership.

K: *"I learn working with a big group of children, youngsters and adults. I have to plan my things in the way attractive for four age groups".*

A: *"I learn a cooperation in the group through talking the activities over and preparing them".*

K: *"I learn empathy, try to develop my interpersonal skills, to win the group's trust and sympathy, to cooperate effectively"..*

Learning a pedagogical profession was also presented as a challenge which students want to take up. Reading the sentences it is easy to discover students' strong positive attitude to their future profession.

A: *"It is an event which allows me to test myself in pedagogue's role, animator's role. It is a significant meaning, even invaluable, it is difficult to describe it in a few words".*

K: *"The work that allows us for a self-actualisation and brings some effects gives us a self-confidence that we chose the most appropriate way of real-life development".*

M: *"It is a source of a lot of new experiences, which can be useful in our life. It gives me a strength, courage, strengthen my character. I don't say it is easy but we can manage with all the things if we have ideas and desires to act."*

These narrations presented students as brave and ready for various efforts "fighters". Then they were asked about the difficulties they met taking the tasks. It occurred they have met some emotional barriers to overcome, especially in the beginning of their activity.

A: *"I was afraid and felt stress thinking I would not be accepted by the members of the village. I had a fear nobody would participate in the meetings. But it occurred the inhabitants were very open for our initiatives".*

K: *"It was difficult to win the inhabitants trust and to start a cooperation with totally unknown group of people".*

Another kind of difficulties were tied with the specificity of pedagogical profession: unpredictable and dynamic. Students had to learn how to be a reflective practitioner being able to applicate a reflection-in-action which is a very useful tool in pedagogical work.

K: *." It was a necessity to change something in the program, spontaneously. We sometimes had to change our roles, enter new tasks, plays, help a colleague who was not able to manage. We needed fluency, the work with a group learns fast reactions for emerging situations".*

Participation in the experiences of service learning was treated by students as an advantage for professional learning taken through practical experiences of pedagogical work. It concerned mostly the improvement of social and interpersonal competences and the recognition of the specificity and barriers met by students in pedagogical work. Practice was treated as a tool to overcome them.

The Meanings Given to the Results of Service Learning

A big part of data gained during interviews concerned students narrations about the results. They indicated benefits both for the inhabitants and for themselves. First of all they noticed a processual character of people's involvement in the activities.

K: *"In the beginning the inhabitants and children felt difficulties to join our activities, but they gradually started to engage. Their participation in ordinary plays allowed them to meet, to talk together".*

M: *"They step by step started to cooperate with us and with themselves".*

A: *"Something started to happen in the village".*

Students also perceived some changes in the way of inhabitants' engagement.

K: *Each person engaged according to his/her potential, using their manual abilities, talents, creativity, joy.*

M: *"Until recently they sat at home …But they started to become convinced of the activities (…) They understood that acting jointly they could accomplish a lot. They started to organize evenings, meetings on their own, going together for walks. They organized a common trip.*

K: *The participation in common tasks convinced them that as a rural society they could take independent actions.*

A: *"I noticed changes concerning the persons who took part in a few events. In the beginning some persons came just because of curiosity, to look, they were sceptic, standing aloof. During the following meetings they not only look but also took part in the tasks, educational games. And they were glad because of the common fun".*

The perceived changes have had – according to one of the students – also much deep personal character. He told how he perceived such transformation of some "inhabitants.

A: *"First of all they had a feeling of appropriability and a belief that without them nothing can be successful. These feelings supports positive self-estimation, it is the beginning for the following activities taken for the society's good. It implicates a reinforcement of interpersonal bounds and gives a mobilisation for a more frequent meetings".*

Some results presented by the students concerned their mutual cooperation with the inhabitants. They underlined a process of community' constitution, based on responsibility and civic competences. These narrations presented also presented some moral aspects of service learning.

K: *"I think that during the tasks which were realised in the village we both develop, the inhabitants and we, students. We felt responsible for each member of this community"*

A: *"Both students and inhabitants have the possibility to gain and improve the civic competences, like a feeling of solidarity and local bounds"*

For us as researchers and academic teachers students' voices about their personal experiences gained through taking part in the project were very important. Telling their stories they said it was „education in action"- appreciated because of the possibility of working and learning in real conditions and mutual exchange of experiences. Knowledge constructed through these activities had for them dynamic and "hot" meaning.

A: *"For me it is an alternative for the education taken by the participation in lectures at the university where we work through simulation of real events. But education in action is a reality, it takes place here and now, you can immediately draw conclusions what can be improved, what was successful, what was popular among the participants, what mistakes you made. Here we have a feedback form the receivers at once".*

The fast and immediate process of estimating value of knowledge underlined a strong connection between theory and practice, which was another important aspect of „education in action".

A: *"And all the more I practice what I have learnt and immediately I have verified my knowledge".*

Additionally students noticed a interdependence between their free and creative participation leading to competence development and their service for local community's evolution.

K: *"This kind of education gives the educator a lot of possibilities of the aims realization. Being oriented on the development of local society he/she is allowed to constitute his own professional competences"*

K: *"Through the education in action we can strive for positive social changes"*

M: *I am able to have an impact on people's life, give them support and motivation to further devoirs".*

Some "egocentric" benefits were also uncovered.

A: *"Participating in education in action I am not only a giver but also a receiver and it is the best for me. I gain more than I give.*

Education in action seemed to have differentiated results, students could recognize

on one side a big number of them (personal, social, developmental, educational), on the other – the way these results were interrelated with each other. The research data indicated that students engagement in the service learning fostered their many-sided preparation to a pedagogical profession and civic activities.

Conclusion

Service learning is a "type of engaged learning that embraces the possibility of conjoint civic renewal and academic betterment" (Butin, 2010, p.xv). In our research this engagement was increased by students' participation in action research process. These complex experiences created additional opportunity for a combination of educational, social and exploratory activities, important in students' professional education. They constituted personal knowledge, going through multiple ways of knowing – mostly practical one – „know how" to prepare and organize meeting, manage the group, achieve the planned aims, communicate and cooperate with inhabitants, encourage them to common activity, conduct a research. It was knowing experienced through „education in action", sometimes through trial and error method, through the attempts of undertaking pedagogical practice. This way of knowing was enhanced by a mutual learning of students and the inhabitants. It was a multidirectional co-construction of knowledge resulted in a process of building a community of practice, of people learning with and from each other through the involvement in practice. These common activities were motivated by personal (biographical and developmental) and social motives of young people looking for their own ways of self-actualization and for possibilities of a „making the world better", of being the actors of social positive changes.

The practical knowledge was „hot", created „here and now" but it was reconstituted by reflection (in-action, on-action - Schön, 1988) and meta-reflection and through students' narrations. These reflections and creative narratives helped them to build a connection between the experiences and „a world of theory in their own worlds and stories" (Long, 2008). This way practical knowing was integrated with propositional one – theoretical, conceptual, representing knowledge brought from the University. During project realization students also experienced representational and experiential ways of knowing, they took advantage of their sensory abilities and artistic capacities but these opportunities for knowledge constitution were less recognized by them.

Education „in action" gave students many opportunities of personal and professional learning. Its main „tool" was practice as a space of learning, experience and service. Such an education creates possibilities for many competences' development: cognitive, communicative, interpersonal, social ones. But what was especially valuable – according to students narratives – was connected with civic competences understood as learning to recognize a local reality of small village and a service for the animation and integration of this society. Students expressed their solidarity and took responsibility for the increasing well-being of the village community. They made an effort to activate the inhabitants to overcome the barriers hindering their independent engagement in solving their local problems. Service learning had then also strong moral aspects - very significant in pedagogical profession.

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