# "Real Learning" in Service Learning: Lessons from La Clase Mágica in the US and Spain[1]

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**Abstract:** In this article, we present initial findings of an exploratory-pilot research study that focuses on *service learning* as a framework to examine "real learning" and identity changes of university students participating in a community based educational activity known as *La Clase Mágica.* Student's reports and fieldnotes from two distinct locations: the original 25-year old project located in San Diego, California and a recent adaptation in Seville known as LCM-Seville, now completing two academic years of experience. The two programs in San Diego (US) and Seville (Spain) illustrate the types of learning that students acquire as they engage community members in activities that support community participants' development:

**Keywords:** service learning, real learning, narrative inquiry, diversity, higher education

## 1    Introduction

In the context of global trends in education, the university is in an ideal position to meet the needs of both students and society. We concur with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) Greening Universities Toolkit's (2013) appraisal of the university as an "agent(s) of change, catalyst for social and political action as well as centers for learning" (p. 4). It has the mission and the resources to prepare future leaders to meet the demands of the complex and diverse social realities of the 21st century – i.e., that is, to create the conditions that guide and support the development of well-informed, responsible human beings (Maturana/Nisis 2002). To fulfill this mission, not only must it prepare future leaders for economic gain but it must also provide them with opportunities to develop a social consciousness and real sense of citizenship (Euscátegui/Pino/Rojas 2006) to meet the demands of an ever-evolving world society. In this paper we argue that the university can accomplish this role by engaging students in the real problems of society in ways that they can learn from real experiences in real places, with real people who are undergoing specific realities and developing different personal and cultural perspectives (Euscátegui/

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Pino/Rojas 2006; Blázquez/Martínez-Lozano 2012). The introduction of service learning in higher education provides an excellent example of combining learning of academic concepts with communitarian service (Eyler/Giles 1999; Knapp/Fisher/ Levesque-Bristol 2010), and in these times of continuous change, it can serve as an ideal strategy for preparing future generations of leaders for the complex and diverse world that awaits them.

In this article, we provide empirical insights into the ways that the intellectual, social and emotional development of university students is reinforced by their participation in service learning activities at *La Clase Mágica* (LCM)*,* an informal educational activity situated in community-based institutions supported by a university research team and a practicum course (Vásquez 2003, 2008; Vásquez/Bustos/Riojas 2014) and UC Links, a consortium of university-community partnerships established to provide a mechanism for maintaining the diversity of the student population at the University of California (http://uclinks.berkeley.edu/) (Underwood/Parker 2011). We focus on two iterations of *La Clase Mágica* as a "cultural laboratory" for the study of learning and development: 1) *La Clase Mágica, Seville,* situated in a gypsy community where women seek social and academic skills to help them achieve self-sufficiency and University Pablo de Olavide students put into practice service, academic, social, and citizenship skills; both women and undergraduates come together in a community center offering multiple social services for the women and where the university students assist as part of the requirement of a practicum course in Learning Processes in Non Formal Settings. 2) The original iteration of *La Clase Mágica* in Southern California where undergraduate students enrolled in a specially designed Practicum in Child Development offered at the University of California, San Diego conduct their research at four afterschool educational activities situated in three Mexican origin communities and a Native American reservation. In both cases, undergraduate students work closely with community members to meet the social and educational needs of both constituencies – the community requiring educational resources and institutional support (Stanton-Salazar/Vásques/Mehan 1996) and the university requiring innovative means to prepare its students for a diverse and complex world. In the process two unequal populations come to better understand each other creating a model of social change (Martínez 2012).

Previously, *La Clase Mágica* scholars have focused primarily on the child participants' academic achievements and life careers, and the subsequent contribution to social change of minority groups (Martínez 2012). However, in establishing quasi-laboratories in community-based institutions that link to practicum courses, the university provides rigorous academic training in disciplinary knowledge as well as practical experience in cultural citizenship (Eyler/Giles 1999). These experiences provide university students with the opportunity to engage in innovative pedagogies that connect theoretical concepts with real life situations, one of the most important contributions of LCM (Macías/Martinez-Lozano 2013; Macías/Martinez-Lozano/ Mateos 2014; Martínez 2012; Vásquez 2003; Flores/Vasquez/Clark 2014). However, the university students' social and intellectual development has not received sufficient attention in this initiative. The benefits obtained by university students in terms of their own academic, social, cultural and individual development have not been widely documented, in spite of the overwhelming amount of field notes they have written over the life of the project. These field notes constitute a major source of data for the study of child development and the efficacy of specially designed curricular

materials and learning environment. As we point out below, field notes also provide a window into the impact that a specialized course and an informal educational activity has on undergraduate students' own academic and identity development. These field notes allow us to track the changes that university students themselves undergo as they participate at the field sites as co-collaborators with community participants in the problem-solving process (Macías/Martinez-Lozano 2013; Macías/Martinez-Lozano/Mateos 2014; Martinez 2012; Vásquez 2003).

## 2    Theoretical Background

Learning processes are always situated (Lave/Wenger 1991; Rogoff 1990). When these take place in settings where students are personally involved, new information is assimilated into their own life story, gaining meaning and significance in terms of who they are in the world (Polkinghorne 1988). Their personal involvement is therefore a key means for analyzing and therefore understanding the processes of learning beyond purely cognitive dimension, including processes that affect personal identity (Wenger 1998). To better understand these learning processes, we combine insights generated in three different research traditions that have produced knowledge in the fields of cultural historical psychology, identity studies, and the study of pedagogy. Each of these traditions account for the three elements that we consider fundamental to understanding the learning processes of students during their participation in LCM. First is the notion of *real learning*, conceived by the cultural-historical psychology research tradition (Meijers/Wardekker 2003; Van Oers 2005, 2006, 2007; Wenger 1998) as a significant, authentic and long lasting type of learning. These scholars argue that when real learning happens, the learner's identity is affected and transformed. We build on the findings of identity studies that focus not only the cognitive, but also on the emotional processes that lead to the experience of *identity change* (Erikson 1968; Bruner 1986, 1990; Brockmeier/Carbaugh 2001; McAdams 1996, 2001). Additionally, we study these processes in the context of *service-learning* programs in higher education programs as a pedagogical methodology where the two processes – real learning and identity change can be analyzed (Eyler/Giles 1999; Knapp/Fisher/Levesque-Bristol 2010). Up to this point, much of the work produced in the study of service learning has focused on its applied nature. A theoretical framework for showing how learning processes are supported in service learning programs has not been rigorously developed. We believe that the notion of real learning developed within the cultural-historical tradition in psychology provides a thoughtful and meaningful account of these processes. We aim to shed light on the complex learning processes happening at LCM by creating a dialogue across three different research and applied traditions that centers on the concepts of service learning, real learning and identity change.

*Service Learning.* Previously service learning has been linked to such educational practices as volunteering, co-operative education, internships and community outreach. However, the scope of service learning goes beyond the goal of collaborating with community on social issues. It also involves self-reflection on participation and on the process of learning (Giles/Eyler 1994). As community-based learning activ-

ity, service learning can be identified as a kind of "boundary practice" (McMillan 2011) within an activity system at the boundary of two pratices: the university and the community. Additionally, service learning represents a methodology designed to help students attain an experience in practical and real life issues through non-traditional strategies. The National Commission on Service-Learning (Fiske 2001) defines it as "… a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (p. 6). In this sense, service learning is an educational practice in which community and formal education come together to enhance the potentiality of institutional curriculum. It also aligns with critical pedagogy, critical postmodernism (Anzaldua 1987; Giroux 1992) and new literacy proposals in education that goes beyond what is traditionally understood as a formal curriculum in higher education (Cazden et al. 1996).

Participating in a boundary space involves contradictions and tensions at the same time that it generates new forms of meaning that support learning beyond the cognitive and conceptual level. Following Mitton-Küner, Nelson & Desrochers (2010), it may also encourage major changes in the identity of participating students. According to these authors a service learning experience is an example of a cross-cultural experience, influencing participant's identities in the same way that "borderland" and "otherness" experiences produce "alterity," that is, experiences that promote self-related reflections and transformations (Macías/Amián/Sánchez 2008; Macías/García/Sánchez/Marco 2010; Macías/de la Mata 2013; Macías 2013).

*Real Learning.* The notion of "real learning" (Simons 2000; Meijers/Wardekker 2003; Van Oers 2005, 2006, 2007) provides the framework for assessing the developmental process of the undergraduate students' LCM experiences, helping us to understand how, in their participation at the sites, they learn about their academic disciplines at the same time they acquire new cultural ways of knowing. When real learning happens, cognitive changes are not the only changes that take place, other aspects of learning do as well. For example, they acquire social knowledge about other people and cultures, professional practical abilities, and importantly, they also acquire a new way of looking at the world and of seeing oneself in a new light (Simons 2000). They undergo a transformation much like Vygotsky (1987) and other cultural historical theorists have described as *perezhivanie,* which literally means "living through," and in this context, with the connotation of thriving is "the process through which children make meaning of their social existence" (Mahn 2003, p.129).

*Identity change.* In this situation, real learning makes possible the transformation of the learner's own identity. Learning requires a motive that allows the learner to participate in a social group (Van Oers 2005, 2006, 2007) and thus, we argue that real learning from this perspective necessarily implies a motive. A motive can arise from a "real" question, or a gap between what the individual aspires to achieve and what she actually can achieve given available resources. If there is a motive to learn, it is possible that real transformation and identity change can take place. A motive is not only a cognitive and individual construct it is also supported by a social activity that involves emotions. A motive, or a genuine question, can be analogous to what is called a "boundary experience" in identity studies (Meijers/Wardekker 2003). A "boundary experience" has been defined in identity studies as a situation that produces a turning point in an individual's autobiography (Sarbin 1986; McAdams

1996, 2001; McAdams/Josselson/Lieblich 2006) in which she experiences fully the limits of her existing resources. When the learner not only knows but feels that her own previous resources are not enough for interacting fully as a member of a given social group, a motive for belonging to this social group emerges, spurring an identity change as Wortham (2001, 2003, 2006) documents in his analysis of the development of Latino learners' academic identity. In Erikson's (1968) terms, a "boundary experience" produces an "identity crisis" that triggers a commitment to a goal and the social practice that supports the motive implicit in that commitment. This commitment is to a community of practice (Wenger 1998; Wortham 2001, 2003, 2006) where learning happens within the enactment of identity positions built into the ongoing activities of everyday life. It is a commitment to a given idea of who one is in relation to the world and to oneself, deriving from the emotion in the sense-making of new experiences.

Weaving these theoretical traditions together allows us to view *La Clase Mágica* as service learning experience that positions students in a "borderland experience" with "cultural others," creating "real learning" in an integral way. Under the framework of a practicum course students, not only learn how to apply theoretical concepts in a community context, but, through real participation and reflection they also develop emotions and feelings that affect them personally and thus affect their identities as well. In part, these experiences deal with intercultural interactions where individual values and cultural assumptions are challenged and relativized. In sum, service-learning activities at LCM provide ample opportunities for identity change as students experiment with their position in carrying out innovative activities and then documenting the processes that they and the children undergo – for them, a reflection on the efficacy of their interactional strategies in supporting their younger peers development and then turning the ethnographic lens on themselves to document their experience in applying theory to practice and the lessons they take away.

## 3    Methodology

The research context of this study is *La Clase Mágica* (LCM) in two distinct sociocultural contexts, San Diego (US) and Seville (Spain), a unique example of preparating undergraduate students. In the US, LCM is situated in three Mexican origin communities and a Native American reservation in San Diego County located in Southern California. This expansion has inspired other initiatives along diverse geographical and social landscapes including *La Casa de Shere Rom* in Barcelona (Lalueza/Crespo/Pallí/Luque 2001; see Padrós et al. in this volume) and LCM-Sevilla in Spain, both working closely with Gypsy communities. It also has inspired *La Clase Mágica* UTSA (University of Texas in San Antonio), which focuses on preparing teachers in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to work with English learners from Mexican origin communities (Flores et al. 2014).

*La Clase Mágica* San Diego programs have targeted different developmental age groups, ranging from pre-school to adulthood (Macías/Vásquez 2012). Bilingualism and biculturalism have formed the social and intellectual foundation of all adult-child interactions and curriculum materials strategically linking to the participants'

prior history (Vásquez 2003). The LCM sites are institutionally linked to an undergraduate course, "Practicum in Child Development" providing both theoretical and practical training: theoretical and research training in the course and hands on experience working with child participants around specially designed learning activities. In collaborative engagement with child participants, undergraduate students offer community service at the same time that they learn to connect theory to practice and discover new social realities. More concretely, for approximately 9 weeks- of an academic quarter, students participate two hours once or twice a week at LCM sites, depending on the distance to the sites – the San Pasqual Reservation, for example, takes close to an hour to reach, making it impossible for students to attend more than once per week. In Seville, students go a short distance by bus to participate at *La Clase Mágica* once a week for 2 hours. In both cases students participate as "more capable peers," (Vygotsky 1987) collaborators, ethnographers and participant observers when interacting with the community members. Their primary role at the sites is to enhance the learning potential of the participants by scaffolding their progression across their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 1987).

## Subjects

Three subjects were chosen from each of the university courses that constitute this study: "Practicum in Child Development" at the University of San Diego, California (UCSD) and "Learning processes in non-formal contexts" at the University of Pablo de Olavide - Seville (UPO). They were selected randomly from the total sample that attended the sites during January to March, 2013 (corresponding to the Winter quarter at USCD and the second semester of the course in UPO). The UCSD "Practicum on Child Development" co-listed course is offered through the Department of Communication, the Human Development Program, and the Department of Psychology. Attending the afterschool activities at the LCM sites was a class requirement for all students. Most of the students of the UCSD course were from White American and Asian backgrounds with one or two Latino youth. The Seville course offered at a Social Education degree at UPO. A total of 40 students attended classes throughout the year, but only a few of those participated in the LCM project. Attendance at the sites was voluntary. All UPO students were Spanish middle class non-minority students. In both cases, class discussions were based on texts related to learning processes, learning in cultural contexts, inter-cultural interactions and cultural psychology, always related to student's site experiences at LCM. In both cases, student's ages ranged from 18 to 26 years old. Both sets of students had to submit ethnographic fieldnotes after each visit to the site. Both courses also required a final research report on their own applied experience and developmental learning trajectory of the participants or themselves. The fieldnotes were our data source for this research.

## Data Analysis

For our research, we used qualitative methodologies of narrative analysis. As in many traditions of research, especially in identity studies, narrative is considered as a privileged method for the study of learning processes that enable the detection of

identity transformations and turning points. According to Bruner (1990), the defining characteristics of narratives are their temporal and sequential organization. It is through the sequential ordering of events that narratives attain their power as interpretative and sense-making devices. Thus, narrative analysis has arisen as the most productive methodology in identity studies for assessing the processes of identity construction in specific situations (De Fina/Georgakopoulou 2012; Wortham 2001, 2003, 2006; Bruner 1986; 1900; Brockmeier/Carbaugh 2001).

In our study we applied narrative analysis to the students' fieldnotes supported by Grounded Theory (Strauss/Corbin 1994) and Atlas-ti 5.0 software. We analyzed all the fieldnotes produced by the six subjects selected from both sites. Data sources numbered 15 field notes from UCSD and 15 from UPO students. The present research tracks references in the field notes that indicate learning among the participants in terms of defined categories. Below (see Table 1), we present the category system that emerges from these analyses. Given our sample is restricted; our study is an exploratory-pilot research. Our goal is to shed light on the processes of meaning making, identity changing and real learning that happens as a result of students' participation at the two LCM projects. Our expectations are to build a methodology to analyze these processes and in the future to apply it to larger samples.

## The categories of Analysis

We used an inductive, grounded theory methodology (Strauss/Corbin 1994) to analyze the 30 field notes that constitute our data. Through this process of filtering data from the ground up and engaging in data-theory dialogue, we have derived three main categories that reflect three main types of learning identified in the texts: conceptual learning, profession-related learning and attitudinal learning. The table below summarizes the set of categories used for the data analysis:

Table 1. Categories of analysis applied to field notes of both U.S. and Spain Students

| CATEGORY | SUBCATEGORIES | DEFINITION |
|---|---|---|
| **Conceptual Learning** | **a) Theoretical Concepts:** Appropriation of theoretical concepts as part of one's vocabulary in writing FN. | References to theoretical concepts in the field notes (FN) |
| | **b) Apply theory to Practice:** Specific examples in FN on how theoretical concepts apply to observations of social situations at site. | |
| **Professional related learning** | **a) Acquisition of Profession skills:** Mention of one's acquisition of skills in relation to how professions solve practical problems. | References to one's acquisition of profession skills to solve practical problems and of feeling part of the professional community. |
| | **b.) Identification with community workers:** Mention of feelings of inclusion and equality among professional practitioners at community center. | |

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|---|---|---|
| **Attitudinal Learning** | a) **Self-identity:** References to situations that produce awareness of one's knowledge of self, emotional state and limitations of one's own resources and knowledge frameworks. | Reference to situations of self-reflection and awareness of new cultural understandings. |
| | b) **Intercultural skills:** References to enhanced understanding of the social and cultural reality of the community and its inhabitants (the "other") as well the surprise and curiosity that the actions and habits of community members provoked in them. | |

Source: Gómez-Estern/Martinez-Lozano/Vásquez

The *conceptual learning* processes relate to the subject matter of the course and include references to *theoretical concepts* and *applications of theory to practice*.

*Profession-related learning* include quotes where students reflected their acquisition of professional skills; made reference to any skill developed by the professionals they were in contact with at the site (observational learning about the community process); and quotes that show any kind of closeness or equality with the community of professionals they interacted with.

*Attitudinal learning* includes all the students' quotes that made reference to aspects related to *self-identity*, and to *intercultural skills*. We have coded "*self-identity*" all comments that reflected *self-knowledge*, *self-criticism*, or any statements that showed any emotional state. Under *intercultural skills,* we have included quotes where students made reference to aspects that reflect their *approach to socio-cultural reality* (the specific social and cultural reality of minority groups) and the acquisition of *knowledge about the "other*;*"* and any statement reflecting *surprise or curiosity* about the context, the situation or the participants.

## 4    Results and Discussion

Our preliminary results illustrate how the experience of service learning in Seville and San Diego among students constitutes "real learning" experiences that impacts the students' identities and reinforces their community belonging. In this section we sketch how the different categories that emerged from our analysis relate to the conceptual framework developed in the theoretical introduction. We offer evidence of how learning takes place through a service learning methodology that goes beyond traditional formal learning thus enabling real learning to directly affect a personal process of identity change. Analyses of the field notes also show that the process of learning happening while participating in LCM is not restricted to conceptual knowledge of abstract and decontextualized ideas in the classroom, but it also relates to practice and professional experience. The excerpts below, drawn from longer field notes, provide glimpses into the ways service learning involves the opportunity to apply theoretical learning to specific professional settings. These skills are related to the promotion of real learning in the sense that knowledge acquires a meaning in a specific context. However, this is not the only characteristic that makes service learn-

ing an adequate scenario for the development of real learning. The connections with social and emotional dimensions must be also documented and assessed.

## Conceptual Learning

The field notes show that students can use the concepts learned in class and apply them to practical and real problems. This aspect of real learning is contemplated in the category named *conceptual learning*, which includes two subcategories, the management of *theoretical concepts* and the *application of theory to practice*. These two subcategories together have been noted in 147 quotes at the Seville and San Diego sites together. The examples below show how students have the opportunity to test and apply the conceptual frameworks discussed in their university courses.[2]

"With Elias, I found the use of his bilingualism to be very beneficial, and by using both Spanish and English in our activity it made him feel more comfortable and actually gave him some form of control over our interaction by being able to teach me Spanish words. Vasquez explains the benefits of using bilingualism in the classroom and I really noticed that using this bilingualism really enhanced my interaction with Elias" (Fieldnote, San Diego, Winter 2013).

"This week I have noticed that the student's learning process – referring to the adult community member attending to literacy class – has been very optimal. The class time has been very well organized. At the beginning new concepts were reviewed, and only after all previous concepts were settled new contents were taught" (Fieldnote, Seville, Second semester 2012–2013).

As can be seen in the excerpts we present throughout, the students find the opportunity to really "see" how the ideas and theories they discuss in class take form in real educational settings. In some cases they are themselves the agents who apply the teaching methodologies studied at the university, a circumstance which makes learning more vivid and real.

## Professional-related Learning and Attitudinal Learning

The categories that signal identity-related processes that are evolving in the student's learning processes are those related to their, *professional-related learning* and *attitudinal learning* especially the reference to identity and self: Both categories highlight the social and emotional components of learning that students experience at the sites, while undergoing an identity changing experience. Social and emotional dimensions of learning are two sides of the same coin. As Wenger (1998) and Wortham (2001, 2003, 2006) argue, all learning happens in a social context where individuals perform a task that has a social meaning and interiorize the motives of the social activity. This appropriation of motives involves a commitment to the community of practice that supports the task, as well as point to the wish to belong to that community and to be part of a given social identity.

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2    All Seville site field notes were originally written in Spanish. Originals are not displayed in this version for space restrictions. Translations have been done by the authors.

*Professional-related learning* are references in the field notes that show how the students begin to relate to themselves as social, educational or community workers. They begin by taking part in quasi-professional teams that form a new community of practice for them, with its own rules, norms and activities. It also involves feeling part of a quasi-professional group that holds a given identity construction, which might be appropriated and practiced by the students, promoting changes in their own self. The subcategories included here are *acquisition of professional skills* (123 quotes) and *identification with community workers* (20 quotes). In the following excerpts we see some illustrations of this processes as narrated by the students in their fieldnotes:

"It has been a very enriching opportunity, because, as future social educator, I hope I will participate in many meetings like this one. I find extraordinary the fact that I have been able to observe the dynamics of a community workers meeting while being still a student" (Fieldnote, Seville, Second semester 2012–2013).

"I used this as an opportunity to observe how he interacted with the children and what was successful for him, and I noticed that he incorporated a significant amount of Spanish with the children and really emphasized the positive use of bilingualism" (Fieldnote, San Diego, Winter 2013).

"I have felt more as a professional than I expected, especially because I have been treated by the other professionals as equals, in a very natural way, interacting with me in a direct way and exchanging opinions and information" (Fieldnote, Seville, Second semester 2012–2013).

Finally, but not less important, we present references to attitudinal and self-related dimensions of learning in our data. With this categorie we want to highlight what we consider to be the most relevant part of real learning as an integrative personal experience: its emotional and identity-changing dimension. As developed in the theoretical introduction to this article, this aspect constitutes the most innovative contribution of the real learning approach. Real learning is not learning in a "cold," purely cognitive dimension, but learning through a process that encompasses changes of identity. This moves us to conceptualize the learning process in this context as an identity-changing experience, as the whole person changes and transforms while participating in a new community of practice. In this process new meanings emerge, as well as new insights and changes take place in the knowledge framework that touch the self of the learner. In our analysis we have tried to search for traces of this identity-transforming experience as the students participate in a service learning project.

The sub-categories that account for these changes have to do with both processes of self-reflection (self-knowledge, self-criticism, reference to emotional states) all contained in the *sub-category* as well as with processes of "alterity" and otherness that emerge in the intercultural experience (sub-category *intercultural skills*). In all our projects, students interact with minority community members in a non-hierarchical environment. In some way, the fact of getting the opportunity to interact personally with members of the Mexican American and/or Native American communities in San Diego and the gypsy community in Seville may, as Martinez (2012) found, disrupt the student's value reference frameworks, and incline them to question both their previous assumptions and resources as well as their identities. The categories that reflect these identity-transforming experiences directly relate to the participation

in intercultural settings and also affect their *intercultural skills*. This subcategory includes references to enhanced understanding of the social and cultural reality of the community and its inhabitants (the "other") as well as the surprise and curiosity that the actions and habits of the community members provoked in them. Below we present the analysis of these categories.

We found 44 quotes that relate to the experiences in which students reflect on self and identity. Below, we present excerpts in which students expressed Emotional states while interacting in the sites:

"As we arrived to the site I felt a bit estrange, out of place, but as soon as we all have introduced ourselves, everybody started speaking and the community managers were addressing us all the time, including us and motivating us to participate. The feeling of out of place disappeared, and I felt more relaxed and comfortable" (Fieldnote, Seville, Second semester 2012–2013).

"Last week, I was a little intimidated to have someone watching my every word and interaction with the children and was nervous that I might do or say something wrong. However, hearing that she was simply observing the developmental levels in the children dismissed any of my concerns" (Fieldnote, San Diego, Winter 2013).

The second subcategory included in the *attitudinal skills* category has to do with the acquisition of *intercultural skills*. It reflects the turning point in identities that emerge when interacting in new socio-cultural spaces. In our data, these categories were the most predominant. The excerpts of field notes above below show the extent to which interacting as equal members of the problem solving process with members of cultural groups, traditionally underpowered in both North American and Spanish societies, change students' perceptions of minority groups and of themselves as members of the majority group. For these students, being able to familiarize themselves with other cultural settings and explore different worldviews around meaningful interactions opens their reference frameworks in ways that affect their own values and perceptions of reality and their own identities. We found 85 references to the new understandings of the social and special reality – approach to reality – of minority groups and themselves. The most numerous reference in our whole set of data was knowledge of the "other" with 147 quotations. This finding reflects how meaningful it is for the students to have the opportunity to interact with members of different cultural communities, and to what extent this experience impacts their own values and lives. Finally, we also found a number of quotes where students made references to moments of curiosity-surprise when observing and being exposed to values, behaviors and activities performed by the community members, which also incite the acquisition of intercultural knowledge (18 quotes).

Our goal is to continue to use narrative analysis to explore more deeply the ways these processes take shape in the context of the turning points signaled by students in a larger sample. Below are some examples of how they reflected the mentioned processes in their field notes.

"One of the things that has captured my attention I show surprised they (the gypsy women) get when they know our ages. They are stroked by the fact that at our age, we are still studying, not having married or having children yet. Carmen (one of the women) for example is only a bit older than u and her family is her main occupation. This makes me think how different can be people's lives depending on the context where they develop. Their culture, their

close environment, their experiences, have conditioned their lives in such a way that their lives are totally different from ours even if we have similar ages" (Fieldnote, Seville, Second semester 2012–2013).

"This week I was very impressed with all of the children I worked with. In the events of the day I think it is getting easier for me to use background experiences with the knowledge gained through the reading assigned in this class. Normally I would work similarly with the children as I did today, but having read different articles it has opened my eyes to how children react and engage to certain situations. I hope to continue to help the children open up about their life outside of school and learn more about their community. Hopefully next week all of the groups can work collaboratively together and maybe do some sort of skit about their community or daily life using the puppet set" (Fieldnote, San Diego, Winter 2013).

Together, these data confirm what authors such as Mitton-Kükner, Nelson & Desrochers (2010) have stressed about service learning as an identity-changing experience that can be analyzed through narrative inquiry. The students' field notes offer evidence that participation in a service learning experience like *La Clase Mágica*, as observed in two distinct sociocultural realities, draw experiences and knowledge closely related to real learning that are similar to what some cultural-historical scholars have proposed (Simons 2000; Meijers/Wardekker 2003; Van Oers 2005, 2006, 2007). Real learning, related to participation in a professional community of practice, encompasses knowledge and skills that range from conceptual learning to the acquisition of skills of professional practice and, most importantly, to identity change that transform their own perceptions of self.

# 5     Conclusion

Learning through innovative pedagogies that connect theoretical concepts with real life situations and problem solving has always been one of the main goals and objectives of *La Clase Mágica* for university students. Moreover, linking experiential learning with a strong academic foundation has recently become a prominent focus in higher education (Underwood/Parker/Stone 2013). Our study offers a window into what exactly it is that students learn in terms of their academic and professional knowledge, their understanding of their own place in the world, and their participation in the advancement of cultural citizenship among the members of the community who are outside the mainstream of their society. Our small sample aims to open a field of inquiry on service learning on university-community partnerships that present opportunities for learning among both the university and community constituencies.

    These documented interactions at *La Clase Mágica* sites also can be read as acts of intercultural communication that position both the community and undergraduate participants in a complex world to develop special competencies required to negotiate the social realities of complex, technology-driven globalized world (Cazden et al. 1996; Trilling/Fadel 2009). In the process university students learn to build positive relations with culturally different children and adults and come to confront their own cultural and linguistic limitations. They become prepared as future leaders to work in settings where their cultural assumptions are not necessarily seen as more

powerful or resonant than those of their minority counterparts. Importantly, they learn firsthand about being a new self in our changing world through their own experiences rather than second hand, from academic texts, and as a result, they become able more readily to apply innovative teaching and intervention methods.

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