Professional Development of Teacher Educators through a "Transitional Space": A Surprising Outcome of a Teacher Education Program

By Ilana Margolin

Introduction

It is surprising that even though teacher educators are key agents in the transformation of the teaching profession and cope with a very complex professional context, there is limited empirical research focusing on them and investigating their profession and its development. Since there is no formal program for preparing teacher educators, the latter have to develop their own professional competencies, knowledge, and pedagogy while performing their role as teacher educators (Murray & Males, 2005; Murray, 2008).

The challenges facing teacher educators to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to solve the problem of curricular fragmentation necessitate the creation of a more coherent program, the establishment of partnerships with schools, and the building of new educative spaces. In order to provide students with rich learning opportunities, and enhance their learning about teaching, teacher educators are required to serve as models and as change agents and to engage in an ongoing exploration of their practice, which in itself is a significant change (Loughran, Korthagen, & Russell, 2008; Clandinin,

Ilana Margolin is a senior lecturer with the Levinsky College of Education in Tel-Aviv, Israel.

2008; Koster, Dengerink, Korthagen, & Lunenberg, 2008). One of the ways of meeting these challenges is to establish communities of practice that support and foster collaboration in a collegial environment and serve as a means for transforming teacher education and ultimately improving schools significantly (Wenger, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Margolin, 2007a). However, the establishment and nurture of such communities entail an in-depth process that is not simple for either leaders or teacher educators, and certainly cannot happen in a meaningful way overnight (Prestine & Nelson, 2005; Margolin, 2007a). Thus, for such a change to occur, there is a need to create a transitional space between the old and the new that enables the innovation to become a more stable feature of the organization.

Context of the Study

The pre-service teacher training for early childhood, elementary school, special education, and junior high school in Israel takes place in teacher education colleges operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and the Council of Higher Education. Upon completion of the four year program, students receive a Bachelors of Education degree and state teacher certification. Our college is one of the four largest colleges in the country, with more than a thousand undergraduate students and three hundred full-time faculty. In traditional teacher preparation programs, the studies are divided into three main areas: education studies, disciplinary studies, and practicum with supervision. The candidates take courses for three years in their particular department and spend one day a week in practical work teaching at school, accompanied by a clinical supervisor from the college. In the fourth year, students work as part or full-time paid interns in schools while completing their advanced studies at the college one day a week. In spite of a well planned program, much of the integration of the pedagogical and disciplinary theories as well as the in school application had been left to the candidates.

A project initiated at the college focused on shifting the curricula from the conventional stand-alone course format to one in which there is curricular integration that facilitates a meaningful connection between college-based courses and students' experience of the field. Four years before initiating the project described here, the head of the elementary school department with a team of four teacher educators from that department implemented changes in the teacher preparation program for elementary school teachers (Margolin, 2007a). The changes were established on three main principles: (1) integration of the curriculum, (2) partnerships with cooperating schools, and (3) action research as an integral part of the curriculum. Since we were operating within an ecological system, in which change in one element affects all other elements, the college management decided to instigate reform in all education programs in the college, so that they would be integrative, coherent, and responsive to the changing needs of the context in which we functioned. Accordingly, a year later, the nuclear team from the elementary education department,

under the leadership of the department head, initiated a new experimental program to widen the application of these changes across the entire college. The proposed alternative curriculum was approved by two bodies in the Ministry of Education: the Department of Experimental Programs and Initiatives and the Department of Teacher Education. The new curriculum was based on five interrelated principles, the three principles from the previous project were developed and two more were added:

1. An inter-disciplinary orientation to curriculum, emphasizing integration of and connectivity between disciplines and content in order to improve instruction.

2. Cross-specializations designed to teach candidates in Elementary, Special Education, and Early Childhood together in mixed cohorts.

3. Partnerships between the college and local schools.

4. A technologically rich learning and teaching environment, where computers are used as 'mind-tools' to expand sources beyond the current setting.

5. A strong emphasis on inquiry; teachers and teacher educators should observe, document, and analyze their own practice.

The nuclear team then became the leading group in this larger program. Students and teacher educators from three departments (early childhood, elementary school and special education) taught and studied collaboratively to plan and execute the new teacher preparation program (See Margolin, 2007b).

While the project's principal aim was to construct an alternative and innovative school-based teacher preparation program and experiment with it, a major by-product was the significant professional development of the teacher-educators. The aim of this paper is to describe and analyze the innovative learning space that the teacher educators created for themselves, affording them the possibility of building a new teacher education program while changing the educational environment and transforming their conceptions as well as their actions.

Transitional Space: Theoretical Perspective

The concept of "transitional space" helped us understand the processes that took place during the four years of building our new teacher preparation program. The interdependence between the organization and its members means that the requisite organizational and societal change cannot take place unless personal transformation occurs in large numbers of individuals. Thus, the concept "transitional space" depicts the state when an old paradigm is no longer viable but the new one has not yet taken effect. This state originates from the distinction made by organizational and psycho-social theorists between "change," which is external, in factors like policy, practice, structure or technology, and "transition," which is internal, in the psychological

reorientation that people have to undergo before the change can work (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000; Amado & Ambrose, 2001; Zellermayer & Margolin, 2005).

Transition to new forms and values is a difficult process of 'rebirth' that requires recognition of the various losses that people have experienced and their replacement by an acceptable alternative new culture (Trist, 2001). Thus, there is a need to facilitate transition by providing some "transitional space," which means creating a safe environment where options can be explored in safety without repercussions, where people can experiment with roles and behaviors and where they can work through issues and dilemmas (Amado & Ambrose, 2001).

Thus, this transitional space is characterized by a series of planned and unplanned processes that create a state of confusion and uncertainty but allow for risk taking and creativity that are no longer possible once the innovation is integrated into the organizational framework. It is also a space for the negotiation of unique individual identities within the community of practice.

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. In which ways can teacher educators transform their conceptions and practices while teaching in a traditional program and concurrently aiming to create an alternative teacher preparation program?

2. What characterized the change in the teacher educators' learning space that enabled them to undergo personal and professional change?

Method

This study is a self-study conducted by the leader of an innovative teacher preparation program. The self-study draws on data sources that are appropriate for examining issues of practice, and is a unique form of research that is responsive to the demands of the practice context (Berry, 2007). Though the term "self study" suggests an individual approach, it includes colleagues in the interpretations of the data in order to guarantee that focus, data collection, and analysis do not become self-justification or rationalization of experience (Loughran & Northfield, 1998).

Evidence

Action research and self study of students and faculty were major components of the project. Thus, from the beginning and over the course of four years we collected data from various sources: (1) transcripts of audiotapes of all community group discussions; (2) transcripts of twelve seminars that were held during the semester breaks; (3) logs of online discussions among the members of the community; and (4) three interviews the researcher conducted with each of the participating teacher educators at the end of every academic year. In all, we recorded 300 hours of meetings and discussions, which were then transcribed and analyzed.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in 4 phases:

1. The extensive amount of data collected led the researcher to first conduct a full 'holistic' reading and then identify 5 distinct frameworks that have evolved throughout the community's 4 years of activity: (1) the list-serve negotiating space, (2) the integrative modular space, (3) the mentoring space, (4) the partnership space with schools, and (5) the research group space.

2. The evidence collected within each framework was classified into major themes. For each theme the researcher added examples, quotations and interpretations representing the participants' "voices."

3. The themes that emerged from the analyzed framework-bound data were re-analyzed through the lens of transition theories (Amado & Ambrose, 2001).

4. The dialectical process between the data and the transition theories helped conceptualize them as the "transitional space" and define the characteristics of the changes in the community learning space and their impact on the community learning.

Data validation

The research findings were twice validated:

1. The research sub-group members read the findings in the initial state and commented upon them. Their comments were used to refine and improve the reporting of the findings in their final version.

2. The dialectical process between the data and the transition theories as well as with the members' interpretations formed and defined the findings.

Participants

The community consisted of 24 teacher educators, with between three and 30 years experience, most of whom volunteered because they were dissatisfied with the traditional teacher education program and wished to create a new one. They included clinical supervisors, teaching methods supervisors, curricular experts, a research facilitator, the head of the computer department, teacher educators of social studies disciplines: psychology, sociology and philosophy, and teacher educators of language, literacy, literature and mathematics. Each teacher educator received payment for one teaching hour as remuneration for participation. The researcher, a senior member of the college faculty and a member of the management of the college, was the project leader.

Findings

This section describes the complex processes of the transitional space construction and the emergence of its various constituent frameworks. It also analyzes the participants' professional development in the space as well as the curricular changes. The main change processes are described as follows:

• Initial space: A fragmented curriculum.

• Altering the space: Negotiating space via list-serve.

• A breakthrough: From disconnected courses toward an integrative space.

• Mentoring: From frontal teaching to differential accompaniment space.

• Expanding the space into closer relations with the schools: From a training site to joint participation in teaching and learning.

• Deepening the space: From constructing knowledge to writing and publishing it.

Initial Space: A Fragmented Curriculum

During the first year, we found ourselves devoting a great deal of time at the three-hour weekly community meetings to uncovering, comparing, and contrasting the participants' epistemological conceptions and educational worldviews. We argued about the essence of knowledge and knowing and of teaching and learning. We engaged in discussions regarding our purpose and what was worth doing. We dealt with moral issues such as worthy partner schools or suitable candidates. During the discussions, the commonalities as well as the diverse conceptions of the community regarding knowledge and knowing, teaching and learning gradually began to surface.

Our point of departure was a conventional disciplinary-fragmented approach in which we used lectures to "deliver" knowledge that was contextually disconnected from and seemingly irrelevant to the students' needs or practicum. We were not yet aware of the numerous demands and changes we would want to implement or of the many issues, dilemmas and conflicts that would confront us. Moreover, in terms of the relationship among the community members, the latter gradually began to understand the meaning of their relinquishment of their individualism and complete autonomy by joining this new adventure, as the philosophy lecturer describes:

> … Only when we started our long weekly meetings did I understand what I had gotten myself into. 24 professionals, all of them are clever, intelligent, knowledgeable of the Torah [Pentateuch]. The problem is that they do not have the same Torah. Each one possesses a different expertise, each one thinks about teaching for many years with great proficiency. Although all of us felt dissatisfaction with our praxis, each one constructed it, indeed very professionally and by strict reflection on his work, but differently. Now 24 different, wise and assertive people

are obliged to transform a set of abstract ideas into a plan of action that will be implemented tomorrow morning or next week. While all of us are very resilient, we particularly understand our colleagues' obligation to become more flexible and agree with us… (3.6.03).

This quotation demonstrates the lecturer's awareness of the tensions inherent in the innovative project as each teacher educator came with his conceptions and agendas, beliefs and dreams. However, at the end of the first year, he felt safe enough to accept these tensions, ask himself questions and admit to his weaknesses. He saw his own image mirrored in the confrontations with his colleagues and their different interpretations, and from this he gained the insight that in order to change the system, he first had to change himself. He grasped the inherent conflict between individual interests and the community and concluded that the participants all had to work on the collaboration process. Thus, on the one hand, we all began to understand the complex reality in which we were operating and to bring our conceptions and assumptions to the surface and re-think them through the confrontation with the others. On the other hand, we had to cope with the challenge of building an integrative new curriculum together while teaching the traditional one. Mainly the confrontations inside the community occurred between two groups, the nuclear leadership team who wanted to base the curriculum on the socio-cultural approach and the other community members who practiced the behaviorist, positivistic approach to teaching and learning. As a result there were many discussions about the conceptual foundations of the project.

Broadening the Space: Negotiating Space via List-Serve

In order to cope with the challenges of deciding about our approach and practices, we started broadening our learning frameworks as well as inventing new strategies of action. Since there was not enough time during the meetings to complete our discussions, we expanded the discourse in order to let the members express their world views and increase their mutual acquaintance.

After one of the discussions about our educational stances, two lecturers continued their discourse via the list-serve of the entire group. Thus, the community initiated a long-range and profound discourse that transformed the list-serve into a virtual space that expanded the discussions of our professional community. It afforded clarification of views and issues, formulation of documents, coordination of our teaching, decision-making as well as the delivery of administrative messages. This virtual framework enhanced the community's learning, facilitated the construction of teaching tools, and enabled people to make their voices heard, produce meanings and influence the vision and the direction of the program. The framework not only permitted the participants to acquire technical skills they had not used before such as track changes, writing cooperative documents and linking courses, but it also, and mainly, enriched their collaborative capacities. This was an intensive experience in social learning and collaborative action from which the

faculty came to understand that they could derive much more from it than merely their specific specialization. Many of the students' assignments were reformulated hundreds of times via the list-serve during the process of negotiating their final form. The teacher educators scaffolded the students' action research by cooperatively building tools step by step such as various models of observations in the classroom, an outline of the teaching plan, tools of colleagues' feedback, and indicators for evaluating their group discourse.

The literacy lecturer, who was responsible for the final wording of one of the documents, wrote:

> Hi everyone,
> Here is the rewritten assignment. It seems to me that I've taken all your remarks and clarifications into account, and if not, please comment. It still seems very clumsy to me … the links are not good enough. We have to think how we can shorten sections and what to put first…. (19.12.03)

In light of these insights and according to the correspondence that underscored the differentiation among the groups, we created sub-groups around specific subjects or domains. For instance, the group of language and literacy experts with the head of the computer department and the clinical supervisors worked together to plan a module of literacy. They built connections between closely related content areas and the new language curriculum for elementary schools published by the Ministry of Education using the rich technological environment. They focused on stressing the relationship between language, literacy studies, and the student teaching practicum and drew on the skills of the clinical supervisors to support an integrative, performance-based assessment of candidates' learning.

The initiative for the organization into sub-groups was also spontaneous and emerged from the community's desire to promote a specific subject in which they were engaged or to try out innovative ideas (see also the module in the next section). The membership in these sub-groups, along with participation in the weekly meetings of the entire community created a transformation in their affiliations from their original compartmentalized homogeneous professional group of the disciplines or supervision to a collaborative heterogeneous professional group. These various frameworks and the routines of the meetings and correspondence afforded an exposure to knowledge that came from sources and connections far beyond their specific subject matter.

A Breakthrough: From Disconnected Courses toward an Integrative Space

Toward the end of the first semester, the community decided to design an integrative course derived from issues that emerged in the students' fieldwork and consisting of philosophy, psychology and sociology. A sub-group was established for this purpose which included the clinical supervisors and the philosophy, psychology and sociology lecturers, who discussed the desirable structure of the course and the

various kinds of integration possibilities inherent in it. They had many doubts about the way to create this integrated course vis-à-vis the traditional disciplinary courses they had taught previously. During these discussions, they attempted to identify the main issues and to use their multifaceted knowledge in order to facilitate the students' understanding, interpretation and conceptualization of what they saw in the classrooms.

At the end of the year, the participants of this sub-group succeeded in mastering a new mode of cooperative teaching in which they did not deliver their knowledge individually in traditional order as they used to do, but rather helped the students analyze issues from their written texts on their practicum and understand and interpret them from different points of view (psychology, philosophy, pedagogy and sociology). After two integrative seminars with the students, the psychology lecturer said:

> During the second semester, the weekly meeting became an effective mechanism for mutual designing and a platform for the clarification of stances and for the mutual enrichment of the faculty. We experienced good examples that had the potential for development. From my point of view, this experience was particularly advantageous for the faculty because we proved that we could design successful shared plans through the theoretical analysis of students' texts or through films in order to bring dilemmas, conflicts and discussions among students to the surface. Each of us will now be a better integrator in his lesson than he was prior to this experience. (2.6.2003)

This was indeed a breakthrough in the teacher educators' conceptions and teaching behaviors. The participants realized that the only way to effect the requisite changes, as Fullan (2006) claims, was to take risks and improve the practice within their classroom. This mutual planning of the faculty members and their co-teaching in the classroom contributed to the construction of their new teaching capabilities. As the psychology expert indicated, their successful new experience was crucial for their mutual construction of meaning and value. Such a new experience also had the potential to engender different beliefs and to motivate. This was indeed a breakthrough toward the emergent change in and improvement of their practice. What stimulated the teacher educators to take the risk and try new modes of teaching, which was not at all easy, was the safe space they built for themselves in the community. This was a framework of multi-party collaboration processes in which the participants were negotiating the tensions, risking stating their own views, listening to opposing opinions, discussing them and reflecting on their practice. The high expectations of the community members and the intense pressure were accompanied by tremendous support. In the sub-group, the members clarified the emerging needs, planned new teaching strategies and encouraged each other to try and even to fail. Thus, by becoming knowledgeable about one another's experiences, ideas, conceptions, and purposes, they created new levels of collaboration and commitment and established a common ground for experimentation.

Moreover, in order to review and assess the processes of the experiment, to check the accomplishment and non-accomplishment of goals and to better understand the meanings of the process and improve it, we conducted a whole-day conference at the end of each semester. In this setting, we paused in order to rethink our actions, deepen our theoretical foundations, examine the implications and results of the changes we had implemented and consider our future directions. Participants were invited to sum up the process from their point of view, raise issues and difficulties they had identified in the process and describe how they would like to shape the future. On the basis of the various voices heard, the community completed one term and planned the next. At the end of the first year, we analyzed the integrative course critically, studied its difficulties and weaknesses as well as its advantages and success, and resolved to reinforce the integration by building a whole module on the subject "Learning and Teaching" for the second year.

The central course of the module focused on socio-cultural theories while other satellite courses were connected to the main course and to the practicum. The module focused on a few big ideas such as experience, experiment, and construction of knowledge and was connected to the faculty members' and students' building of rich teaching and learning environments in the college and in the schools. Simultaneously, for the second year, we devised an annual, long-term, integrative assignment for the students and assessed it collaboratively. This assignment included the practicum and the courses in the module: teaching and learning (the central course of the module); curriculum studies; methods courses (math, language, and science); computer applications and practicum inquiry. The eight experts of the sub-group of the module met intensively to discuss, connect, and design their courses based on the big ideas of the module. The final assignment reflected the content of all the courses in the module and the integration among the disciplines. The teacher educators also constructed routines and psychological tools in order to provide scaffolding for the candidates as they were required to work in the new ways the module demanded of them.

In order to plan such a complex mechanism, facilitate the shift from our traditional ways of teaching, and experiment with the new ones, we mobilized the various frameworks we had created during the process: First, we opened the door to Vigotsky's theory in the weekly meetings and studied it extensively by reading several of his books; some of the teacher educators sat in on the central course in order to learn the socio-cultural theories together with the students and to become acquainted with their examples from the field. In order to define for ourselves and for the students the objectives of the module and the modes of managing it, we included a manifesto in the program's Internet site in which we described what we represented, the principles, borders and main subjects of the module and the context of the practice. Thus, the formulation of the module and its accompanying assignment by eight faculty members was a long and complicated process. After writing the final assignment and giving it to the students, the issue of its collective evaluation emerged, followed by the challenge of presenting it, and so on.

We therefore planned the program in an ongoing process by identifying the issues, learning them by generating better practices, and trying new strategies. This process took place in the transitional space created by our community. Here the participants could observe their colleagues' practice, share their conflicts and struggles with their peers, engage in an ongoing dialogue, give and receive advice and solve problems cooperatively. All this led to building a new infrastructure for constructing knowledge by negotiating meanings, tools, events and problems (Harris, 2007)—and most important, building the participants' capacities (Fullan, 2005).

Mentoring: From Frontal Teaching to Differential Accompaniment Space

During our frequent conversations with the students, we learned that the long-term integrative assignment, which was a central pillar of the module, was difficult and necessitated a different kind of individual support. Moreover, we came to the conclusion that in order to fulfill the requirements of connecting the different areas of study and in order to accomplish the holistic and deep integrative assignment as well as cope with the new conceptions and innovative ways of learning, the students needed special supervision and differential mentoring and consultation. Therefore, by being attentive to their needs and complaints, we decided to create additional frameworks in order to support their learning process.

The community also felt the need to broaden their own learning space and receive individual support in the new tasks they were undertaking. They initiated a common language and assessment criteria for evaluating the assignments and supported one another in the analysis of student texts. All this led us to create a dual, non-hierarchical framework of mentoring, which became an integral part of our schedule. On the one hand, the teacher educators served as mediators of the scientific concepts and helped the students relate them to their practice. They also accompanied the students in their action research. Action research was the principal assignment of the third-year module and was based on the capacities students and teacher educators learned via the integrative assignment of the second year. On the other hand, the teacher educators modeled new ways of mediation that they learned from each other.

With the assistance of the philosophy expert, the teacher candidates became aware of their educational world view and examined it critically while exploring the issues they had chosen. The philosophy expert, who co-mentored the students with the clinical supervisors, was surprised to discover that his subject became much more meaningful to the students. No longer detached from their world, philosophy became an important tool for reflecting on the candidates' practice and their conceptions and for shaping their professional identity. At the end of the third year, in preparation for the presentation of the students' action research, the teacher educators helped the candidates organize their work and conceptualize it. It was salient that these preparations turned out to be psychological tools that empowered the students and helped them reshape their professional identity. Thus,

through mentoring and differential advice, the community members empowered the students and encouraged them to make their voices heard loud and clear—especially at critical moments in their professional development.

Mentoring thus became a central component of the program, generating a new learning environment and opportunities for a different discourse among the community and providing a space for innovative ideas and problem-solving. It transformed the mode of teaching and learning as well as the partners' relationships. The advanced phase of the students' learning occurred when they learned to make use of the teacher educators in order to meet their own needs, as one of them describes:

> I feel I have the confidence, the vision and the joy of creation and my landing in the field [school] was much smoother owing to this program … an astonishing faculty that supported us and gave us professional and personal responses … A whole team … We also had helpful technology … each planning session, each performance, each follow-up and reflection are things that I have assimilated and they are already intrinsic to me. (13.2.06)

The faculty, in turn, learned to be responsive, to mediate and to lead the students to higher levels of observation, meta-thinking and criticism instead of simply imparting the content in each course. Thus, the consistent and enduring learning of the community created a turnabout in beliefs, expectations and interactions among the faculty members and between them and the students. This mentoring framework was part of the transitional space that afforded opportunities for the participants "to interact beyond their own situation in order to change the climate or context for getting things done" (Fullan, 2005).

We continued to ask ourselves many questions about the differences between the traditional program and the new one, and constantly wondered about the essence of action research and the mentoring, and their effect on the students' learning. We collected evidence that demonstrated a shift in the teacher educators' and students' planning and actions. Similar to Amado & Amato's (2001) description, the planning and actions were grounded in data, addressed the real problems faced by both faculty and students, and directed all of us toward reflecting on them and improving our practice. The products of these studies and the mentoring framework constituted some of the psychological tools we created as well as a theory of planning and activating an innovative program. In a concluding seminar at the end of the fourth year, one of the clinical supervisors summed up the process of establishing the mentoring framework:

> … It comes full circle. When we started talking about mentoring, we talked for two years until we implemented it…. In the first year, we removed it from our agenda because neither we nor the students were ready for it…. In the second year, after listening to the students in a joint meeting, there were not many community members who volunteered to mentor them, and only in the third year was it implemented…. (6.9.06)

This quotation shows that when the mentoring was suggested as a top-down framework at the beginning of the program, the community rejected it out of hand, but when the teacher educators realized that without mentoring the students would fail, and they themselves would continue to do more of the same, they initiated the framework and worked very hard within it.

Expanding the Space into Closer Relations with the Schools: From a Training Site to Joint Participation in Teaching and Learning

Although we built a new space that comprised many frameworks operating simultaneously in the college, we felt that the connection between the frameworks in the college and in the field schools was still too loose. The community participants who were not clinical supervisors missed out on hands-on experience with the realization and application of the new curriculum in the schools, with the new technologies and research as well as with solving real problems that emerged in the field. In order to facilitate learning through doing, from the second year of the project all 24 community members took part in the activities in the schools. We replaced the traditional one-week concentrated practicum each semester with a three-week period of intensive practicum in which the entire community participated. Traditionally only the clinical supervisors had visited the schools, while the teachers of the various disciplines met the students only in the college classroom. In our project all community members visited the schools for a three-week period twice a year instead of their usual college teaching schedule. They observed and documented students' lessons, gave feedback, conducted discourse with the candidates and their cooperating teachers, and began to link this experience to their courses in the college. The ability to conceptualize what had happened at school and connect it to the practicum transformed the students' learning into a more meaningful experience and the teacher educators' teaching into a more relevant act. As the language expert said:

> After today's visit, I want to do it more. I saw that I succeeded in integrating with the clinical supervisors and with some of the cooperating teachers, and I liked it. From my point of view, it opens a door to a different type of negotiation with the students and with my colleagues. When I look at my course in retrospect, I say: I am really an expert in language and I have no doubt that I have a holistic view, but when I see what schools or students need, then I think about my course differently and I strive to rebuild it. (23.1.04)

Although the members of the community had taken active steps in their professional development in the past, the visits to the school caused them to rethink their courses and recheck their relevancy for the students and their pupils. Some of them altered the structure or content, but they all tried to create innovative connections between their courses and the practicum. Furthermore, they understood that they had to be not only teachers from whom the students and the cooperating teachers could learn, but also learners who could gain a great deal from them. The real essence of these

visits was the shared understanding that stemmed from the unique combination of theory and practice, which afforded opportunities for new ideas and actions. Moreover, the lecturers also learned to appreciate the unique contribution of their colleagues both to the students and to themselves, as the lecturer of sociology told the clinical supervisors:

> I didn't know what you did. I take my hat off … Until I joined this community I thought my discipline was at the center. And now, coming to the field, I understood that the clinical supervisors are at the center and we are around them... After I attended the practicum, I reduced my self-importance and increased their importance. They actually do the integration and the synthesis and everything…. (23.1.04)

In addition to attending the practicum, the community members taught some of their courses in the schools in order to facilitate the joint learning of the candidates and their cooperating teachers. For instance, the developmental psychology course, which dealt with social skills, was taught to the students together with their cooperating teachers. They created special programs for children with low and high social skills. The methods courses were all taught at the field schools and responded to the needs of the candidates, pupils and cooperating teachers alike.

Gradually, the tutoring model changed and the cooperating teachers assumed some of the supervisors' roles. The supervisors understood that in the long run it was worthwhile since the candidates would gain from the cooperating teachers' professionalism. However, the joint frameworks that we created with the teachers in the schools also enabled them to embed theory in practice and vice versa. All the participants began to understand the huge significance of these two kinds of knowledge and of integrating them. The insights regarding the nature of the knowledge and the mutuality that was advantageous to all the partners constituted an additional shift in the participants' conceptions.

In a concomitant process to the candidates' mentoring, a support framework emerged in the school whereby a veteran clinical supervisor undertook to mentor three of her colleagues. Instead of the traditional model in which one supervisor tutors a number of students in a school, our new model of partnership featured several supervisors from different disciplines mentoring a large group of students from various trajectories. The four supervisors worked collaboratively with the students and with one another in one of the schools. The veteran supervisor mentored her colleagues and attempted to respond to their needs and requests.

The veteran supervisor described above had the freedom and autonomy to manage her team at school and to share the decision-making with them. Together with the school staff, they decided on the agenda, the timetable and the modes of mentoring, and even initiated seminars at school to which the teacher educators as well as other stakeholders were invited. This empowered the participants and encouraged their learning as well as their commitment and accountability to the innovative processes. An important element in building the transitional space was to grant any

member who initiated a program or led a team the freedom and autonomy to plan and act within the agreed-upon borders of the community. The safe space that was constructed as a result of the collegial relationships among the faculty and between them and the cooperating teachers and the students afforded exposure and opened classroom doors. The community members experienced professional development in many directions, one of which was shifting their teaching from teacher-centered theory to practice to basing their teaching on their students' knowledge, as one of them noted:

> …we consulted with the experts in the various domains, with the supervisors and the cooperating teachers. All of us learned the huge potential of the students' lessons. We understood that they were interested in these lessons, that they wanted them, and from this we could produce what we had to teach. It changed our syllabi. We started working on the examples presented by the students; it was much more meaningful than presenting our own texts. Initially, it was very difficult, but gradually we learned to build on the products they brought from the field… (17.2.06)

Deepening the Space: From Constructing Knowledge to Writing and Publishing It

From the onset of the project the leadership team also approached the process as group and individual research and aimed at researching their practice. We explored our practice during the entire period; however, the shift from collecting data and constructing knowledge to publishing our studies led to the creation of a research sub-group. This group collaboratively reframed the central issues and themes that had emerged during our enterprise, reading the relevant literature, functioning as critical friends to each other, making explicit the new insights regarding the curriculum and relationships and rewriting the studies (Margolin, 2006; Tabak, 2007; Zellermayer & Tabak, 2006).

Our presentations in conferences, both as individuals and in symposia, convinced us that the preparation for the presentation was no less important than the presentation itself, and sometimes even more so. We read one another's action research and self-studies, gave feedback, raised issues and dilemmas, helped select the relevant literature and suggested corrections.

This research sub-group served as a transitional space for shifting from the traditional teacher educators meetings to a new kind of discourse. It was an opportunity for experienced faculty as well as for novices to learn and improve their research capabilities. It afforded the participants opportunities to experience research, to read other studies, to learn the principles of the methodology, to receive and give feedback, to think of the practice reflectively and from various perspectives, to present their studies in conferences and to publish them. These processes all empowered the participants, engendered professional development and improved their research as well as collaborative capabilities.

Discussion

The Emergence of the Transitional Space

From the very beginning of the planning, it was obvious to us that in order to effect change in our teacher preparation program, we had to build embedded frameworks to enable not only the students but also the faculty members to learn and develop professionally. On the one hand, we wanted to consolidate the vision, the mission and the agenda of the program, and on the other, we wanted to create the new program while teaching the traditional one. This construction required not only abilities and skills much beyond the faculty's existing repertoire, but also expertise in changing the traditional context in which we were operating to a new one that was not at all clear even to us. At the outset, therefore, we created two time frameworks that were conventional and familiar to the participants: a regular weekly community meeting and a fixed day for working at our cooperating schools. However, upon analysis of our evidence retroactively, we identified numerous learning frameworks that emerged during the four-year process. In retrospect, it is clear to us today that if all these frameworks had been predetermined as an integral part of the experiment, none of the community members would have joined the program, which was demanding and pressured from the very beginning. I could not have expressed this conclusion better than Amado and Ambrose (2001) in their introduction to the book, *The Transitional Approach to Change*: "You cannot alter people's deep-seated habits by directive, only they can do it themselves, when they really want to, when they themselves experience a strong need to do so" (p. xviii). Indeed, all the frameworks which comprised the transitional space emerged ad hoc for relevant periods of time and were replaced by others when needs and conditions changed. The participants themselves identified the needs and voluntarily initiated the frameworks according to their common decisions relating to the flow of events.

Professional Development
through External Change and Internal Transition

As we examined our evolving understanding of our practice, we realized that the changes we had implemented were dual-faceted, intertwined and interdependent: There were external structural and organizational processes that changed the context, but also an internal transformation of the participants that could not have taken place without the frameworks that emerged during the entire period. This enabled us to recognize that we had all tried to create adequate conditions for the shift from the traditional context to the new one while changing it, and from working individually to participating in a community of practice.

We also identified some major characteristics of all the frameworks: in-depth learning on the part of all the participants, including diversity of voices; a new common language and continuous discourse; real-life experience and experimenting with curriculum, research, new technologies and leadership; and experiencing

mentoring and tutoring in various modes and on all levels. One of the main principles of the project was a consistent emphasis on activating new ideas, reflecting on them and modifying them in order to make them workable while coping with the huge obstacles; in other words, the discourse, reflection and conceptualization were based on the actions and did not replace them. Thus, placing the practice at the center of the process led to the capacity building of all the participants in teaching, learning, researching, collaborating and leading.

The conditions that afforded all this were first and foremost allocating time and space for engaging in our practice, learning and teaching, reflecting, planning and making decisions collaboratively through dialogue. The regular meetings and broadened frameworks permitted the establishment of a community of practice in which the learning constituted the active social participation of all the participants. This community functioned as a safe space that was created by building trust among the participants, developing respect, personal regard and integrity, tolerating the various views and allowing contradictions and conflicts.

There is no doubt that the power of the community was crucial. Had each of the participants been alone, he would certainly not have dared to follow such a complicated path. Although the vision, the principles and the general direction of the program were presented at the outset, there was sufficient freedom and space for each participant to initiate, influence and shape the program continuously. All the community members gradually realized that the final outcome was not predetermined, but rather shaped by the interplay of the participants and by the needs, deep thinking and issues that emerged during the process. In addition, we encouraged people's new ideas and supported their accomplishments, helped invent new and creative solutions for emergent problems and appreciated excellence, diligence and initiatives as well as any deviation from conventional norms. The facilitation by training and mentoring in differential areas and the support in coping with obstacles as well as with uncertainty empowered the participants and broadened their roles and horizons. This transitional space afforded opportunity for the redefinition of our roles as teacher educators and the transformation of our knowledge, identity and relationships.

The program created by our community will be superseded by a new teacher preparation program that is being implemented throughout the college, responding to the new standards published by the Council of Higher Education. However, while sharing some of the distinguishing characteristics and main principles of the project, it is predictably different and was generated by a different process. However, the core leadership of the new program is comprised of many of the teacher educators who participated in the project. Moreover, the accumulated knowledge, the broader horizons of the people, the new and vast repertoire of capabilities and the deeper understanding are all products of the project that enabled the college to respond to future changes in its context and work proactively toward them.

References

Amado, G., & Ambrose, A. (2001). Introduction. In G. Amado & A. Ambrose (Eds.), *The transitional approach to change*. London & New York: Karnac Books.

Amado, G., & Amato, R. (2001). Organizational change theories and practices a critical review. In G. Amado & A. Ambrose (Eds.), *The transitional approach to change* (pp. 29-85). London & New York: Karnac Books.

Berry, A. (2007). Reconceptualizing teacher educator knowledge as tensions: Exploring the tension between valuing and reconstructing experience. *Studying Teacher Education*, *3*(2), 117-134.

Bridges, W., & Mitchell, S. (2000). Leading transition: A new model for change. *Leader to Leader, 16.* Retrieved June, 2001, from http://www.pfdf.org/leaderbooks/L2L/spring2000/bridges.html

Clandinin, J. (2008). Editorial. Creating learning spaces for teachers and teacher educators. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, *14*(5-6), 385-389.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S, L. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. *Review of Research in Education, 24*, 251-307.

Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability: Systems thinkers in action.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Fullan, M. (2006). *Turnaround leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Harris, A. (2007). The school as the knowledge creating entity: Creating the spaces for instructional improvement. Paper presented at the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI) Conference, Budapest, Hungary.

Koster, B, Dengerink, J., Korthagen, F., & Lunenberg, M. (2008). Teacher educators working on their own professional development: goals, activities, and outcomes of a project for the professional development of teacher educators. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *14*(5-6), 567-587.

Loughran, J., Korthagen, F., & Russll, T. (2008). Teacher education that makes a difference: Developing foundational principles of practice. In C. J. Craig & L. F. Deretchin (Eds.), *Imagining a renaissance in teacher education* (pp. 405-421). Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Education.

Loughran, J. J., & Northfield, J. R. (1998). A framework for the development of self-study practice. In M. L. Hamilton (Ed.), *Reconceptualizing teaching practice: Self-study in teacher education* (pp. 7-18). London, UK: Falmer Press.

Margolin, I. (2007a). Shaping a new professional identity by building a new concept of leadership through action research. *Educational Action Research, 15*(4), 519–543.

Margolin, I. (2007b). Creating a collaborative school-based teacher education program. In: M. Zellermayer & E. Munthe (Eds.), *Teachers learning in communities* (pp. 113-125). Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense Publishers.

Murray, J. (2008). Towards the re-articulation of the work of teacher educators in higher education institutions in England. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *31*(1), 17-34.

Murray, J., & Male, T. (2005). Becoming a teacher educator: evidence from the field. *Teaching and Teacher Educaiton, 21*(2), 125-142.

Prestine, N. A., & Nelson, B. S. (2005). How can educational leaders support and promote teaching and learning? New conceptions of learning and leading in schools. In W. A. Firestone & C. Riehl (Eds.), *A new agenda for research in educational leadership* (pp. 46-60). New York: Teachers College Press.

Tabak, E. (2007). Between planning and practice: Toward the implementation of integrative learning in an experimental teacher education program. Poster presented at EARLI, Budapest, Hungary, August, 2007.

Trist, E. (2001). Prologue. In G. Amado & A. Ambrose (Eds.), *The transitional approach to change*. London & New York: Karnac Books.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zellermayer, M., & Margolin, I. (2005). Transitions to partnership: A phenomenological inquiry. *Journal of Educational Change*, *6*(2), 147-176.

Zellermayer, M., & Tabak, E (2006). Knowledge construction in a teachers' community of enquiry: a possible road. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and practice, 12*(1), 33-49.