ACE (Active Collaborative Education) set out on its educational journey in October 2001. At the time, graduates of the college were enthusiastically accepted in the field, smoothly slipping into the school system and highly appreciated as 'good teachers'. However, this situation did not please this book's contributors. They wanted to see ACE graduates as different teachers, agents of change and innovation in their classrooms as well as in the wider circles of their society. It is against this background that the ACE program came into being – subversive in spirit, focusing on the process as much as on its end results, on dialogue instead of on competition, and on learning communities and participation as much as on individual engagement.
Active Collaborative Education
Active Collaborative Education

A Journey towards Teaching

Edited by

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FOREWORD

*Constructing Professional Identity in Teacher Education:*
*The ACE Version*

In the process of constructing our professional identity we answer questions such as who and what we are, where do we come from and where do we see ourselves in the future?

About thirteen years ago, a cohort of teacher educators at Kaye Academic College of Education, a small college in the southern region of Israel, took upon themselves the initiative of developing a “new and different” teacher education program which would be in congruence with their views about teaching and education. They have operated within a setting of a traditional teacher education institution, not offering an alternative route or a shortened program to become a teacher, but rather proposing a deeper and a daring path; one that questions the obvious and criticizes it in the process of developing the professional identity in teaching.

The exceptional cohort of ACE (Active Collaborative Education) has been professionally tackling the challenge of promoting change in the field of teacher education. Their actions have exemplified their professional beliefs: doubting rather than confirming, raising questions rather than supplying answers, and advising that teacher educators take unpaved paths in the process of constructing their professional identity and becoming social agents of change.

Several conditions enabled ACE to develop. It was cultivated in a peripheral college, in the Negev desert of Israel, where the willingness for new initiatives was prominent. In fact, the desire of the ACE cohort was met with an open willingness from the academic administration to develop new and more relevant education.

The majority of Kaye College students are Jews and Bedouins, from the Negev, Israel’s Southern Region, first generation entrants to higher degree education. The relevancy of ACE was exemplified by the wide usage of narratives in the process of constructing and re-constructing the professional identity of the student-teachers as well as the faculty members. The narrative approach to learning closely met the cultural background of the students as well as the professional expertise of some of its faculty members. People identify themselves via the stories they tell about themselves and their development, and ACE made the narratives its main avenue for understanding learning processes.
FOREWORD

The eagerness to be contextual has been nourished by ACE’s “human tapestry”. The ACE cohort and its students have been comprised of a multicultural group of: Jews, Muslims, Druze and Christians, females and males, natives and new immigrants, those living in cities, towns or Kibbutzes, some born in the Negev and others arrived from various parts of the country. The connective thread has been the willingness to change and the common understanding has been that the various voices should be heard and has influence. As such, the diversity and the multi-voices became a central resource in the construction of the learning processes in ACE.

As an innovative program, ACE needed time and continuous efforts to be endorsed by other programs within Kaye College. In the beginning, those faculty members, not involved in ACE, considered it an esoteric program. Following the recognition from outside (that of the Israeli Ministry of Education and of other academic institutions) and a closer acquaintance from the inside regarding its philosophies, other programs have started to adopt parts of its values and learning strategies. Nowadays, the entire teacher education program at Kaye College is driven by the understanding that teacher education is regarding the construction and re-construction of personal beliefs about identity and learning processes.

This book allowed us, as a college, to go back and reflect on ACE and on our vision and goals in educating teachers. I invite the readers to join this journey …

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PREFACE

ACE set out on its educational journey in October 2001. At the time, graduates of the college were enthusiastically accepted in the field, smoothly slipping into the school system and highly appreciated as ‘good teachers’. We, however, were not so pleased. We wanted to see our graduates as different teachers, agents of change and innovation in their classrooms as well as in the wider circles of their society. It is against this background that the ACE program came into being – subversive in spirit, focusing on the process as much as on its end results, on dialogue instead of on competition, and on learning communities and participation as much as on individual engagement.

Seven years ago, the decision to write the book was a first interim stop-over on the road towards a different, open-ended, teacher education. The book, Active Collaborative Education: A story of teacher education (Hebrew), documented the development and growth of a program during its first years. Through the format of an edited collection of studies, we looked into the emergence of our collaborative curriculum and the dimensions which carved its landscape. By turning practice into a learning text that can be critically studied and academically shared with the professional community, the chapters of the book brought to the forefront the crucial role of collaboration, narrative inquiries and self-studies in constructing knowledge and understanding in teacher education. Most of the authors were involved in the program, as teacher educators, academic advisors, and program evaluators, from its very first years. The whole group of writers collaboratively formulated the overall structure of the book.

Today, spring 2015, the team, that started as a group of seven people, has grown to a group of 15, and the number of participating students is approximately 150, compared to 23 in the first cohort. ACE teacher educators, a heterogeneous group in terms of disciplinary backgrounds, gender, religion and practical experiences, continue to meet every other week to discuss ongoing program issues, and to inquire into various issues, not without arguing and voicing their different opinions along the way.

This English edition of the ACE story is another collaborative team project, updated and translated by the authors of the original chapters who continue to explore alternative possibilities in teacher education as a dynamic model of active collaborative education weaved by its participants in practice.

Readers can approach the book through any of its chapters. The introductory overview ‘About ACE’ could be a good starting point as it provides a general description of the program and its unique learning environments.
PREFACE

The first three chapters invite the reader to participate in the different learning environments of the program, in which both pre-service teachers and teacher educators negotiate meanings of practice and identity.

Chapter 1: Studying our practice: Stories from the field as a learning space for the study of teaching – Smadar Tuval and Ariela Gidron study the process of turning students’ stories from the field into narrative texts that can be shared and studied. Their study explores the power of stories by unravelling the complexity of teaching/learning situations, exposing hidden assumptions and promoting negotiations of meaning.

Chapter 2: Narrating cultural identity: Getting to know the me I bring to class – Ruth Mansur Shachor examines how telling stories of cultural background contributes to the professional growth of student teachers, and offers a multifaceted picture of the role and meaning of working on professional identity as part of the teacher education program.

Chapter 3: In-between school and college: Creating an edge community – Judith Barak, Malka Gorodetsky and Haya Hadari reflect on the process of creating a shared professional space between the college and its partner school. They suggest the model of Educational Edge Community as an environment for co-emergence of personal and institutional growth.

The next four chapters (Chapters 4–7) open windows to the different learning experiences of pre-service teachers, graduates and teacher educators.

Chapter 4: Expecting the familiar and meeting the strange: Student perceptions of a nontraditional learning environment – Bobbie Turniansky and Smadar Tuval study trek diaries written by pre-service teachers at the end of their first year in ACE. They describe the intensity of the students’ experience of learning in this unfamiliar environment and their ways of coping with it.

Chapter 5: Paving a professional road: Exploring teaching through self-studies – Ariela Gidron, Judith Barak and Smadar Tuval present a collaborative narrative self-study of their practice working with second year students. The study suggests three road signs of “de-idealization”, “contextual understanding” and “community of learners” as major themes on the way towards paving an open professional road in teacher education.

Chapter 6: Graduates’ voices: ACE’s graduates reflections from the field – Judith Barak, Ariela Gidron, Adiba Arafat and Talia Weinberger listen to ACE graduates, five years in the field. Setting out with the question: Who are the graduates we educated? The authors offer a rich picture of professional life at the beginning of the road.

Chapter 7: Learning not to know: A key to professional identity – Dina Friling and Bobbie Turniansky examine the growth of the ACE team as a learning community from the stance of organizational theory. Based on written and oral material, such as team meeting protocols, email, and team member interviews collected over the years, they coin the concept of an expert novice, a professional state of mind that enables new thinking and development of alternative practices and unlearning.
The last three chapters (Chapters 8–10), provide a philosophical and pedagogical framework to conceptualize alternative possibilities in teacher education.

Chapter 8: The journey of ACE: The hermeneutical-phenomenological approach to teacher education – Shlomo Back provides a hermeneutic phenomenological approach that gives meaning to the ACE experience in the context of the philosophies, out of which it developed, with a view to possible future directions.

Chapter 9: The “third” within ACE – Shlomo Back and Ruth Mansur Shachor offer a critical examination of the ACE program in light of Serres’ theory of ‘the third’. They propose using Serres’ theory as an inspiring source for reconceptualization of the program in terms of logical, epistemological, ontological and ethical dimensions of becoming a ‘third’ teacher.

Chapter 10: Edge pedagogy – Malka Gorodetsky and Judith Barak study the potential of an ‘edge environment’ on the basis of the Deleuzeguattarian conceptualization of nomadic spaces and processes of learning. They suggest ‘edge pedagogy’ as a possible answer towards growth and creativity in the educational system.

We invite our readers to join our journey and to unravel the relational and transitional aspects of our collaborative teacher education curriculum. We hope it will deepen our understanding of the complexity of this environment, its influence on all participants and the implications it has for teacher education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We are especially thankful to Professors Shlomo Back and Lea Kozminsny, the two consecutive presidents of the Kaye Academic College who were encouraging and contributing partners to this unique journey, being there for us whenever needed, with support and good advice. We want to thank our students along those 14 years, without whom we could not set out on these educational journeys, and who keep sharing with us their stories as graduates. Most important of all, we want to express our gratitude to the ACE team, our friends and colleagues for the last 14 years, who set out with us on this new journey, as individuals and as a collaborative community, committed to the mission of making our innovative professional voice heard beyond the limited borderline of our state.

A special thank you is sent to Angie Avittan, our English translation editor, who is responsible for the finishing touch.

Finally yet importantly, we express our appreciation to Sense Publishers for opening their door and inviting us to publish our book with them.
ABOUT ACE

ACE (Active Collaborative Education) was launched at Kaye Academic College of Education on October 2001. ACE is a two-year, post-graduate teacher education program that educates k-12 and special education teachers. ACE’s students represent the multicultural faces of Israeli society: immigrants and Israeli-born; secular and religious Jews, Bedouins, and Arabs. The program includes about 160 students and 15 staff members who also come from diverse disciplines, cultures and backgrounds. About half of the program’s team has been members since the first years.

The name of the program—ACE—represents the conceptual approach that framed its construction:

**Active:** Being actively engaged within educational practices is the source for learning and becoming.

**Collaborative:** Collaboration is a guiding principle both at the institutional level and in the context of learning processes. Collaborations between schools and the college, as well as the collaborative learning environment, involve all participants in developing a creative learning community.

**Education:** Developing educational dialogue in this community creates a web of interactions that form the basis for multiple possibilities of action, considering the socio-cultural diversity and the different contextual situations.

ACE emerged from a mandate to develop a new teacher education program, which stemmed from two seemingly opposing processes. At the time, graduates of the college were enthusiastically accepted in the field, smoothly adapting into the school system and highly appreciated as ‘good teachers’. We, however, were disappointed! We not only wanted to see our graduates as different teachers, agents of change and innovation in their classrooms, but also in the wider circles of society. We asked ourselves: how can we educate teachers to work in the existing system of education, and at the same time advocate and fight for change? How can we educate towards developing educational practices that are context and student related?

Our aim was to educate our graduates: to become innovative proactive teachers with voice and compassion; to introduce questions into the taken for granted perceptions of teachers being efficient at interfacing between formal plans and demands, and the pupils who are expected to accomplish them; to become a subversive against the perception that turns teachers’ complicated work into a standard checklist assessed against external and measurable criteria dictated by managers across the system. The ACE program’s main goal is to return this authentic voice and unique educational essence to teachers and to the schools.
ABOUT ACE

RATIONALE

The conceptual framework of the ACE program regards praxis in terms of being in varied situations and the ability to learn and change. It is an approach that highlights the complexity of teaching as ways of being and becoming. We believe that in order to become a teacher, one has to learn how to navigate within the complex web of emotions, perceptions, interactions and socio-cultural backgrounds which make up the fabric of schooling and influence almost all learning processes.

This approach goes back to the Aristotelian notion of “phronesis” or ‘practical wisdom’ that regards teaching as an independent type of knowledge that emerges through the unique dialectic discourse between action and interpretation, rather than as an applied science. Becoming teachers from this standpoint calls for a curriculum that allows student teachers to be engaged and become active participants in the narration of their professional identities.

The ACE program offers a learning environment – a habitat – comprised of a dynamic web of communities of practice and learning which initiate processes of knowledge creation. The curriculum is a design of open learning environments that enable learning through cycles of acting and negotiation of meaning. Becoming teachers within this context calls for experimenting and interpretive hermeneutical discussions by students as well as teachers. These processes are facilitated by the participation of those involved in the discussions in overlapping learning cycles. ACE curriculum is not an aggregate of courses but a set of intertwined workshops, most of them co-taught by members of the same group of teacher educators. Such concurrent interpretive hermeneutical cycles engage the participants in unfolding a common intersubjective meaning and enable the expansion of the participants’ horizons.

THE CURRICULUM

ACE’s curriculum can be described as a dynamic web that represents the complexity and connectivity of all the learning environments. There are classes and workshops for specific groups, such as early childhood, special education, etc., and there are also the larger forums of learning that transcend those classes but interact with them. Those forums include the larger community of learners (Mansur et al., 2011). Learning within these environments is authored by the participants and mediated by their presuppositions, backgrounds and aspirations, which are weaved into the hermeneutic processes.

The ACE program is, thus, continuously re-written and changed by its participants all along the way. The mutual relation, between the different spheres of learning and the shared space, creates language and practice that have common denominators that are constantly retuned. This is a creative process that leads to new landscapes of knowing and acting that each of the group’s members (teachers, students and mixed groups) could not have reached on their own.
ACE’S UNIQUE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Wisdom of practice: At the core of ACE’s curriculum, there are Wisdom of practice workshops in which students’ practice is studied through narrative texts of their school experiences. Learning within these environments is based upon the living school experiences and participation in a community of practice through sharing ideas and experiences, of reflection upon practice, critical thinking and self-study of questions and dilemmas which emerge throughout this learning process. This process of telling and retelling of practice stories is an ongoing activity of negotiating and renegotiating of meaning. These experiences become multifaceted narrative texts that invite the students to explore new arenas of learning and creation and to expand their professional landscape (see Chapters 1, 4 and 5).

Personal and cultural identity: These workshops bring onto center stage the cultural background of the participants. Based on conversations which expose and reflect upon dimensions such as tradition, issues of gender, culture and beliefs that are embedded in the taken for granted background and negotiate their meanings (see Chapter 2).

This multicultural dialogue allows the participants to experience the meaning of being a part of a diverse community of learners, and to develop their professional ways of action. Becoming a teacher, in this respect, is a process in which the personal and the professional experiences interplay, and practical ways of being are told, retold and developed.

Learning Community: Another special feature of ACE is our learning community (LC), in which all ACE participants, students and staff take part. Project/Problem-based learning, a framework of research and independent learning, is a central part of the LC (Mansur & Friling, 2013). “The reality around us (or in which we educate)” was chosen by staff and students as the project theme. The rationale behind the choice focuses on developing a closer acquaintance with various circles of reality in which we live and work, over and beyond the formal school curriculum.

Field’s Academy – Schools’ learning environments (Chapter 6): Our partner schools have a unique role within the program as, in collaboration with us, they developed and teach workshops based upon their experience and knowledge. A unique model of ‘edge culture’ was suggested to frame the unique mode of partnership that we have created. Within the evolving interactions, school teachers became teacher educators, and they lead workshops where their knowledge regarding issues of different learning environments, evaluation, teachers’ experience and case studies are brought up and discussed, breaking the boundaries between institutions and expanding the horizons of the pre-service teachers.

The rest of the program’s workshops and forums offer a variety of learning experiences that relate to issues of learning and teaching such as literacy, social and psychological aspects.
THE ACE TEAM

The ACE team itself forms an integral learning cycle as our experiences are negotiated and studied as part of our being within the program. The team is a heterogenic group of teacher educators who come from different disciplinary backgrounds, different cultures, and practical experiences. The spirit that framed our philosophy and our daily being is deeply embedded in collaborative life and so is our teaching as well as our research (Barak, Gidron, & Turniansky, 2010; Tuval, Barak, & Gidron, 2011). The team works as a collaborative community. We meet every other week to discuss the program’s ongoing issues and inquire into these issues.

REFERENCES


1. STUDYING OUR PRACTICE

_Stories from the Field as a Learning Space for the Study of Teaching_

On one of my practicum days, I entered the classroom before the teacher, together with the children. In the midst of the commotion, I noticed a child with his shoe laces untied. I called him from nearby: “Noam!” He looked at me, and I said, “The shoe laces!” He kept running towards his chair. I called his name again, he turned and I repeated: “Your shoe laces!” this time pointing towards his feet. He looked up, and it seemed to me that, despite the noise, he heard me and understood me, yet chose to ignore me—I felt there was something else there, but could not put my finger on it. Determined, I made my way towards him, and, trying to hide my anger, asked him in a low voice, “Noam, why are you ignoring me? I told you that your shoelaces are loose.” He answered, “I wasn’t ignoring you; I just can’t tie shoes.” I thought I was going to faint right there. He was such a poor, cute thing, and I really felt for him. I was glad I had not gotten angry or shouted aloud at him. I simply hugged him and said, as naturally as I could, “Never mind! There is nothing to be ashamed of; I didn’t know how to tie my shoes at your age either.” Then, very quietly, I asked if he wanted me to tie his laces, and he nodded. I bent down and quickly tied his laces before anyone could see.

(Lilach, February, 2005)

Lilach, a first year ACE student, wrote this ‘story from the field’ several weeks after she started her practicum. It is one of a series that we later called ‘surprise stories’; stories that confronted us time and again with our taken for granted assumptions. Lilach’s story is one of many, written and told by our students during their first year in ACE; stories from the field that served as a learning space and invited a process of negotiation on the meaning of experience.

This chapter tells the story of four years in a workshop called “The wisdom of practice,” in which, together with our first year students, we explored ways of understanding their practice through telling and re-telling their stories from the field.

The introductory discussion of the chapter examines the role of studying one’s practice in the process of professional development of student teachers. The main part of the chapter takes us on a learning journey, in the footsteps
of selected stories, which exemplify the wealth of insights and understandings that emerge from this narrative work. The stories open windows into the world of first year students’ field practice, and the world of our practice, the teacher educators working with them. In the final part of this chapter, we discuss the conceptual framework of the narrative approach that serves as a basis for our work in this workshop, arguing that it offers a community of learners, engaged in understanding the wisdom of their practice, an open learning space for the construction of a shared language.

The questions that stand at the center of our study are: How can practice turn into meaningful experience? When does experience become meaningful? How can we, teacher educators, help our students turn their practice into a meaningful, professional experience? Several education researchers discuss these questions. Zeichner (1992) describes three main approaches of learning from practicum: learning as apprenticeship: ‘do as I do’; learning as implementing in the field what you have learnt in class: ‘do as you have learnt’; and learning as a process of studying one’s practice: ‘do and study your practice’. The common denominator in all three approaches is that they put the learning of the individual student in the center, and focus on what he/she should know or learn to do, as a teacher.

The approach we want to discuss in this chapter views learning as doing, and the process of learning as context related. Actively involved in the complex reality of the class, the school, and the college, pre-service teachers explore their process of learning to become teachers through sharing stories from the field with their learning community.

The transition from the approach of teacher training (learn how to do), to the approach of becoming a teacher (learn how to be…), is not simple or taken-for-granted. Many ACE students grew up on the knees of a more traditional approach to teaching, and arrive at the college expecting a training program that teaches them all about what teachers need to know. Their underlying assumption is that there are those who know how to teach and their job is to teach it to those who do not yet know. Most of our students feel quite uncomfortable with situations that are not clear and with questions that do not necessarily have or produce clear-cut answers. We found that students, who expect us to give them answers, find it difficult to relate to themselves as alternative sources of knowledge.

Two assumptions guided our work. The first assumption—good lessons could not be analyzed and handed over like a cake recipe that one follows step-by-step. In other words, in order to learn how to teach, one has to teach, be in the school, personally experience the teaching situation in the class, try out and be part of the teaching-learning situation. The second assumption—experiencing the school situation does not guarantee a learning experience, or does not, necessarily, meaningfully teach how to teach. Often, this school experience can inhibit learning. Dewey (1938) pointed out, that in order to turn such an experience into meaningful learning, one has to study it and expose its educational potential.
When then, does experience turn educational or meaningful? Two principles guarantee a thinking process which gives meaning to our experience. Dewey called them the vertical and the longitude parameters of experience, parameters that are not separate but meet and become one.

The vertical parameter, based on the interaction principle, defines the situation by looking at the system of reciprocal relationships between the different participants that create it in a given context.

The longitude parameter, based on the continuity principle, defines the dynamic process by which we give meaning to our present experience based on our past learning and the prospect of its effect on future experiences. In order for us to turn our teaching practice into experiences of educational value, we have to turn those elusive lived experiences into a text that we can tell others, and study and interpret it from the aspects of the two principles described above.

This complex learning process cannot be taken for granted for the following reasons:

• Learning situations occur in the present, but we can only talk about them in retrospect.
• Any teaching-learning situation is comprised of multiple actions that happen simultaneously and are context and time dependent, and therefore, cannot be taken apart without losing the grand picture.
• In order to study a given teaching-learning situation, one must remove himself and view the situation as an outsider. This means being both involved and objective at the same time.

Looking for a meaningful way to overcome the difficulties presented above, we found stories from the field to be an endless source for learning and re-learning. The story, argues Bruner (1987), is the closest thing we humans have to our lived experience. The story enables us to put life events, or actions, into a narrative framework which can be passed on to others and used to discuss a complex, multifaceted situation, such as a lesson.

Within the narrative framework of the ‘Wisdom of Practice’ workshop, students write their stories from the field and bring them into the workshop as learning texts, where the wisdom of their practice can be gradually constructed through the group conversation. This process of telling and re-telling (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) stands at the center of the group’s discussions in the context of their practice in school and at the college. It places the students’ practicum at the center of their learning, and shifts the focus of learning from ‘how to do’ to studying their practice in the larger context of the professional educational scene.

A selection of stories, from the field, will serve as a starting point for our discussion on the meaning and contribution of the narrative study of ‘stories from the field’ to the professional growth of both our students, as future teachers, and us, as teacher educators.
What Is a Story and What Is My Story?

People, argues Bruner (1987), are born storytellers. Rosenthal (1993) identifies three kinds of narratives we use when we tell our personal stories: report, story and justification. We found that students are well equipped with the skill of detailed reporting about their field practice. Often they can also justify an event they report, however, the skills of telling full volume stories (Geertz, 1983) from the field cannot be taken for granted and need polishing. First, we have to help our students identify “a story” and learn how to tell it orally or in writing. The students join their practicum classes in the first weeks of the academic year, and we ask them to start writing at least one story from each day in class. They then share their stories in their study groups. The stories chosen to discuss, in this part of the chapter, are taken from this early stage of our work: Michal brought and told her story to our discussion group, and it later served as a basis for small group work. Sarit and Ella posted their stories in the group’s Internet forum.

Michal’s Story – (December, 2004).

Dan played on the computer, and Tal moved the mouse and pressed the key boards, Dan asked him to stop doing this as it disturbs him and it is his turn to play. Tal went on, ignoring him. Dan murmured, “Ooff, he does not understand me. He does not know Hebrew,” and asked David to tell Tal, in Russian, that it is his turn now, and he should wait for his turn. David explained that to Tal in Russian. Tal stopped, sat beside Dan and watched him play quietly.

In the following discussion, the group compared Michal’s short story with Lilach’s long story, presented at the beginning of this chapter. The first clear observation was the different narrator positions in each story—one situated herself on the side, a passive observer, while the other was actively involved in the situation. The discussion that followed exposed the different taken for granted attitudes of the narrators; it was clear to Michal that she should be an outside observer, just as it was clear to Lilach that it was her job to get involved and act.

This discussion encouraged new thinking as to the role and place of the teacher in various situations and events in her classroom. This kind of learning was possible once the story that initiated it turned into an independent entity that enabled all the participants, including the narrators, to look at it from the outside. This learning process also exposes the ‘taken for granted’, initiating yet a deeper level of learning and practice. For example, this is Ariela’s personal feedback to Michal:

I would call your story a minimalistic story – short but holds a lot. You caught a seemingly small event, and succeeded to turn it into a meaningful story.
What title [or several] would you give to the story?

Who are the active characters in it? What is their role? What is the role of the narrator? As a reader, I had some thoughts as to its meaning: Children can get along on their own if you just let them… they are resourceful, capable of solving problems on their own. A language can bring people together but also separate; there are hidden connections between different groups in the class. All these questions could be a good basis for further discussions. The strength of a story is exactly in its power to elicit dilemmas that are seemingly unspoken…

The feedback, so Ariela felt, was complementing the student’s ability to write ‘a good story’. The student, however, was rather hurt by the expression: “a minimalistic story” and could not relate to the rest of it at all. From the personal conversations that followed, it turned out that the student’s understanding of the term was based on personal experiences she had at school, where her teachers complained she wrote too little. It took us more than one conversation to clarify our worlds of understanding and start building a shared language for our future dialogue.

It was clear we did not have a common narrative language which could have helped Michal understand the term minimalistic as a literary expression, and us, as instructors, to be more sensitive to any kind of criticism at this early stage of the year. We learned it is important to develop a shared narrative language with your students in order to have an open dialogue regarding their personal stories from the field.

The feedback exposes the basic narrative tools offered to the students on every occasion, such as: giving names to the story, identifying its main characters, identifying the narrator and the story’s point of view, and finally, identifying the end-point, the main point of the story.

Ella’s Story – (December, 2004)

My story from last week

It is a story I have already told some of you, a story that taught me a lot. I prepared a poem for a Hebrew lesson called: “When it Rains Outside,” written by Yonatan Geffen. I read the poem to the class, asked a few questions about the rhyming; the meaning of it, new things that could be found in the poem and that was it! I finished, thanked the pupils for being attentive and wanted to collect my stuff and go. “Ella,” the class teacher, looked at me as if she was about to strangle me on the spot. “You have to end the lesson with a summation,” she murmured… Oops! I pulled myself together and somehow improvised an ending to the lesson.

I exposed a rather serious problem—my lesson plan was missing a beginning, that would lead the class into the subject, and an ending, that could close up and summarize the lesson, leading the class to understand the meaning of it all.
That was my story for today; I am sure tomorrow I will have additional stories to tell…

Ella’s story started the first round of stories posted on the group’s Internet Forum. We asked the students to write stories from the field and respond to stories of their colleagues. Ella’s story was meaningful, as she was among the first who dared to jump into the water and take an active part in the Forum; it reassured us that each story is relevant to our work with the students on their practicum. In the following feedback excerpts, one can see how we grab the opportunity and open up a discussion relating to the structure of a lesson—opening, body, and ending—encouraging the participation of the whole group.

Ariela – beginning, middle, and ending: the lesson as a good story (January, 2005):

Ella, your story opens up the question: What makes a good lesson? Or, quoting my own teacher, Prof Moshe Caspi: Without what, a lesson is not a lesson? One of the more thought provoking answers could be without a beginning and an end, as you learned from experience. I suggest thinking about a good lesson as a good story, with a beginning that leads through a middle plot to an ending that has a point. By the way, this is true for a literature lesson as well as for a Math lesson. Is this a challenge you would want to take?

Smadar – the never-ending story… (January, 2005)

Ella, and all the rest who struggle with the structure of a lesson. Like everything in life, a lesson, as you discovered, divides into three: opening, body and ending. You identified a missing beginning and ending. In retrospect, could you think of what was missing there? Then, hypothetically, plan the lesson and include the missing parts. What could this change in the given lesson? Could you bring the results of this rethinking to our group discussion next week? Together, we could try out various possible openings and endings. By the way, what title would you give your story? I thought of two titles: “the lesson that never ends,” or “this time I thought it was excellent!” I invite the other Forum participants to give titles of their own to this story and to the others as well…

It is clear from the above description that we, as teachers of the group, try hard to use every opportunity to enrich the arsenal of narrative tools available for working with stories from the field. Ella’s story served us throughout the year, whenever issues of lesson planning arose. Ariela’s suggestion, to think of a lesson in terms of a good story, was too early, though became useful in later stages of the year.

Sarit’s Story – There is Nothing Like Mom! (January, 2005)

Hi everyone, this is the story as it happened: On one of my practicum days, I worked on counting citrus fruits on a tree. I opened the activity with a personal
story: “When I was still a small child, on a nice day my mother sent me to pick up oranges from the orchard…” while telling the story I could not help noticing whispers and a sense of unease in the group that I could not figure out. Then one of the kids raised her hand and asked, “Sarit, is the story you are telling us true? Did it really happen to you?” I was about to answer her when Ilay interjected, “Are you crazy? Do you think she has a mother? Teachers don’t have mothers, right, Sarit? Grownups don’t have mothers.”

Now I stopped my story and my plans for a math activity I had prepared in advance and took time to talk with the children on what bothered them so much. I explained that I do have a mother, and yes, it is possible for nursery school teachers to have mothers, and only when I made sure that the children figured that out, I went on with my original lesson plan.

My lesson was that you cannot preplan each detail of a lesson, and that diversions are part of it all, and, as a teacher, I have to learn how to cope with it. Well, Mother’s Day is ahead, so I end my story with, ‘there is no one like mom’ and a happy Mother’s Day to you all...

Ariela – personal correspondence with Sarit:

Since I promised to slow down with my Forum responses, waiting for you all to do it first, I chose to write to you personally. I enjoyed your story “there is nothing like Mom.” The story is a classic example of those wonderful surprises that occur in our dialogue with children, opening up small windows to their unique ways of thinking that is so different from our own. The amazing wonderings, such as, do nursery school teachers have moms, can open up fascinating conversations about the passing of time, age differences, and family relationships. Next time we meet please remind me to give you details of a wonderful American nursery school teacher and writer, Vivian Paley, who also writes using those themes.

The feedback is the heart of the narrative work with stories from the field. We use different communication channels for the feedback. We had a personal dialogue with Michal, a public open dialogue on the Forum with Ella. Our personal email response to Sarit’s public forum story followed our decision to refrain for a short while from responding on the Forum, hoping this would encourage other forum members to participate.

We often wonder how far we can go with what a personal story offers us. In other words, do we have the right to use such a story for purposes that are beyond the need of its narrator? Our answer depends of the context of the given group and takes into consideration the need of the narrator, the dynamic of the learning group, and the stage in their professional development. As teacher educators, we sometimes feel frustrated when realizing that a story is too rich for the group to confront at this stage of their learning process.
The three stories that open the chapter were written during the very early days of the students work in the field. At this stage, we concentrated mainly on identifying a story, writing skills and storytelling, sharing and responding to each other within the learning community, and the construction of a common narrative language. This is clearly not a linear route and engages the group simultaneously in learning the language and working on the issues it initiates.

Towards the second semester, we moved into a more structured work in permanent learning groups concentrating on analysis of stories from the field and implications for further practices and learning. As you will see, the students’ stories are fuller and richer at this stage, but we cannot take it for granted that the students know what to do with them beyond the actual sharing in the group. In the next part of our chapter, we present the work of two learning groups with two stories they used as texts for their mutual learning.

Good! I Have a Story – What Do I Do with It?

The stories we present in this part were told within two intimate learning groups [out of three] that were led once a week by one of its participants who brought a story from the field and led the discussion. At the request of the students, we, the counselors, took turns sitting with each of the groups.

Yelena’s Story – The Words Flew Out of My Mouth (May, 2005)

It was during lunch break. The children ate their sandwiches. I stood in the kitchen corner and drank my coffee. Suddenly I saw a child throwing half a pita into the garbage can. I told him that this was not nice, but he did not listen to me. A minute later, another child did the very same thing. I asked him, “Why did you throw that away?” and he said, “Because I don’t like it.” More children did the same thing, and I simply did not find the right words to explain to them why they should not behave like this, that one should treat bread with respect. At that moment, I thought to myself, that maybe, I asked them to think the way I think simply because I was taught, “bread is above all.”

Yelena came to Israel from Russia, three years ago, where she had also worked as a teacher. She is studying towards her teaching certificate and is doing practicum in a nursery school class. It is clear that Yelena is a natural storyteller, but for the time being, she refuses to put them in writing, and she does not yet know what to do with her stories. The work process we present here shows how the group let the story talk, and, together with Yelena, rebuild its possible meanings. The process started with Yelena sharing a written version of her story that she then read aloud. Next, the listeners were asked to think of an appropriate title for the story:

Menar: A slice of bread

Dorit: The importance of a sandwich
Achmed: The lunch break

Dina [the teacher educator]: I had no words, they flew out of my mouth

The titles express the different ways each of the listeners grasp the story and its main points. This first round enables the narrator to get her story back through different prisms of understanding. Discussing the various themes of these titles, enlightened different angles through which the story could be interpreted and encouraged the group to follow several directions of thought and practice. The narrator chose to adopt the title “I have no words, they flew out of my mouth” to represent her personal emotional experience, saying, “Here, I have no experience, therefore, I found myself with no words, in Russia I would have known what to tell the children.” This saying, as we shall see in the coming protocol, set the discussion on a cultural route.

Dina: What kind of a story do we have here?

Yelena: A story of inexperience, in this land, I have no experience or knowledge as to what is accepted, therefore I found myself with no words. In Russia, I would have known what to tell the children.

Dorit: I connect with this inexperience issue, though, as for the bread, our cultures are parallel.

Yelena: Right, often I hesitate to ask questions that may seem trivial.

Dina [the teacher educator]: Dorit, I hear you talking of two different things—her inexperience as a student and, what you call, her cultural inexperience due to cultural differences.

Menar: In every culture, in general, bread and food are important things. In our culture, if someone does not want to finish his bread, he tries sharing it with others, and if they do not want it, they save it for the goats.

Dina [the teacher educator]: …So who is the hero in this story?

Yelena: My complex feelings and sensitivities.

Dina [the teacher educator]: The story takes place in Yelena’s head, the deliberations, sensitivity… As who? A woman? A teacher?

Yelena: Possibly, because my grandma told me that my uncle, in the world war, did not even have potatoes, they suffered from hunger. Since then, I have feelings of respect for bread, from home, and the notion that you do not throw away bread or any food… bread was sacred to my grandma!

Dina [the teacher educator]: You are holding on to something you were brought up on as a child.

Yelena: We had songs, in the first grades, about friendship, and about bread.
Dina [the teacher educator]: We have here a “hero” who was brought up on the holy value of bread, and another “hero,” the teacher. The question then could be: What am I supposed to teach here? Maybe, like in Menar’s story, I should teach them that you do not throw away bread but pass it on to those in need.

Yelena: This story happened just before Passover, and it did not seem right to me to speak of bread just then…

Dina [the teacher educator]: I wonder what name we could give to the story, what did the story tell us about its “hero”?  

Dorin: First, I have to say that Yelena knows how to tell a story. She deliberates about a thing that would probably look trivial to me.

Dina [the teacher educator]: What looked so natural to the children created a grave conflict for Yelena.

Menar: I identified with Yelena’s fear of asking questions that would make me look culturally different, identified with her feeling of being culturally different…

Dina [the teacher educator]: Though you two come from different cultures, you connected, as you both live in a culture different from your own. In that sense, personal deliberations make a story very personal, an autobiography.

Achmed: I would like to ask Yelena if she was sensitive to the bread thrown away or to the fact that the child did not eat.

Yelena: Honestly, I did not think about the hungry kid but about the thrown away bread…

Dina [the teacher educator]: Then you were telling the story through the eyes of someone educated on the sacred value of bread more than through the eyes of a teacher…

Menar: If you see a child throwing bread away again, will you act the same?

Yelena: No! Now I know that I could talk about not throwing away bread here too, and I will think about the hungry child as well…

Dina [the teacher educator]: The story brings out your cultural tension, between the culture you were brought up on and your present one; it seems like a process that moves gradually from: ‘me and them’ to ‘us’.
Menar: Last week, I was at the university when the Memorial Day sirens went off… Everyone stood up, and I did not know why and stayed sitting…

…

Dina [the teacher educator]: I noticed that themes relating to cultural differences appear in your stories.

Yelena: The truth is that I often catch myself wondering about cultural differences …

Menar: It is not easy to live in a multi-cultural society.

Dina [the teacher educator]: Because of the difficulty you point out, it is important to ask questions that clarify those differences.

Menar: Indeed, do not be ashamed to ask… I go out of this meeting with the feeling that no matter what people may think, the most important thing, for me, is to learn what I do not know, to ask and not leave too many unanswered questions.

Yelena: I often avoid asking.

Dina [the teacher educator]: You do not ask because.

Achmed: Because of cultural differences?

Dina [the teacher educator]: Or maybe because you do not want to expose a vulnerable point?

Yelena: Part of the reason is to avoid others’ stigmatic reactions.

…

Dina [the teacher educator]: I want to return to Achmed’s question, whether it bothered you at all that the child might be hungry.

Achmed: In my opinion, if she thought about the hungry child, the teacher in her would be the “hero” in this story.

Dina [the teacher educator]: In what way would the story be different then?

Achmed: Her thoughts and wonderings would be different.

Dorin: She could have told him that if he throws away the bread he will be hungry.

Dina [the teacher educator]: Here we can connect to Elchanani’s paper about having conversations with children.

Yelena: And maybe then I could have gotten different answers from the boy…

Dina [the teacher educator]: Achmed, what was most meaningful for you in Yelena’s story?
Achmed: In our society, we believe that you don’t throw away bread, whatever we don’t eat, we let the teacher gather and give to the needy. But the truth is that most kids in our school eat all the food they bring, and those who bring too much for themselves share the rest with their friends. They get lunch in school, and they look forward to it.

Dina [the teacher educator]: We now understand the sources of your former question to Yelena…thinking of children who get their only hot meal at school…we hear stories with our personal world and experiences.

Dorit: Food is meaningful in more than one way: honor, hunger, physical needs, cultural values…

Yelena: Thank you all for this process of learning and understanding. Today I found answers to many of my questions – I know now that we should pay respect to food, but also to the need of children not to be hungry, and that I can talk about values without leaving the child’s need aside. On the cultural issue, I hope to be able to mind less what others think of me…and get the courage to ask more…

Dina [the teacher educator]: It seems to me that you could start thinking more positively about belonging here too…

It is worthwhile to pay attention to the following three things that happen throughout the discussion: First, the participants connect to the cultural issue, and when we read the text, we can see that the difference on the ‘bread issue’ is between generations [teachers vs. children] more than between cultures. The second point is the dual situation of Yelena as a new comer and a new teacher. The third point relates to additional issues, such as caring for the child who did not have a proper lunch. Because of the conversation, Yelena identifies new issues she wants to attend to in the future.

Two core issues came up in the process of studying Yelena’s story—the issue was that of the wide multi-cultural spectrum of interpretations of the meaning of being a teacher in a multi-cultural society. The participants were surprised to discover that, despite their cultural differences, they shared a taken for granted assumption about the value of bread, e.g., ‘you don’t throw bread away’.

Exposing that which we take for granted is essential for student teachers in order to help them be aware of the need to be sensitive to the diversity among people. The discussion exposes the many cultural differences among the students, and between them and the children they teach, and sheds light on blind spots we all have which prevent us from seeing alternative aspects of a given situation. Another issue that came up in the discussion was the fragile status of a new comer who hesitates to ask clarifying questions from fear of being ridiculed. Another interesting question that gradually built up was whether there are hungry children in my class, and am I aware of the economic situation they live in.
This short story turned out to be a source of endless topics for further discussion such as: Food and children, what do we do when children do not listen to us? How do I handle habits, poverty, and hunger in my children’s homes? How does my cultural world of values affect the way I judge and act? Here too, we did not ‘push’ the story towards directions other than those developed by the group.

Achmed’s Story – The Perfect Imitation (May, 2005)

One of the students arrived one morning with a wounded face; I treated it and sent a letter to her parents to continue the treatment.

As she entered, other kids started asking her about the wound and how it happened… the girl told them she fell at home.

One of the other girls interrogated her in length about the details of her fall: How did you fall? Did you go to the hospital? What did the doctor do?

At the end of this long conversation, to which I listened attentively, that the interrogator wounded herself lightly on her face and asked for the same treatment. When asked: Why did you do this? She said: oh, I fell yesterday at home and my parents took me to the hospital…and continued with a completely imaginary story similar to the one of the first…

Achmed is a third year Bedouin special education teacher, who lives and teaches in the south. He has a B.A in Middle Eastern studies and is now specializing in special education. The group, now with a different leader, suggested the following titles for Achmed’s story:

Achmed: The perfect imitation, the wounded girl

Dorit: The adventures of a wound, me too… Why would only you have all the fun?

Menar: Like in the movies: a great actress

Yelena: The small actress

Michal: Attention… attention…

Smadar [the teacher educator]: And what is the truth?

The discussion that followed opened a new dimension for understanding the story:

Yelena: Why does the story have unfinished sentences? Did you have more to tell us?

Achmed: I wanted to tell a story not give a report.

Smadar [the teacher educator]: Those unfinished sentences arouse our curiosity.
Achmed: The dots mark unfinished sentences and symbolize additional details that are unknown to us, like how did she fall?

Smadar [the teacher educator]: Do you believe her?

Achmed: [shakes his head for ‘no’]

Smadar [the teacher educator]: So we probably have more than just the story of the wound on the face and that of the imitation? What other underlying stories does Achmed suspect?

Menar: Oh, it is turning into a suspense story.

Achmed: The kids in my class are severely retarded, and I have a feeling someone at home is biting her.

Michal: Do you really want to know? Would you act differently had you known she was bitten?

Achmed: In our culture, [Bedouin] they don’t treat retarded children so well, they don’t tolerate her limitations, and she often comes to school with bruises. There are state laws against hitting kids, but also the cultural tradition that allows it.

Smadar [the teacher educator]: What is more important to you—the word of the law or that of the cultural custom?

Achmed: I worry about the treatment those kids get at home, if it is positive or negative.

Smadar [the teacher educator]: We have the more general issue of your society’s attitude towards children with special needs, and the more specific issue of how the kids in your class are treated at home. I feel you brought up this story to share this dilemma and look for ways to deal with it…The law says that when a child or a helpless adult are badly treated by those who take care of them, it is the teacher’s duty to inform the police or the relevant social worker. By law, teachers, just as doctors, have to inform authorities of abuse. Cases of abuse could include sexual harassment, neglect, physical or mental harassment. Achmed, you did not ask too many questions in order not to get problematic answers, isn’t it so? We often feel that it may be too dangerous, for us professionally, to know too much, especially if we think we could not do much about it…

Achmed: With us, if we inform the authorities without telling the family first, then we may get into real trouble in our community.

Smadar [the teacher educator]: Achmed, did you have any idea about the direction your story might take?

Achmed: No!
Smadar [the teacher educator]: This is the power of a story; it takes us to new and interesting places.

Exploring this story enabled us to expose another, hidden level in the told story. While the open story seemed to be about imitation, the hidden story uncovered by the grammatical structure of the story [the extra dots at the end of sentences] helped ask further questions, thus encouraging Achmed to tell what was really on his mind. Just as the girl in the story gave hints about her situation at home, Achmed was also giving hints about the story behind the story. As we did here, delving into the stories could also serve as a model for Achmed to use in similar situations with his class.

The narrative work described above opened up alternative avenues for action in class, nevertheless, it left the main issue still unresolved and open for further questioning and study of issues such as: imitation and learning; harassment of children and the teacher’s role and duties in such cases; norms, laws and customs in specific cultural milieus.

During the last feedback session, the end of all four rounds, the students found the following issues most relevant:

- Surprises – planning and spontaneity in the learning situation, or to what extent do I plan in order to avoid surprises or let them happen?
- Beginnings, endings, and all that is in between – the structure of a lesson as a good story.
- Codes, and cultural norms – me, the other, and the taken for granted.
- Authority and obedience, where does trust enter this relationship?
- Learning and teaching strategies are synchronous with creativity and innovation.
- The ‘good pupil’ as a life-saving rope for the teacher.
- Learning and imitation – all that is in between them.
- Silenced stories – how can we read between the lines?

Some things that were said at the end of the session:

We learned a lot from this story series, until now, I did not know how to get into what was lying beneath the spoken words.

We simply stood in front of a mirror that reflected our future work, I hope…

It all stays in our heads, each dot and comma of the story we tell, symbolizes something that we think or feel.

I connected to Yelena’s hope that, in a moment of truth, these discussions will prove themselves and give us practical tools for the future.

From the stories, I learnt about my duty to inform, I also learnt how to have conversations with pupils and have opened up to understanding my pupils’ behavior from different perspectives.

Life is a story, and we can learn from each and every one.
I met my group three meetings ago and could feel how we developed—from just listening to story texts, to coping with the issues exposed.

Suddenly, I could hear voices of participants I never heard before in the group.

It was fun learning from our own discussions, we felt we could lead our conversations to where we really wanted them to go.

The fact that the groups were constant and the teachers took turns with us helped build intimacy in the group.

Throughout this work, we felt that things we just talked about before turned into the real thing for us, putting together theory and practice.

A Story and Another Story and Yet One More – Tracing a Growing Identity

We chose to end this chapter with one student’s stories examined from a historical perspective. The student explores her stories chronologically, as she studies her pattern of thinking and processes of change and development. Her first story opened our chapter; here is another story, written during the second half of her first year in the ACE program:

Lilach’s Second Story (June, 2005)

In one of the lessons I taught, I gave the students a mission to write a story of their own which includes characters, time, plot development, etc., entitled: “His Shirt Turned Inside Out.” The students were given several minutes to complete the mission, and then I read, commented, returned the work for corrections, and collected it. One of the students decided to write about a ghost that turns inside out by climbing on the wall, running away from the people of the house who finally catch it.

I read what he wrote and, without hesitation, told him, “A shirt is not a ghost, in a moment we’ll explain, exactly, the definition of shirt…” The student was angry and hurt, “I do not care! You said each of us could write a story of his own, this is my story!”

I was stunned. I thought to myself, he is so right, do something about it and fast! Regaining my voice, I answered softly that he was right, and I accept his story and take back my former comment.

I thought to myself: What is happening to you, Lilach? Is this not what you asked them to do? Or, maybe you expected them to write a specific story you had in mind? What was wrong with the ghost idea? What did you not like about it? This was a meaningful and most frustrating moment for me which brought me back to that difficulty I write a lot about in my road diary – that I
find it difficult not to expect others to think and behave the way I do or want them to. I am proud to say, that today, towards the end of this year, I am in a different place, and almost expect my students to think and be different than I expect…

Lilach’s stories were written during her first and second year at ACE in two different classes. At the beginning of the first year, one could tell she focused on her role and authority in the class, following rules, and expecting almost complete obedience from her students. “I am not ignoring you. I cannot tie my laces,” the boy’s unexpected response in the first story became a key concept within the group, like a yellow blinking warning light: This may not be what you think it is. The second story, from her second year at the college, deals with a teaching-learning situation, exposing a conflict between hidden and open declarations. Argyris and Shon (1978) claim that exposing such gaps between what is said and what is done have the potential to bring about meaningful change. At this stage of her development, Lilach is capable of reflecting on action as well as in action [see: Donald A. Schön (1987): Educating the reflective practitioner, p:26]. She corrects her request from the child, admits her mistake, and continues thinking about the meaning of what was revealed to her.

Lilach included the second story in her end of the year reflective writing. By now, she is able to look at it width wise as well as lengthwise (Dewy, 1916), analyzing the event as part of her class activities, and connecting it to previous events, as she draws a developmental pattern of behavior that is undergoing change. This chain of stories enables the student to identify her personal professional story beyond the specific situation. She can expose habitual patterns of action, realms of interest and situations, and improve her professional behavior.

From My Story to Your Story to Our Story

Working on stories from the field is a narrative tool that can lead to the creation of “alternative worlds.” The story starts when something expected goes wrong (Bruner, 1996). The language of a story is universal, both for the narrator and for the listener. The narrative approach encourages the pre-service teacher to think of the teaching-learning situation in terms of a story with a plot-line and characters in interaction (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Bruner, 1987; Gergen, 1995; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). A story has a structure of its own that gives framework and language, in which to describe human, multifaceted situations of learning, like a lesson. In this process, we developed with our students, narrative tools with which to study their stories of practice and understand them professionally. We helped our students identify the main ‘heroes’ of the story, e.g., the main character, identify the structure of the story, the plot, the conflict and its solution, the narrator voice and its role in the story.
The process of telling and retelling of practice is mainly based on the following four principles:

1. The process of professional development is, in essence, a process of telling and retelling of practice.
2. In order to turn a teaching experience into a meaningful professional experience, we need to turn it into a story – the closest human expression to the actual experience that can be forwarded to others (Bruner, 1996; Dewy, 1916, 1969). This skill, of turning teaching experiences into stories, helps teachers and pre-service teachers to develop professionally.
3. Stories from the field need to be carefully and professionally studied. Hence, it is necessary to include the teaching of narrative study tools in the teacher education curriculum.
4. Using stories from the field as central texts for learning groups of teachers and/or pre-service teachers encourages the creation of communities of learning whose members collaboratively study their stories of practice from the field.

The following “building blocks” helped us create learning spaces for our narrative work with stories from the field that encourage negotiation of meaning, and exploration of professional identities in the making:

• Collecting written stories from the field.
• Telling and listening to our field stories in small learning groups or on the Internet Forum.
• Analyzing those stories with narrative tools such as: giving names to the stories, examining possible connections between the stories’ structures and meanings, analyzing the characters and personal interactions that make up the plot, identifying the story-line that leads to its endpoint.
• Telling the story from the different perspectives of its characters.
• Retelling the story with new understanding.

The newly told story was added to the arsenal of stories members of the group use for their ongoing professional discourse. From the examples brought in this chapter, we can see that working on stories from the field offers, both students and teacher educators, several avenues of new learning and skills, such as:

• How to identify your personal baggage—we can only tell stories through our own eyes and understanding, thus, the stories we tell help us and our listeners identify personal knowledge and taken for granted assumptions that guide our reactions.
• How to read a complex reality – teaching and learning are complex processes. It is rather difficult to break down a lesson into separate units. A story shows the complexity of a lesson as a whole picture.
• How to use alternative thinking – look at a given situation from different perspectives.
• How to formulate questions for further study, practice and professional development.
Epilogue

In this chapter, we presented a narrative collaborative study on teaching a group of pre-service teachers that works as a learning community. We found this a fascinating way to explore, with our students, the meaning of their personal teaching experiences in school. We expect this collaborative learning experience will serve as a good basis for a deeper narrative study of their practice during their second year in the program.

The dynamic learning process we offer uses creative knowledge that builds discourse within a learning community. This is a context-dependent learning combination made of practice and personal experience through reflection and meaning-making dialogue within the learning group. This approach gives up the notion of authority of knowledge, transferred from the knower to the one who wants to know, and builds on exploring and reconstructing the wisdom of practice of the learners, both students and teachers (White, 1997). This approach gives up the concept of authoritative hierarchy as given knowledge, passed to the learner. Instead, it views the focus of learning as a process of exploring and conceptualizing what we call “the wisdom of practice.” This approach recognizes not only the process of personal growth, but also the process of moving from the edge to the center of the professional community. It assumes that professional identity is not transferrable; it is a dynamic process; an adventure that encourages an on-going construction of professional identity.

We cannot conclude this chapter without relating the personal experiences we underwent as the group’s teacher educators. After many years as experts in our field, we found ourselves, with our students and like them, in an initial process of learning. As part of the learning community, we were often caught by surprise, not knowing what to say, just like novices. We had to give up some of our defense mechanisms and authority, and found ourselves rather ‘naked’, not knowing, and embarrassed. This was simultaneously a frightening and challenging experience. Despite our theoretical stance, meaningful learning grows out of uncertainty and confusing experiences, we were surprised to discover that this was also true for us, despite the rich experience we brought into the situation.

In order for the students’ stories to take center stage, we had to learn to silence our professional voice. This was not easy; it turned out that whenever one of us managed to move aside, the other filled the vacuum. Listening carefully to our students’ and visitors’ feedback, we gradually learned to give the group space and feel comfortable in the background. Moving aside did not necessarily help all the students take center stage, some felt frustrated, still expecting information and working tools from us.

In time, we, the instructors, learned to create learning frameworks that put the students’ work, either personally or in small groups, on center stage, leaving us in the circle but not in its center. We learned to let things happen naturally, not only according to our pre-planned schedule; the unknown became less fearful, and we enjoyed the results of this process. Like our students, we learned that meaningful learning, frightening as it may seem, could be challenging and fascinating.
REFERENCES


2. NARRATING CULTURAL IDENTITY

Getting to Know the Me I Bring to Class

This chapter introduces the process of professional identity development in teaching, in light of the perception that defines learning–teaching activity as a state of being, asking not only “what a teacher should know?” but mainly “what a teacher should be?” According to this approach, the learning–teaching process is not an instrumental process of knowledge transmission, focused on a rational cognitive relationship between the instructor and the learner, but comprises human situations in which one takes part and experiences learning and teaching like any other human interaction. To participate in a learning – teaching activity is to act as one is or as one would like to be. The basic concept of this approach is that in order to become a teacher, one has to emphasize, and study, the practical knowledge which stems from educational experiences. This view defines the essential professional issues as issues of “good judgment” according to different life situations, which therefore poses the issue of the teacher’s identity in the heart of the professional development process.

The topic of professional identity is presented and discussed from different points of view in the teacher education’s research literature. The widespread claim is that good teachers are aware of their identity and continue to evolve as professionals; they define themselves by their profession and not merely act as teachers (Borich, 1999; Britzman, 1994, 2003; Danielwicz, 2001; McLean, 1999; Pittard, 2003, and more). Teacher professional identity is how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others. It is a construct of professional self that evolves over career stages; and can be shaped by school, reform, and political contexts (Lasky, 2005).

The discussion about teachers’ professional identity deals with the cognitive – psychological aspects of the student teachers and the role of the development of professional identity in teacher education. The literature dealing with these aspects defines the design of professional identity as a one way linear process starting from being a learner until becoming a teacher. The development of professional identity is regarded as an accompaniment to, or a result of, the teacher educational program, but does not include a planned constructed process (Pittard, 2003).

The ACE program offers a different perspective from the above. It considers teachers’ professional identity as essential and therefore puts it in the heart of the teachers’ educational program. The development of professional identity is planned and constructed; the process is considered as dialectical rather than linear.
and deals with opinions, attitudes and beliefs of the student teachers rather than their personality features. We in ACE do not wish to design peoples’ personalities, but for them to take into consideration their basic assumptions, conceptions and attitudes. Assumptions, conceptions and attitudes are important elements for self-understanding and understanding the context in which one acts. These elements are subject to constant change in the process of giving meaning to events and life situations.

Our conception is based on the following assumptions:

- The developing processes of one’s identity are particular, not universal, and depend on the socio-cultural context in which they take place.
- “Identity” does not wait to be revealed, but is the result of a process of giving meaning and significance through which one learns to know his cultural environment and its role in his life.
- The development of professional identity is not a linear process from learner to teacher, but a hermeneutical one, with dialectical relations between learner and instructor that is subjected to constant examination.
- “Being a teacher” is part of who one is as a person. There is a dialectical relation between the personal aspect and the professional one. Meaning, the development of professional identity is involved in the development of personal identity and vice versa.
- The development of professional identity is not an occasional by-product, but a component that has to be intentionally developed.
- One way to engage in identity development is through story, not as a revealing tool but as a creating and constructing one (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

According to these assumptions, the development of identity is an active dynamic hermeneutical process that creates meaning in a certain cultural context. Identity is created, designed and changed by a complex combination of parallel life paths, e.g., being, at the same time, both a parent and a teacher. This process uses materials derived from past and present experiences told as stories that, in turn, redesign these experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

The question is then: How can we keep the dialectic mode of being in learner – teacher, firstly as a creative process of identity development based on the personal identity of each individual, and secondly as participants in a learning community that creates knowledge? This question challenges teacher educators’ programs from the practical point of view, and the answer is context dependent. Each program has to develop an appropriate theory of practice that suits the issue of identity in its context. This chapter presents the practical theory of the ACE program while focusing on understanding the working processes in the program, as a whole, and in the identity workshop in particular: through discussion of the students’ stories, their portfolios, their written papers, their own assessment documents, and the protocols of the different learning workshops.