

## Growing as Teacher Educators:

### Learning New Professional Development Practices

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This paper<sup>1</sup> focuses on two teacher educators in the process of altering their professional development practice. These educators are graduates of the Mandel Foundation's Teacher Educator Institute (TEI), an intensive two-year program for Jewish professionals responsible for teacher education. TEI's overarching purpose is to develop in its graduates new visions and new practices that improve the quality of teaching and learning in Jewish schools. The program<sup>2</sup> and its rationale are described in Holtz, Dorph & Goldring (1997) and Dorph & Holtz (2000). TEI's objectives share much with recent efforts to alter professional development in general education, yet detailed studies of individual teacher educators attempting to learn new practices are rare. This paper explores how two teacher educators implement new practices in their own settings. It describes the pivotal moves each makes to engender new educational perspectives and the inherent challenges of adopting a new paradigm for professional development.

New approaches to professional development are grounded in ambitious notions of what constitutes good teaching and learning for students. Such teaching, often referred to as "teaching for understanding," requires that teachers develop the capacity to "learn in and from their practice, rather than amassing strategies and activities" (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p.4). This more reflective/intellectual orientation to teaching requires new goals, roles, and pedagogical practices. It necessitates the development of new forms of professional development in which what to teach and how to teach it are reexamined.

Recent literature describes new approaches to professional development in a variety of ways. Putnam and Borko (1997) summarize its features as follows: 1) Teachers should be treated as active learners who construct their own understanding; 2) Teachers

should be empowered and treated as professionals; 3) Teacher education must be situated in classroom practice; 4) Teacher educators should treat teachers as they expect teachers to treat students. Others have focused on the development of sustained conversations and activities that encourage a critical and investigative stance towards teaching and learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Little, 1993; Loucks-Horsley, 1995) and on creating learning environments that are more collaborative and “centered in practice.”

Although there are differences, both subtle and not so subtle, between the old and new paradigms of professional development for teachers, charting some of the features of these approaches, as instantiated in TEI and similar programs, can be useful as a heuristic device (adapted from Dorph & Holtz, 2000):

<b>Old (Training) Model</b>	<b>New Model</b>
One-shot workshops	Sustained, ongoing deliberations
Disconnected from teachers’ work	Integrated/situated in teachers’ work
Focused on generic strategies and/or increasing subject matter knowledge	Focused on subject matter and the teaching/learning of subject matter
Participants as isolated individuals who are receivers of knowledge	Participants as members of learning communities who generate knowledge
Oriented around answers and solutions	Oriented around questions and investigations of practice
Based on a view of teaching as technical work	Based on a view of teaching as intellectual work
Teacher Educator as expert	Teacher Educator as facilitator of teacher learning and co-learner

The new model of professional development creates many challenges and uncertainties for teacher educators. Teacher educators may struggle to create programs that match their new vision of teaching and learning, adopting a “stance of deliberative uncertainty” as described by Ball and Cohen (1999).

The research literature offers little insight on the work of professional developers who adopt or adapt these new practices. Much of it focuses on ways to organize schools so that teachers can engage with colleagues about teaching and learning on an ongoing basis (Little, 1999, Sergiovanni, 1996), particularly on the need to support sustained teacher learning and provide opportunities for introducing new subject matter and

pedagogical ideas into the school. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) provide a conceptual framework for thinking about teacher learning and its relation to new forms of professional development. The framework includes consideration of the knowledge-practice relationship, images of teacher knowledge, images of teaching and professional practice, and images of teacher learning and teachers' roles in educational change.

A study particularly relevant to ours is that of Stein, Smith, Silver (1999). They present analyses of experienced professional developers in mathematics education who worked in two different schools and the challenges they faced in relearning their craft to be more congruent with the new model outlined in Figure 1. The analysis shows that the professional developers need to adopt more encompassing goals, expand their pedagogical repertoires, be more sensitive to the specific contexts in which they work, develop ways to promote learning among teachers as part of a social group, not only as individuals, and decipher how to challenge current practice and support change. In particular, Stein et. al. highlight the tension between developing interpersonal trust and propelling teachers toward higher levels of competence. In the two cases that follow, many of these issues challenge the two “newly minted” TEI graduates we describe as they engage in creating professional development experiences for their target audiences.

### **Research<sup>3</sup> Focus**

Almost all TEI graduates develop new visions of professional development that encompass many of the elements in Figure 1. They work on shifting their stance and practice from “delivering content” to “activating learning in others.” Most TEI graduates come to see professional development as a long-term process involving the development of goals and practices that lead to understanding and a reflective stance toward teaching enacted in a collegial context. TEI graduates also learn to privilege subject matter knowledge and knowledge of ways of teaching specific content (pedagogical content knowledge).<sup>4</sup> But new ways of thinking do not necessarily lead to altered practice in a facile manner and we know little about the experiences of those attempting to implement visions such as that espoused by TEI. The current analysis focuses on such teacher educators as they struggle to develop new practices based on their new vision of teaching and learning. With the help of the TEI graduates themselves and our own analysis, we

sought to better understand what the teacher educators experienced and what they learned in taking on new professional practices. We were interested in their struggles and successes in this new kind of work.

From studying these two teacher educators, we hoped to learn more about what it takes to implement new ideas and approaches to professional development in Jewish contexts and the challenges entailed in putting these ideas into practice. By considering the main features of the new paradigm as shown in Figure 1, we asked questions such as: What repertoires did the two teacher educators develop that represented their new images of teaching and learning? How did their planning and practice change in light of a desired shift from disseminating knowledge to creating an investigative process? How did their focus on creating collegial relationships change the dynamic of the group and their role in it? How did they ground their work in their learner's practice? What role did Jewish subject matter play in their programs? And, what evidence exists of TEI influence in their programs?

## **Method**

We conducted a total of four case studies of TEI graduates, two of which we describe here—Brenda, the principal of a supplementary school, and Ruth, a staff person at a central agency, responsible for professional development of family educators. The cases were chosen as exemplars of TEI graduates in different kinds of Jewish settings and as individuals who were clearly engaged with the TEI agenda. Each educator was studied over a school year as she developed and implemented her professional development program. Our overarching purpose was to gather data about each teacher educator's program: its rationale, development and enactment-- and to understand the thinking and challenges each educator went through as she “grew” her program.

Brenda<sup>5</sup> is the principal of a Reform synagogue school with 450 students in a medium sized Jewish community. She has conducted a voluntary monthly seminar for her faculty over the course of the last four years. Brenda initiated the seminar when she was in her first year of TEI. Of the 15 teachers in the school, almost all attend regularly. This is in addition to monthly staff meetings.

The documenter visited Brenda's school at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. The faculty seminar was in its fourth year at the time of the study. The visits included observing the two-hour meeting of the faculty seminar, pre- and post-visit interviews with Brenda, interviews with some of the teachers who participated in the seminar, and some informal classroom observations. Materials used in the faculty seminar during its four years and Brenda's own notes about the seminar, including her written goals, were also collected.

Ruth works in a central agency in a large metropolitan community in the field of family education. She directs a program that educates family educators who come from synagogues, Jewish community centers and day schools. She works with educators over a multi-year period as they progress through a funding/ professional development sequence.

Ruth's program for family educators was observed on two occasions, each by a different researcher, at the beginning and near the end of the school year. The first observation of a four-hour session was an introduction to the program for family educators who would subsequently participate in different levels of the program. The program visit was preceded and followed by interviews with Ruth. Materials used in the program were collected along with Ruth's own documentation of the program. The second observation of a two-hour session for more advanced family educators was also accompanied by pre- and post-interviews with Ruth. Two face-to-face interviews and two phone interviews about their program experience and its impact were conducted with participants in Ruth's program.

For each case, the interviews included a history of the program and its goals, the educator's motivation for the program and the manner in which it was planned, how and why the program changed over time, and specific information about the sessions that were observed. Interviews also included the educator's reflections on the program and her work, including challenges she faced and successes and failures. Other topics were included on a case-by-case basis as appropriate.

We prepared a descriptive memo about each teacher educator and her program using all the material relevant to the case (interviews, session observations, program materials). To verify our understanding of each case, these memos were subsequently

reviewed by each teacher educator. We analyzed each case individually looking for: a) evidence of suggested TEI practices and ways of thinking (or clear absence), b) evidence of learning and development as a teacher educator, and c) tensions experienced by the professional developer. In the case analysis we attempted to identify salient issues (e.g. tension about role, balancing telling and asking) that required further exploration. After individual cases were described and subjected to a first round of analysis, the team discussed each case looking for cross-case themes and contrasts in the spirit of Miles and Huberman (1994). We turn now to the two cases, beginning with that of Brenda.

### **The Case of Brenda**

Brenda served as Principal of a Reform supplementary school for 13 years and described her activities with teachers primarily in terms of supervision and administration with occasional teaching in faculty meetings. Prior to launching the faculty seminar, Brenda worked with teachers in a conventional manner. She said,

*I had kind of used the model of going into the classroom and finding out what was wrong and trying to fix it, or saying I really like the way you did blah, blah, blah, as opposed to trying to create a more equalizing discussion with teachers.*

Through her participation in TEI and a modest community incentive (small stipend for teachers), Brenda decided to start a faculty seminar that met for two hours one evening each month after Hebrew school. We studied the seminar in its fourth year and describe its evolution over time. Two aspects of Brenda's growth are particularly interesting: the way Jewish content for teachers became more central, but also more personal and complex over time, and the way in which Brenda's role evolved in the seminar from a leader sharing responsibilities with faculty members to a teacher-facilitator and co-learner.

From the seminar's inception, two general goals informed Brenda's work. She wanted to create an ongoing learning environment for teachers and to enhance teachers' Judaic knowledge. As she said,

*...[one] piece of it was really to be able to study together with teachers, to be able to provide an atmosphere to do that, where everybody could study together. My teaching staff is not tremendously experienced or knowledgeable in Judaica so a very, very big piece of it was to be providing a stronger Judaic base of*

*learning ...something more ongoing, that would really raise people's level of Judaic knowledge.*

During the first year, Brenda focused on images of good teaching and learning and introduced activities such as journal entries about a favorite teacher to foster discussion among teachers. These were activities introduced at TEI. She also tried to develop collegiality by having teachers share responsibility for the seminar.

*I invited teachers to teach each month, and so every month a different teacher basically was kind of sharing their curriculum with the other teachers and trying to do it on an adult level. [So if], somebody was doing Jewish History then they should be teaching the Jewish History on a level for adults.*

Thus, the first year created collegial sharing while staying close to the content of the existing school program. Teachers were able to showcase their knowledge in line with the school curriculum and to experience contributing to learning for other faculty and learning as a faculty, but they did not necessarily have to generate new knowledge for the seminar.

The second year saw Brenda assuming primary responsibility for leading the seminar at the faculty's request. The faculty evidently preferred that she be in charge rather than taking turns in the instructor's role used the year before. The year was devoted to examining and improving the holiday curriculum. Although still school related, the work was grounded in a growing understanding of the importance of teachers getting in touch with their beliefs and commitments. She organized a series of meetings devoted to studying the holidays, including study of appropriate primary texts,

*in order to connect it to our lives today, and also to figure out how to teach this ...to create different curricular objectives and activities for each holiday and ...by the end of the year, a holiday curriculum ...that was developmental throughout the grade levels.*

The task proved to be more generative of new learning than had been achieved in the first year. By the second year the use of *hevruta* for text study was common and many sessions began and concluded with a journal exercise. The focus on adult learning of Jewish content was becoming stronger. These new features of the work—Brenda's leadership role, the connection to improving the curriculum for students, the personalization of the learning to the teaching—changed the dynamic of the seminar.

Teachers developed some common language, were more comfortable studying with colleagues, and developed a trusting attitude toward one another.

The third and fourth years of the seminar were devoted to more challenging and personal content with Brenda becoming more of a facilitator and doing less “frontal” teaching. Text study was firmly established. While Brenda hoped there would be transfer from the seminar to teachers’ classrooms, the heart of the experience was for teachers to engage with important Jewish ideas in the service of improving their teaching. The third year entitled “Becoming Torah” revolved around

*studying Jewish text in order to be able to teach Jewish values...such as tzedakah, honesty, speech, Torah study, etc., and we really studied text and in order to figure out the values we had learned from that text in order to pass that on to our students.*

In its fourth year, the seminar, “Encountering the Divine,” consisted of personal explorations of the notion of God in Jewish tradition. The tie to classroom teaching was much less direct, oriented instead to teachers’ development of personal meaning, values and ideas that then might inform their teaching. Brenda explained,

*So what I try to look for ...is something that can be universal, that there are topics and ideas they can inform themselves more as adults choose, it’s not meant to be a course where you take this and then you go teach it next week in your classroom, ... there’s a goal for them to kind of take and be able to interpret it but more in terms of starting to be thinking for themselves of what are the goals of what they want to teach. Which seems like a real basic thing but my primary goal was ...for them to really be thinking about what they want to teach and why they want to teach it.*

Learning together, careful text study, and voicing different opinions and points of view was a totally new experience for the faculty. Brenda’s role as facilitator and discussion leader where the target audience was the faculty of her school was largely new for her as well. The success of the seminar, as evident in continued attendance and in teachers’ comments, seems an outgrowth of the pedagogical practices built into the seminar and Brenda’s particular beliefs about text study. We turn now to looking at these changes more analytically.



### Analysis of Brenda's Intervention:

It cannot be easy to create a level of comfort and trust in which teachers explore their ideas about God with their colleagues. How did Brenda pull this off? A key ingredient seems to be Brenda's view about study of text as an opportunity to create personal meaning. She construes the text as very approachable and the study of it valuable, even by those with limited background and knowledge.

*And so the goal of the text study was just for them to be confronting text and learning something from it or the experience itself. And for a lot of them that was just really a new thing. Just to be able to study text and question it and interpret it. My philosophy for studying text is very much to take the text and see what you can discover for yourself from it, as opposed to a lot of, let's look at what the commentators say this text is about.*

She adds,

*I guess primarily the thing that attracts me or that I value in Judaism is probably the study of text, of being able to take ancient words and reflect oneself off of them, to find personal guidance and meaning...to kind of go into the spaces and the holes.*

Once teachers gain experience in working with texts, even though far from expert, Brenda believes they will feel it possible to have their students learn text as well:

*...I want you to feel comfortable enough with text that you can have kids study text and not feel that you need to have known all the answers before they study it. They can study it and try to figure out what it means from the text itself.*

Another important ingredient of the seminar was the regular use of *hevruta*. As a pedagogical practice, *hevruta* grants authority to all participants and supports a shift in leader role from expert, knowledge dispenser to more of a facilitator and group member. While individual teachers might be reluctant to express themselves to the full faculty, the small number in *hevruta* virtually mandates active participation in text study. This shift is one Brenda is trying to make, though at times she still struggles. In reflecting on *using hevruta* and leading discussions in the third-year seminar she said:

*I felt better about (breaking into groups and then coming back)...I don't necessarily feel comfortable about being a teacher and just giving people information, [yet] I am not secure enough in being able to go to adapt to a discussion and so that piece I'd like to work on. I give more material than I need to give.*

So in implementing the study of “Encountering the Divine,” she said:

*...so this year I wanted to model that more on...more of a journal question...and have the people work as much as possible, in hevruta style learning and my goal is for them, especially in this curriculum, to be saying that I don't presume, I'm more the facilitator versus the teacher and this is something for us all to kind of be discovering together.*

Brenda and her faculty have come a long way in the four years of the seminar. There is a change in the tone and quality of collegial interactions, deepening significance of the materials addressed, and higher professional expectations. Brenda has moved substantially away from her initial role as supervisor/expert and frontal teacher to a stance in which she is more collegial and supports and facilitates learning together with her teachers. Certain challenges do remain.

Our observer, a teacher educator himself, noted one such challenge. He perceived a lack of probing or follow-up on the part of Brenda and the teachers during the faculty seminars. For example, as teachers expressed different views, the opportunity to request that more be said about each view, or to explore their origins was not taken up. Similarly, when individual teachers gave interpretations of text, they were not asked to use the text specifically to help others understand their claims. In general, the seminar succeeded in eliciting active participation and multiple contributions, but it did not move much beyond the point of uncritically accepting each contribution in the public forum.

Brenda was aware of this challenge. In seeking to explain her hesitation to probe teacher's thinking, she suggested three possibilities. One was her own reserved personality that made her uneasy about questioning the teachers. The second was her concern that to create a safe environment in which the teachers will talk and study, one needs to be careful not to push them in a way that may make them uncomfortable and resistant to go further in their thinking. This concern seemed very salient since the subject of the Divine is potentially very controversial, personal, and emotional. Brenda's third concern about probing was that she might “lead them to an answer” or suggest there was one correct answer when her desire was for teachers to explore their own answers and thoughts.

In spite of the absence of follow-up questions and probing, the teachers were listening to one another and discovering that other points of view existed and could have

validity, a valuable experience in itself. One teacher-participant told us that listening to the other teachers wrestle with the concept of God enabled her to develop a greater sensitivity to children's questions, concerns and dilemmas. She (the teacher) herself had not experienced "issues" or "conflicts" about God, and yet, she now felt she could be more empathetic to her students' questions and encourage a broader diversity of opinions as a result of this learning experience with colleagues.

Brenda's strategy in terms of curriculum is important to ponder as it illustrates a strong belief in the value of adults learning Jewish text with their colleagues at the school site and building collegial relations in this manner. Brenda believes Jewish learning is imperative for her faculty members and does not focus much on their classroom practice as such. More time will be needed to understand how focusing on teachers' personal learning enhances teaching and learning in her school. As we turn to an examination of Ruth other strategies for professional development will take center stage.

### **The Case of Ruth**

*...the hardest thing that I had to learn was to keep quiet. I like to teach and talk. I had to train myself to say, 'I'm doing good teaching even if I'm not talking'.... Talking less, having them talk more...*

Ruth is a veteran Jewish educator; she has been in the field over fifteen years. She has worked in a central agency position in a large city for eleven years, the last five specializing in family education. Over the course of the last five years, she has developed a program to prepare family educators. Her program is part of a communal initiative to strengthen Jewish family education in her community. Participants in the program include professional educators from local synagogues, JCCs and day schools. Typically, the participants are educational directors, teachers, or rabbis with family education responsibilities in their institutions. The program extends over several years in which institutions receive grants based on the number of hours that the family educator works and educators are expected to participate in twelve to eighteen hours of professional development each year. By the time an institution is in the *gimmel* or advanced track of the program, the institution is in a serious planning mode, family education programs are a regular feature of their offerings and the commitment to hire a family educator, for half to full time, has been made.

Ruth's work with family educators in her community began with workshops and modules designed to help educators to learn more about planning effective programs for families in institutional settings. These included Shabbat dinners, *havdallah* experiences and other holiday celebrations. Her goal was to "strengthen and expand family education in as many settings as possible." Her seminars focused on strengthening the skills of family educators in working with families. She focused not only on planning skills but also on increasing their confidence in working with families and empowering them to work with their lay committees to make family education more of a priority in the congregation.

Through her participation in TEI and some of the results of an evaluation of the larger communal initiative, Ruth started to question the adequacy of her goals and of her approaches to the education of family educators. She began to reconceptualize the challenge. She focused her attention on the learners in the family education programs of the communal institutions. What did adults and families coming to family education programs need to learn? What experiences would help them grow as Jews? This shift in thinking pushed her to rethink her professional development initiatives and her role in them. She felt that family educators needed to think less about program planning and more about parents as learners. In her words, "a family educator must become a resource person to nurture and nourish the Jewish family."

Ruth began to reframe the challenge for the family educators in her group from "planning enjoyable Jewish family experiences that the groups they taught could have together" to thinking about the role these experiences could play in their families "at home." She began to reconceptualize the professional development modules that she was planning for them. She still thought that when they entered the multi-year program, they needed to focus on issues of program design and implementation. But here too her sessions reached beyond the programmatic. For example: having painted a picture of families participating in a rich synagogue-sponsored *havdallah* program that everyone found very moving, Ruth asked the question: "So why does the family not replicate this very moving experience at home?" This question led to the exploration of a number of very different hypotheses including: 1) no desire, 2) how can you do *havdallah* if you don't do *Shabbat*? 3) lack of requisite skills, 4) awkwardness surrounding trying

something new. These responses pushed Ruth to examine the professional development program that she had designed for family educators. She asked herself: what experiences do professional developers teaching family educators need to have in order to help them understand the challenges and opportunities facing families?

For family educators in the *gimmel* or advanced track of the program, she began to think about her goals and program in different ways. One of several new modules she planned focused specifically on personal Jewish growth for her learners. She felt that personal growth experiences which were shared, analyzed and investigated could enable learners (family educators in her program) to plan transformative experiences for the families with whom they work. Her new goals included:

*to connect our personal experiment to our professional work with families; to break down (into discrete steps) what it takes to acquire a new Jewish practice; to explore our definitions of Jewish family education in light of this experiment; to see ourselves (not just the families with which we work) on Jewish journeys; and to realize that we're better Jewish educators when we're aware of our own journeys.*

Ruth created an innovative module which asked family educators to take on a new Jewish practice as a way of making a Jewish commitment and as a strategy for “feeling” what it is like for an adult to learn to do something new, to be a novice. She felt that this experience would have additional power. It would not only help them understand what they were asking others to do, it would also give them experience in being in the kind of group that they were now going to try to create. That is, she hoped her family educators would create the same kinds of group experiences for the parents in the groups they were leading. This would mean working with those parents on “hard, risky new practices.” She contrasted this with the usual model of group experiences based on doing something fun together.

She framed the module in a letter sent out to participants in November (even though participants would not be coming together to debrief the experiment until the spring). The expectation was for them to “work” on it between November and April when the two-session module would take place. The letter of invitation laid this challenge out in a straightforward, bold way:

*I'd like to invite you to join us all in an experiment. Let's choose something we've been curious about trying in our Jewish lives. It could be a new ritual practice, it could be regular time for text study and it could be learning more about the Jewish arts. Choose something that appeals to you and document the journey.*

In this way, Ruth framed the curriculum of their family education professional development module. She moved the work of the group from learning more about program development, a practice from which they could maintain personal distance, to a program that would involve them in reflecting on themselves as learners. This became a module in which they would not only learn about family education, the education of adult family members in particular, but also about themselves as Jewish adults. The project moved the engagement with their personal learning and feelings to the center of the stage. She framed an assignment which demanded that family educators themselves engage in Jewish learning and “change” experiences.

*...if we know what it feels like to take on a new Jewish practice or dimension in our lives we will be better able to help families do the same. After all, that is what Jewish Family Education is all about; helping families grow Jewishly. How do we help them go to the next step on their Jewish journey? Can we learn something about facilitating that journey for them by engaging in and reflecting on our own journeys?*

Changing her goals so drastically created enormous personal challenges for Ruth. Reframing what she hoped educators would learn pushed her to create totally new modules. More profoundly, it required her to plan differently and even required that she teach differently.

*I had to learn to plan differently! I wouldn't come in with pages of notes to tell them. I would think about what kinds of questions I want to ask the group. My work would be to come up with two or three good questions. I worked more on my questions, writing them down before I got there.*

Her focus moved from what she would say and do to how she would help her participants engage with the ideas and texts before them. She chose Jewish texts and created questions that allowed participants to study in *hevruta*. She followed up with open-ended discussions that not only enhanced the learning but created a sense of community. She listened carefully to participants' comments, writing them on flip charts, the contents of which she typed up at the end of sessions and brought back to the group for examination at their next meeting. In each session observed, Ruth did impart

information, but it was dropped into the ongoing discussion of issues and challenges raised during the group's work. It is noteworthy that Ruth did not offer her own take on a text or her own answers to an assignment until those present had a chance to explore and share their own ideas. She did however offer her own points of view as a way of including herself in the collegial conversation.

*I always had people talking. But I used to be more nervous about what I felt were the right points. So I didn't really listen when they were talking or explore the ideas they were working on.*

In her efforts to enact this new approach to professional development, Ruth worked very hard on what to say and when to say it.

In each session that was observed, there were examples of Ruth consciously teaching and interacting with her learners in ways she hoped they would emulate in their work with their own learners. In one of the sessions, where the text studied was from the Torah, Ruth said, for example “the text we’re studying is not from this week’s *parasha* (portion of the week), because this other text from Exodus is more appropriate to my purposes. That’s our prerogative as educators.”

*At various points, I'll stop and tell people why I'm doing what I'm doing. 'Here's why I chose what I chose.' I try to get inside the decision moments. This whole idea of modeling and reflecting on what's going on.*

In the *gimmel* program described above, Ruth also took on a new Jewish practice, the conscious doing of an act of *gemillut hesed* (loving kindness) each week. She did what she asked the participants to do. She wrote in a journal weekly and she shared her feelings of exhilaration and frustration with the participants in her seminar. She encouraged participants to talk about the challenge of creating a curriculum for family change, of creating experiences for families that would model the experiences that they themselves had together. Some felt that this agenda was beyond the scope of the family educator; others were challenged by the scope of the task. They reflected on two different kinds of questions: “What allowed us to try this new thing? Can our own experiences together help us learn something about working with parents on similar challenges?”

*Someone said, 'It's hard to push people. I don't feel I have the right.' So we talked about it and I said, 'I also feel that I have a hard time pushing you to do the pushing. We're so afraid to alienate the people. But we can't only do what's pleasant, we have to do what we think is right.'*

### Analysis of Ruth's Intervention

The case of Ruth is instructive. It begins to map some of the challenges educators face as they address issues of teaching and learning and professional development in more complex ways. Ruth changes her mind about what she thinks the family educators in her seminars need to learn. She recognizes the connection between their learning and the learning opportunities they must create for others. As she reconceptualizes her goals, focusing on her learners (and their learners), she finds it necessary to redesign the core practices of her own work. She needs to create new learning opportunities for her learners. This requires her to learn to engage with them in new ways. She moves toward engaging them in more introspective kinds of tasks, which focus on themselves as learners; she pushes them to deeper analysis of the activities in which they engage, more critical reflection. She tries to develop in them an investigative stance so that they can learn not only in their seminar with her but so that they will be willing to engage their learners in these new ways as well. When she talks about her work now, she says:

*I look more deeply at what I'm going to do. I ask myself how are they going to help families to do the same thing...*

Returning to the characteristics of professional development (found in the chart on the second page), Ruth seems to embed her work in family educators' practice by considering how they can truly reach their goals for families. She considers this question with a vision of teaching and learning that requires active and personal engagement on the part of her learners (and their learners). She decides that mastering planning and programming concepts is not sufficient to engender the kind of programming and learning that can produce change in families.

Ruth adopts a number of strategies explored in TEI, especially modeling (treating her learners as she hopes they will treat families) and explaining her pedagogical and curricular choices to program participants as she makes them. She also judiciously selects texts that support points being made in other ways to study in *hevruta*.

Ruth particularly notes a major shift in her own role in the programs, from imparting or eliciting information and knowledge to facilitating discussion and posing questions. As she comments, she spends a lot of time thinking about what questions to ask--a real shift in how she spent some of her extensive planning time. Ruth did not move



directly from lecturing participants to asking challenging questions. The shift was more subtle. Ruth realized that her participants had to generate more insight and knowledge out of their own experiences; she became convinced that participants had to get on the "insides" of a change process.

Nevertheless, Ruth experienced some discomfort about whether she was "really teaching" as she restructured the programs for family educators. Even sophisticated individuals engaged in new forms of professional development carry earlier characterizations of what it really means to teach that can crop up as they adopt new practices. Such tensions are also experienced by program participants who are accustomed to getting "something concrete" from professional activities. The multi-year scope of the family education program made it possible to develop changed expectations on the part of both participants and Ruth herself. The power of her new interventions can be felt in the interview with one of the participants in the *gimmel* program. Maggie says:

*I learned to ask myself, 'what's the big idea?' 'What's my goal in the short term and in the long term?' 'How can I get from here to there?'*

### **Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion**

Both Brenda and Ruth encountered resistance and strains as they started to implement new professional development programs. Their participants held certain norms and expectations about professional development experiences, such as the content of seminars and the manner in which leader and participants were to enact their roles, that were not always consistent with what Brenda and Ruth were doing.

#### The role of the teacher educator in fostering new norms of discourse

Discussing studies of teacher groups, Wilson and Berne (1999) note, "The norms of school have taught them [teachers] to be polite and nonjudgmental, and the privacy of teaching has obstructed the development of a critical dialogue about practice and ideas." (p.186) In somewhat different ways, both Ruth and Brenda have to move their participants to accepting new norms that encompass critical analysis and reflection and help them learn how to do it in a collegial context. This of course creates a dilemma. The dilemma can be characterized in the tension inherent in trying to build professional learning communities among teachers.

*The “community” component of a “teacher learning community” emphasizes shared values, interconnectedness and an ethic of care among teachers. ...The “learning” component of a “teacher learning community” identifies its inquiry stance that engages teachers in critical reflection. Such reflection challenges implicit assumptions of teaching and schooling practices for the purposes of changing conditions. (Achinstein & Meyer, 1997, p. 3)*

It is not only the participants who need to develop new expectations and skills. Brenda and Ruth also need to reexamine and create new ways of enacting their role in professional development and feel comfortable in doing so. For example, we noted the lack of probing questions in Brenda’s seminar and the concerns of family educators in Ruth’s programs when asked “to push” their clients. Ruth seems somewhat farther along and more comfortable as one who formulates questions rather than presents extensive information. Nevertheless she invests many hours in preparing in this different form of planning and is most secure when she uses this strategy with advanced family educators (the educators in the *gimmel* track).

It took some time for Brenda to make the shift from frontal teacher to teacher-facilitator, as she put it. Brenda has created a collegial setting and supports active participation, but she herself is still insecure about how much to tell. She still prepares extensively for each session, typically reading for at least twenty hours, yet is somewhat reluctant to ask her teachers to go beyond their initial contributions in discussion. This tension between sustaining good feelings among participants and a critical stance which could engender more learning is similar to the Stein, Smith and Silver case. Will probing inhibit teacher learning and participation? Will Brenda seem too much the authority? These are issues Brenda is still working through. This is particularly relevant since she is working with her own faculty in a voluntary context. We need to think more about “the enduring dilemma about when and whether and how to intervene to move thinking forward.” (Feiman-Nemser, *private correspondence*, 2001).

A word should also be said about how Ruth and Brenda enact the “teacher-facilitator” role. Both educators have moved from a “telling” mode to engendering inquiry and an investigative stance among participants. However, though they do less telling in the actual program sessions, they are every bit as active in planning, creating, defining and articulating what will actually take place, the materials used, and the goals

to be attained. More work is “off stage” in this new way of professional development, making it particularly important that we include knowledge of planning and preparation in studies of professional development work.

### Role of Jewish Content in Professional Development

Both educators grounded their professional development work in Jewish content learning. There are two prevalent forms of such learning in these settings:

- a. *Torah Lishmah*: Jewish learning which provides an opportunity for teachers to deepen their own subject matter knowledge. Such learning may or may not be tied to what they are teaching their students.
- a) Learning of texts and materials that relate directly to what teachers need to know in order to teach.

The place of Jewish content in these two programs differed. Brenda wanted to both increase the Judaic knowledge of the faculty members in the service of teaching and create collegial interactions. As the faculty seminar evolved, it became increasingly focused on direct encounters with big Jewish ideas and focused on school practices only indirectly. It is not really clear that Brenda had planned this direction at the outset; it seemed more a consequence of her growing understanding of the importance of teachers’ knowing more cognitively, but also of the relationship of teacher’s beliefs and attitudes toward the content they teach. The trust engendered in working together over time enabled both Brenda and the faculty to take more risks. Thus, Brenda and her faculty developed a somewhat different version of the role of the study of Jewish content, building on some of her own experiences of learning texts at TEI. Yes, teachers were learning more cognitive knowledge; yes, they were adding to their Jewish knowledge base in arenas that related to teaching. But, the importance of personal meaning as a building block to helping children make meaning, and doing this in the context of a group of teachers working on the same content, changed the quality and dynamic of this enterprise. As an example, one of the teachers on her faculty told our researcher that hearing her peers discuss their doubts, hesitations and questions about God helped her better understand the questions and comments of children in her classroom.

Ruth, building on work that she had done in the context of TEI where Jewish texts on teaching and learning were included as part of the fabric of the ongoing study, created learning sessions for the family educators in her program. These texts opened up discussions about issues, such as traditional Jewish ideas about relationships between parent and child and the role of ritual in Jewish family life. They created an opportunity for examining the role of Jewish text study in the context of family education. In addition, they provided an opportunity for analyzing and reflecting on their own learning process and the implications of what and how adults in general learn. These two programs suggest the need for further study of the ways that Jewish content knowledge can be used in professional development programs in diverse settings. We have drawn on the professional development literature in general education in constructing this program and in analyzing the results. One question worth exploring is whether a program of professional education set in the context of Jewish education raises unique issues, particularly vis a vis content. For example, both Brenda and Ruth focused a great deal on issues of personal meaning-making. Does this focus emanate out of the Jewish educational contexts in which they work or would we find similar points of view in other kinds of professional development particularly in the humanities? Such questions deserve special inquiry.

Two commonalities between Ruth and Brenda are worth highlighting. *Hevruta* was featured in both programs and seemed effective with educators with varying degrees of Judaic background. We note in particular that using *hevruta* provided the “small group” discussion setting often recommended in the literature on teaching for understanding. In addition, both educators encouraged personal meaning making and experience in their program activities. They believed that their participants needed personal understandings and connections to new ideas and practices before they would be able to use them in their own work. Ruth’s assignment to take on a new Jewish practice was based on the idea that family educators themselves had to personally experience the process of taking on a new Jewish practice before being able to effectively support such change and commitment in parents. In this instance, Ruth starts with an analysis of her learners (the family educators) and determines that a deep personal experience is what they need as a basis for their work with families. In Brenda’s case, the idea that the

primary function of text study is to create personal, emotional and spiritual meaning as opposed to knowledge of scholarly commentary enables her to introduce important Jewish issues such as, ideas about God and analyzing Jewish values to a group of teachers with limited background knowledge. Her assumption is that such personal connections to big Jewish ideas will lead the teachers to think about what they are teaching and why they are teaching those things to children. These cases suggest that different emphasis on Jewish content, school curriculum and/or pedagogy and practice may be appropriate in different contexts or at different times for the same group.

## **Conclusion**

This paper represents one contribution to the development of a research literature about how new practices in professional development are actually implemented. Our analysis has illustrated one promising research strategy with its longitudinal, multi-method case study focus. As reflective educators, Brenda and Ruth are still facing many questions and entertaining hypotheses about their own work. Each of them plans to extend their programs so we can learn more about the evolution of their thinking and practice. To further contribute to an understanding of the individual and contextual features that support successful professional education additional studies of teacher educators attempting to implement elements of the new paradigm of professional development should be conducted in different contexts and with other methods.

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Network for Research in Jewish Education, Toronto, June, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> TEI is an in-service, non-degree program designed to serve as a model of professional development for participants in its use of investigations of Jewish texts and records of practice, such as, curriculum materials

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and videotapes of real classrooms. The design of TEI is rooted in a conception of teaching “that portrays teachers and students as inquiring together about problems that matter to all” (Wilson, Miller & Yerkes, 1993, p. 85.)

<sup>3</sup> The research team was directed by Susan Stodolsky and included Gail Dorph, Elie Holzer, Daniel Pekarsky and Renee Wohl. The study was supported by the Mandel Foundation as part of its evaluation of the Teacher Educator Institute. The teacher educators described in this paper were among several whose work was documented for the project. We are grateful for their participation and insights. We also appreciate helpful collegial comment from Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Barry Holtz and editorial suggestions from Mindy Hepner.

<sup>4</sup> Previous evaluation studies (1998, 2000) conducted for the Mandel Foundation have documented changes in vision on the part of TEI participants and graduates.

<sup>5</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

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