

## The Contribution of Faculty to Community Building in a Teacher Education Program: A Student Teacher Perspective

By Clare Kosnik & Clive Beck

*I really enjoy the sense of community that's been established within the group and I don't think it just has to do with personalities. There is a sense of openness that all the faculty team members have invited and also a sense of professionalism. I mean, there's a lot of joking around and teasing, and that happens; but I don't feel there's going to be a problem with a lack of professionalism or even gossip going around. I don't get that sense at all. So I think you guys have really done a good job in guiding us in that direction and helping us form a positive community.*  
(Martha, preservice student, after four weeks in the Mid-Town program)

### Introduction

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Much has been written in recent decades about the importance of community in education. According to Peterson (1992), bringing community into existence in the classroom is an essential aspect of the role of the teacher: "When community exists, learning is strengthened — everyone is smarter, more ambitious, and productive" (p. 2). Paley (1992) stresses the need for structures and practices that make a class

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an inclusive, supportive community for all. Meier (1995), Wasley (1994), and Wasley *et al.* (1997) emphasize the need to create smaller schools so teachers can work together, and teachers and students can get to know each other and share a common school culture. And Wells (1994) advocates the creation of communities of inquiry in which “knowledge is co-constructed through action, reflection, and collaborative talk” (p. ix). He says we must go beyond Piaget’s relatively individualistic form of constructivism, and recognize with Vygotsky that the source of knowledge “is to be found in the cultural activities in which the learner engages with others” (p. 8).

Turning to preservice teacher education, again there has been discussion of the importance of community. Lortie (1975) contrasts teacher education programs with other professional programs, stating that student teachers typically “perceive teaching as a highly individualistic affair,” and “no special effort is made to offset that conception upon entry to teacher training” (p. 236). Goodlad, on the basis of an intensive study of 29 preservice programs of varying types, observes that in most cases “students scarcely knew each other when they came together for the first time in a foundations course... The group assembled was not homogeneous with respect to the goal of teaching, and in no way was it a cohort group, aware of being the class of 1992” (Goodlad, 1990, p. 207). Recent writers do not see the situation as having changed significantly since the Lortie and Goodlad studies were conducted (Howey, 1996; Tom, 1997). The professional development schools movement of the past fifteen years has certainly helped foster community in some teacher education programs; but only a small minority of student teachers are actually placed in PDSs of a highly cohesive type (Wasley, 1994, p. xii).

According to some of the literature, a solution to the lack of community in preservice education might lie in the creation of “cohort programs,” in which a relatively small number of student teachers engage in their coursework and (insofar as possible) their fieldwork *together*, under the guidance of a small faculty team. It is felt that such an arrangement permits a more integrated program, and allows greater opportunity for faculty and students to get to know one another (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Tom, 1997; Winitzky, Stoddart, & O’Keefe, 1992). Within this literature, some attention has been paid to the role of the faculty team in fostering community in the program (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Thanos, 1990). A cohort arrangement by itself does not guarantee class community. The faculty must deliberately lead the cohort in that direction. Goodlad found, somewhat surprisingly, that lack of a sense of community was just as common in small programs as in large ones (Goodlad, 1990, p. 209). And we, too, have seen small cohort programs that have not become strong learning communities.

In many cases, however, considerable success has been achieved through cohort-based, community-oriented teacher education. Arends and Winitzky, describing the cohort program at the University of Utah, say that the cohorts “have become one of the most positively regarded aspects of the Utah program... Candidates report that they appreciate the support system and collegiality that come

from the cohort organization” (Arends & Winitzky, 1996, p. 547). Darling-Hammond, speaking of PDS arrangements, reports that “in the most highly developed sites, programs are jointly planned and taught by university-based and school-based faculty. Cohorts of beginning teachers get a richer, more coherent learning experience when they are organized in teams to study and practice with these faculty and with one another” (Darling-Hammond, 1999, p. 232).

But difficulties have also been identified. Tom (1997) speaks of the power of the peer group to lead in unfortunate directions, “to reinforce one another’s doubts and points of confusion,” to “provide a platform for strong personalities to challenge program goals” (p. 153). This phenomenon is mentioned also by Arends and Winitzky (1996). Of course, challenges from students are fundamental to a community model, and a key source of insight and program improvement. But faculty teams need well-honed skills, and a deep understanding of the purpose of learning communities in order to ensure that the outcome of such conflict is positive. Other problems noted by Arends and Winitzky are loss of faculty autonomy in an integrated, team-based approach, and reduced capacity to select the very best cooperating teachers when one’s partnership is with whole schools rather than individual teachers (pp. 547-48). Another difficulty is the lack of institutional support and rewards for the work of establishing and maintaining community-oriented programs. And while such work is challenging and time-consuming, building community programs is only minimally recognized by universities for purposes of promotion, tenure, and merit pay (Samaras & Gismondi, 1998; Winitzky, Stoddart, & O’Keefe, 1992).

Our elementary preservice cohort program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT) — the Mid-Town Option — is similar to many of the cohort-based programs described in the literature. And we (the present authors and the other members of the Mid-Town faculty team) have experienced many of the same successes and challenges. Our program is somewhat distinctive, however, in its unusually heavy emphasis on class community. We devote a great deal of attention to community building, viewing the experience of community as perhaps the single most important feature of our program. In this paper, we will concentrate on only one aspect of the topic of community in preservice education, namely, the role of *faculty* in building community. Further, we will focus just on *student* perceptions of this role.

### **Context, Goals, and Methodology of the Study**

There have been cohort programs in teacher education at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto (OISE/UT) for many years. The 580 student teachers in the one year post-baccalaureate elementary program are distributed across nine cohort programs or “options,” so called because in-coming students choose their cohort on the basis of information provided beforehand about

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the distinctive nature of each program. The various cohort programs work within general school of education guidelines, but have considerable freedom to develop their own approach.

Our program is called the “Mid-Town” Option because of the location of our partner schools just north of the downtown area in urban Toronto. We have a cohort of about 65 student teachers, and a faculty team of two full-time and five part-time members. As noted, one of the distinctive features of our option is a strong emphasis on class community. Another feature, which we see as related, is a stress on “inquiry” and “teachers as researchers.” A central requirement of the program is an action research project carried out by the students in their second practicum placement.

The community emphasis of our program appears to have been generally well received by students over the years, and to have had a number of positive outcomes, both for the students and the faculty team. For example, it seems to increase participation in whole class and small group discussion and activities; raise the quality of discussion and group work, especially in the action research projects; and lead to growth in awareness of the value of collaboration. However, as noted in the literature, the work of community building is very time-consuming, and not highly regarded or well rewarded in the university. It must largely be done “on our own time.” Moreover, from time to time, we have some students who do not appreciate the community approach, and some faculty team members who resist involvement in community building, especially the work of visiting students in their practicum placements.

Accordingly, we wished to carry out a study to assess, from the students’ point of view, just what we were contributing to the life of the class community, and whether this effort was worthwhile. We hoped in this way to gain feedback that would assist us in making decisions about the future direction of the program. We also hoped to gather evidence that might be used in convincing reluctant students and colleagues to participate in the community, and in persuading the university and school of education administrations to give greater support to community building in the teacher education program.

Our data source for this study was six randomly selected students in the class of 1998-99, each of whom we interviewed on four occasions. We assured the students that in any reports of the study we would not identify them, or any professors or associate teachers they might mention. (Pseudonyms are used throughout the present paper.) The interviews were wide-ranging to allow for unexpected lines of response and to avoid being unduly leading. We asked such questions as: What were your expectations of the program? How have you found it so far? What surprised you about the program? How has it differed from your previous university program(s)? What words would you use to describe the program? How have you changed since September? What has surprised you about teaching? What skills do you think teachers need? What has been the most valuable part of the program? In addition to the set questions, probe questions were asked. However, we tried not to appear unduly

interested in particular topics, leaving it to the students to create their own emphases. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

This was a qualitative study, as defined by Punch (1998). For example, we were participant observers, we had a small sample (the six students), our interviews were fairly open-ended, we did not test a pre-established hypothesis, our data were often not expressed numerically, and we made extensive use of examples and quotations in reporting. Following Hammersley (1992), Merriam (1998), and Punch (1998), there was a quantitative component to our reporting: we often indicated the number or proportion of interviewees who held a particular view or responded in a particular way. We believe such information can be relevant even in a qualitative study. However, our inquiry was still primarily interpretive in nature. For example, the coding of responses was obviously in part a matter of judgment, and the quantities noted did not compel us to arrive at certain conclusions but rather influenced us within a total set of interpretations.

## **Student Views of the Faculty Role in Community Building**

In reporting the findings below, we present in turn a series of themes that emerged in the interviews, each one corresponding to a contribution most or all of the students felt the faculty had made to building community in the program. In each section, we first report the students' views of the faculty role, and their assessment of its importance for the life of the community and their personal and professional development. We then briefly discuss the theme in general terms, showing how, in our view, the contribution fits into the structure of class community.

### ***1. Accepting Students as Individual Human Beings***

In the interviews, four of the six students spoke about how the faculty contributed to the class community by accepting each student as a unique individual, with his or her own idiosyncrasies. In her fall interview, Janet said: "I'm finding the option fantastic because it's so supportive. There's never one law, there's never a right way or a wrong way, and if we have any questions we can always come to you. I just feel like it's a very nurturing environment, it's very comfortable. You can be who you are and people will accept you for who you are." Martha, speaking at the end of the year, said that one of the things she valued most about the option was "the respect you pay in terms of us coming to terms with who we are as teachers, the respect you pay to individual differences and individual teaching styles. I didn't feel you were molding us into one robot, one teaching robot. I found that you are very supportive of the bouquet that we are."

It wasn't just their individuality they saw us respecting, but also their basic needs as humans. In her fall interview, referring back to Options Night, Jennifer said: "It just felt like a place where I could belong and be nurtured as a human being, and also learn to give what I want as a teacher." Later in the year, she commented:

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“You reminded us to take good care of ourselves and I think we really need...the awareness that what’s inside us is of foremost importance... What we are able to give in the classroom is so keenly influenced by what’s going on inside us.” At the end of the year, Anita said:

I learned this in the program, that everything will get done and it will probably get done in a timely manner, but you cannot break your back and go nuts and just let everything else fall by the wayside. You have to give yourself the time, your family the time, and you have to be fresh because if you’re not fresh you are not going to be good to the kids.

As is clear from the above quotations, these four students not only noted our acceptance of them, they also appreciated it. They endorsed this dimension of our community building. They spoke explicitly about how it had helped them grow, and in some cases how they planned to adopt a similar approach in their own teaching. Martha commented: “I was very pleasantly surprised with the number of opportunities given to us to reflect on who we are as educators and who we want to be... And it is remarkable to see how we have changed.” Janet said:

The program has helped me because the individual encouragement has been very, very positive and the support, knowing the support is there and the deadlines are flexible... Organization is very important but you can’t be meticulously organized... I want my classroom to be neat, organized, and not hazardous, but I don’t think I could expect perfection from every child.

We believe the students here identified a key aspect of community building. While the eventual goal is interpersonal and pedagogical, a solid foundation must be laid in terms of recognizing the individual qualities and needs of cohort members. Too often, there is a tendency to “fast forward” to the end product, the learning community. But individuals will only participate and grow if they feel safe in the group, and can “be themselves.” This is in line with Deweyan theory, according to which individual and social processes must be combined, and growth takes place through restructuring an existing condition rather than simply aiming at an abstract ideal (Dewey, 1916, Chs. 1-6). This is also one purpose underlying the recent emphasis on “teachers’ lives” (Thomas, 1995): teacher education must build on people’s past experiences and current life context if it is to engage their understanding and commitment.

#### **2. Respecting Students’ Ideas**

Five of the six interviewees spoke about how the faculty was respectful not only of their individual needs, but also of their *ideas*. Anita commented: “I love the fact that you guys never treat us like kids, that you respect our opinions. I really feel when I’m talking you’re listening, not just other students but the teachers are listening. I can say what I think without feeling anybody’s going to get defensive; which is a really nice environment because it’s so rare.” In her first interview Janet said: “I find all the instructors very informative, but it’s not an ‘I know everything

and I'm going to tell you everything' approach. Rather it's 'I'm going to share this with you.' We're on an even keel and everyone has something valuable to add. It's not 'I have all the answers,' and I really appreciate that. It's very different." Citing a specific example, Janet said:

CD gave us this paper to read on teacher development and I thought it was the most derogatory, mean, nasty, dumb paper I've ever read. It totally insulted the entire room of preservice teachers... So I put up my hand, I was the first person to speak out. I said, "I've been dying for a week to talk to you about this paper. This is the dumbest paper." And he just let us cut it to bits. It's wonderful. He didn't say, this is why I made you read it... His reaction was totally just, okay, they hated it.

Five of the students contrasted the approach of the option in this respect with their undergraduate experiences. For example, Martha observed: "In my undergrad academic experience, in the final honours year, I felt I was part of a community, but I didn't feel I had any direct influence on the progress of it; everything had been laid out." Janet commented: "In the B.Sc. I always felt really stupid; I didn't like asking questions because I figured the teacher would see right through me... I had never felt intimidated about asking questions before (in high school), just like now I'm not scared to participate in our environment at all. I'll put my hand up and I'll have something to say on just about every issue." Erika, however, was an exception. She did not see a marked difference from her undergraduate experience. She said: "Everything is pretty much set for me right now. Like the reflection paper, I don't have too much choice, this is what I have to write about...it's not like I can pick something out of the blue to write about. But I like direction, though."

Four of the six interviewees commented that they felt free to develop their own ideas, their own philosophy of education. Although they did not use the phrase "inquiry approach," they seemed to view the program in these terms. Jennifer said: "I thought we would go through content and be taught exactly what to do with the lessons. I like what we're doing because it allows us to be the type of teachers we are each most adept to become. I feel we're really being encouraged to experiment as teachers, explore methods, explore possibilities and just develop into individual teachers." Janet remarked: "I liked the action research approach, I will definitely use that concept: There is a problem, how can I fix it? Let's try this. Did it work? If it didn't we'll try something else... I liked the reflection papers, because it was an opportunity for me to sit down and concretely identify my ideas."

Most of the students not only noticed us respecting their ideas, they understood the purpose of this approach, and planned to adopt it themselves in their own teaching. Michael commented: "My view of myself as a teacher has changed all the way through the program. I have become more student-centred and activity-centred. I thought teaching was me in front of the class pontificating, filling those empty receptacles. So I've changed. But it's going to be a challenge." Janet made a similar observation:

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One way I've changed since September is that I now will use a lot more reflective practice. I'm now a strong advocate of having the kids do some work, come back and evaluate it, go back and do some more work, and so on... When I started I thought, Oh well I'm going to be in front of the class, and I have all the answers, I have to be all ready and be a fountain of knowledge every time I get up there. I don't think you have to be a fountain of knowledge. You can make mistakes and learn with the class... It needs to be fun, and it needs to be interactive, and the kids have to play a major role in the classroom.

Once again, Erika responded differently. While she was a hard worker, she did not see a need for significant change in her approach to teaching. She commented: "We all know what to do, basically...but unless we're actually doing it we don't know how to handle it." Her main concern was that more time be allocated for practice teaching: "I think you learn through experience," she said. When asked how she had changed during the year, she responded mainly in terms of what she had learned in the practicum. Although she enjoyed the relaxed, friendly atmosphere in the university classes, she did not share the others' sense of having grown through the campus program.

In our view, the students were making an important point here about the requirements for a learning community. Acceptance of students' idiosyncrasies and basic needs is not enough. Faculty must respect their *ideas*. Unless we do, students will feel unappreciated and remain inhibited. They will be afraid to contribute to the academic discussion, to say what they really think. Attending to students' ideas goes to the heart of a *progressive* approach to learning, a *constructivist* approach. It recognizes as natural that students will be constantly growing and will want to modify their knowledge, relating it to their past and ongoing experience. Of course, there are times when we have to take a strong stand against a particular life value (e.g., racism or homophobia) or view of teaching (e.g., a firmly entrenched *nonprogressive*, top-down approach). We experience struggles in these cases, which bring out the complexities of dialogical teaching, and we often consult with each other on what to do. However, our general position is that faculty and students are partners in inquiry, and must listen carefully to each other.

### **3. Showing Friendliness and Care**

All six interviewees commented that the faculty were positive toward them at a personal level, showing considerable warmth, affection, and care. With respect to warmth and affection, Erika remarked: "Everybody is supportive, I find that really nice... I didn't have any complaints about my undergrad professors, but I never had their home phone number, I never went to their house for a party." Martha said: "I was initially surprised at how warm the whole atmosphere could be, because in undergrad it was in only a few classes, few and far between, that I felt that sense of community." Looking back to Options Night, she commented: "As soon as we walked in, all of you wrote your home phone numbers on the board. That really



made an impact because I thought, these are people who treat us as professionals, who are willing to share their thoughts with us, who don't isolate themselves in some kind of hierarchical pyramid. The vibrancy of the team members, how you guys presented yourselves; and as I said, the accessibility, the way you made yourselves available." Janet said:

The option should continue to be very personal and value everybody. I've noticed that about the whole faculty team, you (AB) in particular though. You take time to actually talk to someone. And it's amazing how, and I'm going to do this with my class too, you take the time to talk to that one person: Oh hi, how are you doing, it's really good to see you. What did you do this weekend? It just makes you feel so special... That's something I really need in order to develop and learn.

With respect to caring, Jennifer remarked half-way through the year: "It feels to me like our growth is the important thing, that we're not here to fulfil requirements, and that we really get a lot of attention. I'd say the faculty is genuinely interested in us, and in our growth personally and professionally." Martha, at the end of the year, said: "This program has such a strong sense of community and our supervisors are so supportive. You are much more supportive I would say than the majority of undergrad profs, and I think that's wonderful given the fact that you have your own research to do, you have your own papers to present, you have your own lives. To see your commitment to our growth has been very, very reassuring." Janet, also at the end of the year, commented:

I kind of expected to be more of a number. I expected to go to big lecture halls and hear some mighty education god, probably male, stand at the front of the room and give us this dogma on child development and so on... I certainly never expected to get to know my professors on a one-on-one basis where they would understand who I am and where I'm coming from and be able to incorporate that into any kind of evaluation technique or even be able to understand whether a practicum placement is going to work out for me or not.

The students enjoyed the warmth and caring in the community and saw its value. Five of the six talked about how it helped them grow personally and professionally. Janet remarked that the community atmosphere made her feel comfortable in asking questions and talking to her peers. Michael commented that the thing he was clearest about with respect to his teaching next year was that he wanted to build community with his students. Anita said at the end of the year: "It was very doable, and everyone helped each other so you weren't solo. That's another thing that surprised me — you weren't solo in anything. There was always somebody that you could call on to talk to about anything and everything was open." She went on:

To someone coming into the program in September I would say...embrace this community because it's a great one. It may be overwhelming at first to have 65 people to get to know, but slowly venture out. Don't stick to your small group

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because not only is it a community for this year, it's a community for your future teaching career. You should embrace it because you're not going to have that opportunity again.

Once again, we concur with this insight of the students into what is needed for class community. Beyond acceptance of people and their ideas, community requires positive emotions and genuine caring. Roland Martin (1992) writes about the need for affection in educational settings. Peterson (1992) stresses the importance of conversation and celebration. Noddings (1992) maintains that the teacher-student relationship should be characterized by care. In each case, the authors see this approach as fundamental to learning, rather than a mere frill that is nice, but not necessary. In our program there are constant celebrations, gatherings in pubs, parties in faculty homes, student announcements, joking conversations, communication by e-mail and phone, help with personal problems, assistance with difficult practicum placements, help with job hunting. We believe students need to feel an emotional connection with us, and have a sense that we care about them personally as well as professionally. Of course, we must also be able to be critical of students' ideas and teaching practices where necessary, be firm in grading, and fail students who should not be teachers. Sometimes, we face stressful dilemmas, and sometimes, students feel we have betrayed them. However, as the interviews show, we achieve a significant personal connection with the students, which on the whole they see as very worthwhile.

#### **4. Linking Community and Learning**

Five of the students interviewed saw the faculty as linking community with learning, as using the community emphasis to foster professional development. They did not view the program as academically soft. Jennifer remarked: "I'm really thrilled with the personal content and how we are bonding in class and learning — learning facts and figures but in an environment that's working together... I think it's good to have standards and to really command excellence but to know that, within that, we can be nurtured as humans." Janet said: "You want us to get the work done and that comes across, but then there's always that window of flexibility: come and talk to us if it's not working out, or if you need a hand, or if it's just not manageable." Martha, as we saw in the opening quote, felt the faculty encouraged professionalism. She elaborated this point:

The program is very demanding. So much reflection has to go on, which is exhausting in itself... In many ways the text I have to study, which is myself, is so much more vast than having a definite ten-page essay in front of you. In my degree in English literature I did of course have to reflect...but you were always guided in some way... Here I see myself in an environment that is academic to a certain degree, but at the same time not painfully academic. I'm learning a lot and I'm learning a lot about myself... And it's more relevant to my life experience in that sense because, you know, in our lives things aren't separated.

Once again, Erika provided a contrasting scenario. While she found the reflection hard initially, because she was “not used to it,” within a few weeks “it came pretty easily, actually.” It was not a struggle for her; she saw it largely in terms of making explicit what she already knew. In response to the question whether she found the reflection papers helpful she said: “They’re okay, but I don’t really know the purpose behind them... I think you’re making us do it so we can kind of collect our thoughts. Because it’s all in our hearts, what we want to do and why; but maybe getting it on paper is a good way to see if we’re actually accomplishing it. But in terms of helping me conduct lessons in my class, no, it’s obviously not helping me with that.”

Most of the students not only saw us linking community with learning, they appreciated this initiative on our part, and felt it was helping them grow personally and professionally. Jennifer in her first interview said, “We are bonding as a class and learning.” Half-way through the year she commented: “I will really miss the people, just the special development of being part of a group... A lot of the things we’ve been introduced to...have helped us reflect in certain ways which, when shared together as a group, can provide expansion for all of us.” Janet, at the end of the year, said:

The B.Ed. was as much work as my undergraduate degree in science, which really surprised me because I thought after doing science I could do anything. There is a lot of work involved and a lot of thinking. And I learned that I wanted to do the thinking. I spent five years bucking the reflection thing: Oh, I don’t need to know about myself, I just need to know facts and get them down, and flower-power isn’t for me. But I really wanted to do a good job on everything, so it took me a long time to do my assignments and think about them.

On this issue, again, we agree with the point of view expressed in the students’ responses. While a preservice cohort should be a genuine community, with mutual acceptance, warmth, and caring, it should nevertheless be a *learning* community, in which student teachers learn that educational knowledge is co-constructed (Wells, 1994). The personal connections should occur in the context of learning and be channeled into learning. The two dimensions should not be kept separate. Learning communities of this kind are described in detail by, for example, Atwell (1991), Meier (1995), Peterson (1992), and Wasley (1994). All these authors are serious about high academic attainment. But, they believe that, provided certain other conditions are fulfilled, academic learning is more likely to occur when it is combined with experience of genuine community.

### **5. Taking a Stand on the Direction of the Community**

All the interviewees noted that we took strong initiative in establishing the class community. We laid the foundation and set the stage. Jennifer, after saying how appreciative she was of the “groupness” of the option, went on: “It’s really been well initiated. I really give you all credit for that.” Janet, in her colourful manner, described our early community building activities:

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Right from the very get go we came into the room (on orientation day) on a really stressful day, registration, and all of a sudden it was like this oasis: Hi everybody, welcome, EF is going to do a reading, and now we're going to introduce the faculty. We're going to have a great time, dah, dah, dah, a math card trick from GH, and oh let's all meet each other. It was so not stressful; it was everything the opposite of what we had just gone through. So it really set the tone for the rest of the year.

Michael observed: "The teachers in the program showed us basically what the program was about, what teaching was about, right from the first moment. And that was something that took me a while to figure out, that you people were modeling everything right from the very first introduction, although it's not as if it was a secret."

Five of the six students appreciated our strong leadership in this respect, and spoke of doing the same in their own classes. They did not view our approach as authoritarian. As we have seen, they commented repeatedly that they could be themselves in the community and develop as they wished. They talked often of the open, non-judgmental, non-defensive approach of the faculty. They valued our forthright style in community building. Jennifer said: "It's an excellent model for education, one I hope I'll be able to carry on as an educator." Michael commented: "I would encourage future students to be aware that (modeling of community) is happening, and that it's all good stuff...it's all practical stuff right from, Hello, how are you? Here is a little activity for us to get to know one another... It's not only for our edification, it's also stuff we can use... It's something I can use in the classroom, or I can if I modify it in some way." Anita, at the end of the year, remarked:

I hope I will be in a school situation where the principal and teachers are supportive of this kind of environment. If not, then at least in my classroom I will build a community, you know, a respect for being able to share ideas, they feel comfortable, I feel comfortable too...and I'm listening to the kids, the stuff they're talking about, and trying to make that little connection.

The students' observation that we exercised strong leadership in promoting community is somewhat ironic. How can one "impose" relationships, democracy, dialogue, ownership? Nevertheless, we agree with them that the faculty have to take initiative in this matter. Students are not used to this approach to university studies, and they have difficulty believing it will really happen. Besides, the retreat centre has to be booked nine months in advance! But while we press strongly in this direction, we find that the great majority of students accept the approach almost immediately and are pleased to join with us in fostering it. They quickly take ownership of the community. Martha's interesting phrase was: "you guys have really done a good job...helping *us* form a positive community." In general, we think it is legitimate for teachers to take a strong stand on things they believe in, so long as they ensure that students have plenty of room to do the same: say what they think, develop their own ideas, propose alternatives, have an impact on how things are done. The point about dialogue is not that people do not take

stands, but that each party has “symmetrical rights” in furthering the conversation (Benhabib, 1990).

## Conclusion

The interviews indicated that, for all except one of the student teachers, the experience of community in the program was very important, both personally and professionally. The exception provided an interesting contrast. She definitely felt part of the community, and saw its value for personal well-being, but she did not appreciate its role in constructing knowledge about teaching. Right to the end she maintained that she already knew “basically” how to teach — “it’s all in our hearts” — and just needed practice in doing it. We believe that to some extent her anxiety about teaching meant she was not open to a more complex approach. She wanted to keep teaching simple so it would be manageable, not realizing that such an outlook can multiply problems. But whatever the reasons, we learned from her the need to show even more clearly the inadequacy of a transmission approach to teaching, and the extent to which teachers must learn from each other in order to be effective.

The responses of the majority of the student teachers revealed that, in their view, faculty have a key role in building class community: (1) Faculty have to accept students’ idiosyncrasies and personal needs, helping them feel secure and enabling them to develop in their own distinctive way. (2) To a considerable extent, faculty must respect students’ *ideas* and utilize them in the program; much of the “instruction” should take the form of dialogue, with faculty and students learning together. (3) Faculty have to be open to the students at a social and emotional level; they cannot be detached “instructors” who just *talk* about ideas and practices. (4) Faculty must link the learning in the program with the community experience, bridging theory and practice in the life of the community. (5) Faculty have to take a lead in establishing the community, setting up communal structures, speaking explicitly about the importance of community, and modeling the kind of attitudes and relationships they believe are essential to community-oriented education.

It should be mentioned that, based on our experience over the years, we believe there are a number of other dimensions to the faculty role in community building. It is natural that the students, given their distinctive perspective and limited time in the program, would not be aware of all the necessary conditions. We note some of them here to indicate more fully what is involved in building community in a cohort program. (1) Faculty have to establish the cohort structure in the first place. The students took this as a given, but it is a considerable challenge in many schools of education. (2) Faculty must integrate the campus courses and work closely together as a team, in order both to model collaboration and to ensure that concepts and values consistent with a communal approach pervade the program. (3) Faculty should cluster the student teachers in a relatively small number of partner schools, so they experience community with their fellow students in the practicum. (4)

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Faculty have to visit the students often in their practicum schools, in order to extend the class community into the practicum and ensure, as far as possible, that the approach to teaching and learning in the partner schools and practicum classrooms is in keeping with a community approach.

Returning to the student interviews, we were especially struck by the *degree* of importance attached to the class community by the students, and the *extent* of its impact on them both personally and professionally. We had hoped for this, but had not before seen evidence of it in such a clear way. With respect to our central topic, the role of faculty in building community, the main new insight we gained from the study was that faculty must be involved in a *personal* way in fostering a communal approach to teaching and learning. We were surprised to see how many of the students' comments in the interviews were about their relationship with *us*. Their responses revealed that their learning about class community and their willingness to commit themselves to community in the program came about largely because of their relationship with *the faculty*. It was our accepting and caring approach and our linking of community with learning that enabled them, in turn, to have that kind of relationship with their peers. This did not diminish the importance of their relationship with their peers. Clearly, being accepted and supported by their peers was a major reason why they enjoyed and benefited from the community. But it was obvious to them that the class took their lead from us, and without our personal commitment and involvement the community simply would not have emerged in the way it did. This view of how a class community forms does not, in our opinion, imply a top-down conception of community or undermine the principles of democracy and student ownership discussed in this paper. On the contrary, it was our close, democratic relationship with the students that helped foster community. It simply acknowledges that *teachers are key figures in educational settings*: they are charged with establishing the agenda, setting the tone, and making final decisions about what is acceptable. Accordingly, they must be fully and personally involved in something as comprehensive and complex as building class community.

The study helped us see more clearly, then, that the community approach to teaching and learning, and accompanying pedagogical approaches, cannot be fostered merely through lectures, discussions, and books. A large part of this approach has to do with personal relationships, which can only be learned through experience of such relationships. It is impossible for faculty to teach the approach without becoming personally involved with the students in the class community. In order to do this, of course, faculty have to understand and accept the approach at a personal level themselves. One reason for building class communities is so we professors can learn more about this approach to teaching and learning, from and with our students.

In closing, we would like to make one further suggestion. Faculty can be helped to understand the value of a communal approach to teaching and learning by working in a *school of education* that cares about *their* personal needs, respects

*their* ideas, is a warm social and emotional environment for *them*, and takes a stand on the importance of community. The support needed from the school of education to achieve this kind of program, then, is not simply the time, resources, and rewards mentioned earlier, but also the modeling of a communal approach in the way the institution is run. We would encourage further movement in this direction by schools of education, with the ultimate objective that our graduating teachers may be better prepared to build community in their school classrooms.

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