Chapter 11: The contribution of the peer group to the participants’ teaching development

The initiators of the Revivim program, its planners and many of its teachers, related importance to the existence of a group for outstanding students who prepare themselves for teaching Jewish subjects, but it is doubtful whether any of them predicted that the group would be of great importance in the world of the participants. The program did include group components such as educational studies in a closed group framework, a number of unique content courses and “learning in small group” which are enrichment sessions outside the Academic Credit program, The belief of the program planner was that such a learning group would influence the academic departments and encourage a high level of students. However, it is doubtful whether any of them saw the group as a source of learning and personal and pedagogical development, just like the sources of study that the university offers its students or even more of them. It seems that everyone regard the group as a collection of Individuals, even if they have a higher academic potential than their peers in the universities departments.

The findings of this study, which are based on the participants’ stories, were surprising in the weight that all the program participants gave to the group during the years of study and training. They regarded not just to the pleasures of social-social encounters with colleagues, and not even with the help that the students had offered to each other in an attempt to overcome together the required workload of them (such as copy and translation articles) Thy meant to the contribution of group of colleagues to their personal and professional growth and development in various relevant fields.

In the first chapter of the book, which discusses the motives for joining the program, they emphasized that the matter of closed and rather limited group framework was an important motivation for joining the program. Some of the participants have already experienced a year and sometimes two years of academic studies at universities, and the phenomenon of being a anonymous student, one of many who fill the lecture hall, rejected them. Therefore when they were offered the opportunity to join a relatively small group and move together the journey of study, they founded it very striking. In addition, the fact that this is a quality group, which was defined as an outstanding group, was an attractive factor. Nevertheless, none of them predicted that a group of learners will be created here that will maintain a dynamic that will lead to personal and professionalism growth of its participants. We will review the Group’s place in the growth of the participants according to the years of training and afterwards.

The first year

In the first year of the program, which was characterized more than others by formal courses and meetings of the student group they almost didn’t refer to the student group. This year, the academic requirements were high, mainly in the Humanistic departments, and therefore sometimes it created tensions. Toward the end of this year the relationship began to balance: “Suddenly I knew a lot colleagues, everyone is completely different. Everyone is a unique person. We have all the political spectrum views, all variety of religion. At the beginning of the year, there were a lot of arguments and friction. Towards the end of the first year there is more patience in informal discussions. you see the pain of other people, the forms of life of different people “ (Orna).

Began to first steps of cooperation, not much more than what is acceptable with students who share academic courses together: “I had no problem taking on myself to organize the photographs of the texts, so that it will make it easier for everyone. Or to study with someone else, and he would learn from me and that I would learn from him. We are a group of twenty four students and this advantage is very significant. “(Rami). Towards the end of the year, there were already group social activities that are not directly or indirectly related to the framework of academic studies: “I can give you an example that tonight we make a meeting of all the group to celebrate together the coming Holyday. Something beautiful has been created here that is also new to me.” It seems that albeit the participants did not consider as a social group, the process was created by itself.

The second year

In the second year of the program, the participants began to practice in teaching inside a real classromm. Teaching presented them with challenges and was accompanied by difficulties. They seemed realize that mutual assistance with their colleagues can help: “I have a lot to consult with friends who study with me, we sit together and prepare lesson plans. “(Shirley) Assaf, who is a great believer in the power of group organization, still was not excited by the engagements that had arisen. They seemed to him only coincidental and utilitarian: “It happens very weakly, unintentional. We’re working together now, because we’re just teaching the same stuff at the same time. It is comfortable working together, we enrich each other, definitely. We need to institutionalize it, The leader of the program have to institutionalize it. “

Despite Assaf’s comment, some have pointed to the group’s contribution. They emphasized the intellectual atmosphere which characterizes the Revivim group: “I learn a lot from the group discussions on several subjects. I really feel I’m learning from the group. There are specific friends that I have a lot to learn from them “(Shira)” I know that I am behaving and reaching a level that I am reaching today, mainly because I am around good persons.”(Rami) There was one who was less enthusiastic about the group, especially when he looked at the first year and thought that there were those who are pushed themselves more and others are pushed less: “This year is better and they give opportunity to those who has spoken less “(Amos).

**The literature on teacher training indicates that in some training programs the students are a learning group. These are structured training programs, which allow the student group a long period of study. “Learning community”, “group of learners” or “group of colleagues” are terms that define situations in which the social environment allows a group of learners to develop interaction relationship and to influence one another. The theory of social learning emphasizes participation in the community as a basis for learning and the process of building the professional identity. Such cooperative learning requires trust and a sense of belonging within the group and emphasizes the maintenance of support as one of the most important roles of “learning communities.”**

**In comprehensive interdisciplinary studies in the fields of psychology, cognition and brain science, which tracks the human learning process, presents varied learning concepts. One of them presents the great influence of “group learning” on the consciousness and thinking. Lev Vigotzky was one of the most important thinkers in this stream, and his theory which marked a new constructivist stream called “the social constructivism.” This approach is differing to the other approach of constructivism which is detached to a certain extent from the environmental context (eg Piaget). Social constructivism emphasize the environmental and cultural factors which affect consciousness and thinking. According to this approach the cognitive development is created through dialectical interaction between the individual and the social world: The individual construct the social, and at the same time the social construct the individual. The learners are creators of culture and its products simultaneously. Learning is perceived as a dynamic activity in which learners participate in the community and in the learning process, becoming part of it and contribute their part in its construction. Hence learning requires social interaction, discourse, communication and negotiation.**

The third year

What in the first two years of the program seemed sporadic and accidental became in the third year very essential. “We consult and build together the lesson plans. It’s very helpful” (Naama) In this year, the participants in the program often taught the same curriculum and the joint work was actually helpful. However, the participants experienced not only the efficiency but also his pleasure: “I work very well with the my friend. It’s very fun that there are persons you can talk to and work with. We exchange ideas, and it is the basic advantage of the fact that we teach the same curricula “(Ziva) The joining among the students-teachers was made on the basis of friendships and without institutional intervention, out of a sense of personal enrichment: “I am building the program with my friends, it’s something I’ve been dreaming of doing for years. That’s the right way of working for me, it enriches me a lot “(Iris).

The partnership between the students and teachers was not limited to joint planning, but also involved the professional development of the participants and the functions that are usually reserved for the academic staff: “We consult a lot together, watch each other” (Kfir). However, there was one who had already “spoiled the enthusiasm” and expressed reservations about the idea of ​​being together as a group for four years. “I think this this group structure it’s not healthy for four years old. People should meet with more people, to experience more worlds. It is not healthy at this stage of life to be in such a state so long. This greatly distresses the world of the people. “Yoel, too demonstrated what seemed problematic to him in the group: “The students became to like a workers committee, with whom the academic teachers should negotiate, instead of dealing with studies matter.

The fourth year

In the fourth year, the students-teachers completed, more or less, most of their obligations for the theoretical courses in education, the first degree was already behind them and they were in the midst of MA studies. At this stage, the teaching internship became more prevalent amounting to five weekly teaching hours. The participants of the program spread across many schools, each one in another school. It was expected that the group would dissolve. In fact, the direction was reversed. It seems that in this year the group framework reached its peak: “In preparing Bible lessons there was mutual work of a few guys and it’s really important. This is amazing support “(Kinneret). Assaf emphasized that working with his teammates is preferable to him of the program’s pedagogic guidance: “I do not really get help from academic training; many times we do it ourselves. Just build lessons together, talk about it, and consult with each other.

Towards the end of the training period, the participants were able to evaluate the impact of the Group. Some have noted that their colleagues “opened their minds”: “I had an contact with special people in the group. It was a significant group. This has greatly expanded my horizons. (Reut).” “I met some of the best people in the world, really I think these are people with best quality, I have no words, and that’s was my privilege. More than what we learned in the program, it was being together. Something amazing. “ (Iris) At the end of the University period , it is the time for some to consider problems of such an intense group meeting: “There are those who speak a lot and there are those who are silent. I was silent. There is always a margin “(Naama).

The connection between the members of the group was deepened by the fact that during the four years they have similar personal experiences: “We go through similar things, get married, have pregnancies, Joint joys. A significant period in life. I can tell my friends how much It was hard for me, and they would share with me what had happened to them, and that was mutual. “(Shirley) The deepest connection among the members of the group and the knowledge that within a few months the program will end and everyone will go his way raised some ideas “to continue in some way. To establish some kind of community in the town of Beit Shemesh, to live together, create together, do together, trying to build significant things.” (Rami).

**The German sociologist Ferdinand Toennies (1887-1963) distinguished between the community (Gemeinschaft) and society (Gizlshft). The term “community” refers to a group of people who are committed to each other and to the common ideas shared by all of them, a group of people with common interests. “Society” refers to the accumulation of people bound together in non-personal relationships and even out of distancing. Society is usually characterized by large populations living in a defined place (state or community) share a common administration and may also have a common social and cultural heritage. Community on the other hand, it is usually characterized by a much smaller group, with social intimacy in which membership is not merely a matter of formal action but depends on the will of community members.**

**It seems that many of Revivim’s members considered themselves not to be a society which combines teaching students on their way to acquiring the profession, a situation that characterizes the majority of the students who come together for academic studies. They consider themselves as a committed community. Moreover, there were those who did not want to see the completion of studies period as a sign of dismantling the community, but wanted to maintain it. The existence of a community of learners requires creation a significant partnership in learning and teaching, collaboration of academic teachers and student teachers. This approach was not given proper expression in the traditional models of teacher education, and therefore some believe that its absence contributed to the strengthening of “The shock of reality” at the beginning of ordinary teaching. According to this assumption, whether in the training process students would keep peer relationships, it will help them to bridge the gap between what happens in the framework of training and what is happening in frameworks of the school. The collaboration and dialogue among members of the community will contribute for the development and support of educational work, and the participants in the learning community would contribute to each other to develop a personal and professional identity. There are even those who claim to existing of community of teachers (as distinguished from a teacher’s society) will allow for significant changes occur in schools.**

**Dan Lortie in his classic book “School teacher” use the phrase “the mutual solitude of the teachers,” which characterizes his understanding of a existing but undesirable situation. On the one hand he points to the fact that the group of fellows teachers are the most important among teachers in terms of ideas of instruction; But on the other hand he points to teachers’ tendency to work in loneliness and the fact that the informal encounters between them, such as in the teachers’ room, thay do not usually deal with education and teaching matters. It seems that the situation described in this study, which deals with students of Revivim, is a reversal picture to the picture presented by Lortie, and the desire to continue and maintain this community attests to a Interesting and productive tendency.**

Fifth and sixth years

With the completion of the program and the dispersal of the graduates in schools throughout the country, there were those who expressed feelings of loneliness: “Today I’m lonely, look, I actually have friends I consult with them. Not always, because everyone is terribly busy. A lot of friends say there is no one to consult with. I try to make good lessons, but I do not have whom to talk. It was very convenient for me to have someone to consult with him “(Shira). Kfir, who found himself distancing from his friends, is very lonely and busy in one of the school “We were a support group when we studying together. At that we prepare our lesson together. I work mainly with Giora. He is now far away from me. We distributed the tasks between us. It was a group process but today I do not feel that there is a group. “

The four years of training and the courageous connections between the group members brought some of them decided to maintain their relationship as a group: “As a group we teach and live in Beit Shemesh, we are here together and help each other. We live close, it is not that there is no variance in the group, there is great variation in the group and it was a fascinating intellectual dialogue that reached high level.” (Asaf) The members of the “Beit Shemesh” group teach in several schools in the town and the surrounding area, everyone lives with his/her family, but they maintain strong connections among them not only as a support group. Mostly they seem to have a social vision that connects them: “We raise our children and work here in the belief that we have to do this and it is important to take part in a social change “(Shirley) As part of the Beit Shemesh Partnership every week they meat for joint study.

Along with the cohesion and preservation of the social framework, we also heard voices, and perhaps even stronger voices, that looked back not only nostalgically, but with reservations about the dominant prevalent voice among the Revivim students: “There was a feeling that the leftist-political tone is the dominant tone, and around that I felt tension. It was very intense and often unpleasant to make an opposite voice. “(Amos) Reut, who, after graduating, moved to a remote settlement, physically separated from most of the group and from this location reviewed the group’s place among the other elements of the program: “My criticism of Revivim is not about the program itself, but mainly about the dynamics between us. We spent some time listening to ourselves, and did not understand that we need many pedagogical tools. We did not internalize theories, did not give any chance to study. “

Benny, as opposed to Reut and Amos, appreciate the group’s contribution: “I can say that the students’ statements during the courses were usually much more significant contrary to the academic staff. There was actually mutual fertilization.” Shirley, who continued to belong to the group by living in Beit Shemesh, held Benny mind: “The most significant component of the program was the group, I want to continue the connection between us, a connection at a higher measure.” Iris, who also joined the group at Beit Shemesh, said she often gets nostalgic memories for group cohesion: “There are days like this when I remember my friends and I remember this social giving. We do it not just because it’s important, but because it’s important to our lives. “

A few years later ...

We returned to the participants at the end of the ninth year, after five years of teaching as ordinary schoolteachers and after they finished their commitment to the program. From a distance of five years, quite a few of them relished their experience as a group. Kinneret, who did not hide her reservations about some component of the group experience, saw the overall picture in a very positive light: “We worked a lot together and asked for help from each other, it was excellent. Today I feel far from the group, I would very much like to continue this.” Some of the friends passed, as stated, to live close to each other in the town of Beit Shemesh and continued to maintain a partnership community at one level or another: “The group decided on the move to Beit Shemesh and we are a part of this. It’s not easy at all, but when you believe in it, it’s important “(Shirley).

Most of the members who were fascinated by the group meeting during the training period presented the group has helped their personal, moral and professional growth far beyond the instrumental contribution to lesson preparation and to the joint work: “I think that from a moral point of view I grew up on several steps thanks to the group. I was mostly silent, but I listened a lot and learned. There are very valuable people in the group “(Giora) Iris spoke about the total contribution of the group, which touches on almost all her life elements: “I owe a lot to Revivim, to all the training and especially to the group of Revivim. I can’t imagine my life without the group. It was a house. really. The first thing I think of Revivim is about my daughter, that in the year she was born, every day I was at the university from 8 to 8 and those who accompanied me were my friends. “A similar picture emerges from Shirley’s words: “The most important part of this program is the group that has influenced my life up to this day.”

Five years after the graduation, all the participants are deeply immersed in their personal lives: spouses, weddings and children, and at the same time flowing with their professional development. The Beit Shemesh group continues to maintain personal and group ties. However, in the course of time some of the connections evaporated: “The reason I went to Beit Shemesh was the friends. I wanted to continue studying with them. After four years we learned so strongly and meaningful it was clear that I wanted to learn with them. Unfortunately, at this stage we could not learn together anymore. Every one was very deep in establishing the families, with his children and can’t come to the group learning meatings”(Iris)

Alongside those enthusiastic about Revivim’s group during and after the training period, there were, as noted, less enthusiastic.: “Of course I did not get in touch with everyone and it’s natural that I connected with some people that I thought I feel a great dialogue with them. But certainly not with everyone. I’m not in touch with no one. But still tell you if I miss it? No. I think I’m the only one with no contact with anyone “(Ziva), Kinneret who declared that she lacked work with her teammates, did not avoid her criticism of what appeared to her to be a blow to the status of the girls: “There was something in the lessons as defined by one of our girls, that the girls were deaf. The boys really took our self-confidence away. I remember the lessons themselves I came and did not understand what they were saying. “ Five years after graduation, the academic agenda of Yoel’s is no longer disturbed by the group, but he is remained reserved: “Very nice people. It’s fun to learn with nice people compared to what happens at university when you study without a group. But there were lessons that it interfered, too much talk. I repeat what I have already said: the dynamics as a group in general, not good “(Yoel).

Conclusion

It seems that despite the reservations of some of the participants, the following word, said by Iris can be an appropriate summary of the entire chapter: “I think the program planners did not mean it. The group is the most central thing in the training process. So you ask how my teaching has changed. It changed thanks to the personalities I met. It is to learn from each other, also learn together text. There is no doubt that this encounter enriched the personality and shaped my being a teacher “(Iris).

Indeed, the great and unexpected discovery of the program is the group’s place in the professional and personal growth of each of the student-teachers. Although the literature who deals with teaching, emphasizes the importance of the community of learners, and the literature on the teacher development emphasizes the importance of the community of teachers, it seems that they have not sufficiently insisted on the power of a group of student-teachers as a community of learners who help each other to prepare themselves for teaching. In light of the existing dissatisfaction with the teacher training programs, the testimony of participants of this program should be a challenge for anyone planning the teacher training programs. We will also refer to this issuein the chapter that closes this book.