ABSTRACT. This study took place during the first 2 years of a partnership between three cooperating elementary schools and a college of education. The purpose of the interpretive phenomenological study was to learn from cooperating teachers, student-teachers and college instructors about the transitions that accompanied the change in the culture of schooling they experienced through the newly established partnership, and to attempt to understand their experiences through their explanations of the transitions they identified. On the basis of the data analysis, we identified seven transitions experienced by the participants:

- From discrete processes to parallel, open processes.
- From individual work to collaboration.
- From seeing the ‘other’ as an object to seeing the ‘other’ as a critical friend.
- From leading to responding.
- From the conception of knowledge as an object to the conception of knowledge as a process.
- From viewing learning as a linear process to viewing it as a spiral process.
- From viewing their work environment as a closed system to viewing it as an open system.

In this paper, we describe and provide examples of each of these transitions and show how they are interrelated and how each one is both a cause and an effect of the others. These findings increased our knowledge about how the school and college altered each other’s consciousness.

KEY WORDS: qualitative inquiry; hermeneutic phenomenology; transition vs. change; school-college partnership.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the school–college partnership has become one of the most prevalent strategies for educational change in English-speaking
countries. In UK and Wales, partnerships are now mandated for initial teacher education. In USA, many partnerships (or professional development schools) that may have started as the initiative of one or two faculty members and a few schools are now affiliated with powerful networks of schools and school districts across the nation, and supported by government and private agencies that helped them to become a strong influence on teaching and teacher education (Linn, 2000). In our country, partnerships between schools and teacher education colleges are only now beginning to emerge as isolated initiatives of the teacher colleges. At present, there are no official guidelines for establishing partnerships. No distinctions have yet been made between the role of the schools and the role of institutions of higher education, as have been articulated in UK, for example (DfES, 1992). The present project was, therefore, constructed on virgin ground. Nonetheless, it drew on two decades of experience accumulated by partnerships in English-speaking countries. We, the initiators of the project, followed reports of how these partnerships were established and how they operate. We have studied how they articulate their objectives, the gains for schools and for teacher education programs as well as the tradeoffs for the various stakeholders. On the basis of this body of knowledge, we have come to the conclusion that a school–university partnership depends on individual circumstances and on the socio-cultural–historical context, and that we, therefore, needed to create our own version of this new form of teacher education. Moreover, since we are not yet able to articulate the features of our own version, we decided to identify them from our own experience.

In what follows, we shall present a brief summary of what we have learned about the evolution of the partnership concept, of the concerns of teacher educators involved in partnerships and how they reflect issues raised by theoreticians in the field of organizational change.

2. A Brief History of the Partnership Concept

Furlong (2000) links the partnership drive in UK to the Government’s launching of the Green Paper ‘teachers: meeting the challenge of change’ in 1988, which offered schools and institutions of teacher education a new vision of professionalism characterized by constant self-improvement through critical reflection and other forms of