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The "Constant Changing of Myself": Revising Roles in Undergraduate Teacher Preparation

Alison Cook-Sather, Bryn Mawr College

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Abstract

In this article the author describes the revision of the traditional roles of teacher educator, experienced mentor teacher, high school student, and pre-service teacher required by a project based in the undergraduate, secondary teacher education program she directs. Although role revisions can pose profound challenges to people's identities and relationships, participants in this project experience the "constant changing of myself" that the role revisions require as liberating, empowering, and educative. The role revisions foster the development of more dynamic and productive relationships than exist among players in traditional roles in teacher preparation, and they inspire participants to develop a more flexible sense of identity. These outcomes enhance the educational experiences of all the players involved.

Revision of traditional roles is a central component of many school/university partnerships that aim to make teacher preparation and professional development "a shared responsibility" (Burnstein, Kretschmer, Smith, & Gudoski, 1999; Griffen, 1999). These revisions can take the form of participants playing new roles in old contexts, old roles in new contexts, or new roles in new contexts (for just a few examples, see Anderson, Rolheiser, & Gordon, 1998; Fu & Shelton, 2002; Johnston, 1997; Stoddart, 1993; Szuminiski, Zath, & Benton, 1999; and Welsch, 1999). In the spirit of these efforts but also moving beyond them in some significant ways, I have facilitated for the last ten years a project premised on revision of the roles of four key players in the undergraduate, secondary teacher education program I direct: teacher educator, experienced mentor teacher, high school student, and pre-service teacher. Because roles are so deeply intertwined in our social fabric, revising them can pose profound challenges to people's identities and relationships. Within this project, however, participants experience the "constant changing of myself" that the role revisions require as liberating, empowering, and educative. Indeed, the role revisions foster the development of more dynamic and productive relationships than exist among players in traditional roles in teacher preparation, and they inspire participants to develop as well a more flexible sense of identity. These outcomes enhance the educational experiences of all the players involved.

Although the goal of many school/university partnerships is to "abandon traditional roles and begin a truly collaborative venture" (Rice, 2002, p. 58), inertia often guides the trajectory of institutions and individuals and can prompt a "reverting to traditional roles" (Szuminiski, Zath, & Benton, 1999, p. 304). And yet there is wide agreement among educators that, in striving to build "symbiotic partnerships" (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988) between schools and universities, there must be a negotiation of roles, statuses, and relationships in order to honor the knowledge, skills, and experiences of participants from both contexts (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves,

1992; White, Deegan, Allexsaht, 1997). This kind of negotiation requires attention to power imbalances (Robinson & Darling-Hammond, 1994; Zeichner, 1996) and careful navigation of "uncharted territories, ambiguities, and institutional complexities" (Johnston, 1997, p. 1). Among the generative ways of thinking about and engaging in these kinds of careful negotiations and navigations are the creation of "boundary spanners" who assume "cross-institutional roles" (Sandholtz & Finan, 1999, p. 23, p. 14); the creation of "blended communities" within which participants engage in "generating visionary teaching/learning relationships…and environments" (Luke et al., 2000, p. 9); and the construction of various and multiple roles, developed through "an interactive process—a very long and difficult process for the participants, often accompanied by uncertainty and fear" (Powell & McGowan, 1995, p. 20; see also Dana, 1998). A brief revisiting of the concept of role illustrates what makes roles sometimes seem fixed and inflexible but also illuminates their potential to be more dynamic, support more productive relationships, and foster a more flexible sense of identity.

Roles and Realities: Terms of Discussion and Experience

A "role" is a part, a function, a prescribed piece in a performance, or the expected behavior or participation in a social interaction. In drama, where the term comes from (via the French word, *rôle*), roles are constructs meant to represent essential qualities of people; the different characters in a play throw into relief, through contrast and juxtaposition, the different qualities each represents. Unless the purpose of the play is to disrupt our assumptions about role, a character in one role in a play does not take the lines or take on the behaviors of another character. In general, a dramatic production is convincing and compelling in proportion to how well the characters enact their well-defined and clearly delineated roles. While the roles are defined in part through interaction with others in their respective roles, the individual performers' identities are distinct.

Sociologists apply these definitions to daily social interactions. Here, a role is "a collection of expectations that others have for a person occupying a particular status" (Anderson & Taylor, 2000, p. 120), with status understood to be an established position in a social structure that carries with it a particular social value (p. 119). "'Role' connotes a set of rights and duties as defined and sanctioned by the system in which the person acts" (Skidmore, 1975, p. 12). In addition, "role implies the existence of other roles that have bearing on each other" (Skidmore, 1975, p. 21). This application of "role" to daily life introduces powerful and power-laden terms: "status," "established position," "social structure," "social value," "rights and duties," "defined and sanctioned." In contrast to parts in a play, roles in daily life are, in conventional terms, about enduring—and, to a degree, imposed—identities within established, hierarchical systems as opposed to temporary performances in fictional scenes. These roles, too, are recognizable and comprehensible owing in part to their coherence within life beyond the stage, but their embodiment is bounded.

As the sociological definitions suggest, people occupying different roles are ascribed different degrees and kinds of power. These power dynamics affect interactions and people's sense of themselves, which are closely intertwined. They influence people's thinking about what they are responsible for, what is possible for them, and what is not. In teacher education programs, as in all educational settings, participation is often scripted according to these definitions and assumptions; players in such scenes tend to have clearly delineated impressions of what is theirs to speak to or act upon in relation to others. The clear parameters that roles offer simplify relationships and interactions; knowing "where one stands"—on the stage, in a social scene, or in an academic context—makes performance more straightforward, less uncomfortable, and— here's the trade-off—more circumscribed.

A consideration of how roles are conceptualized and enacted in school/university collaborations reveals that those collaborations that seem to unfold most smoothly are those in which participants maintain, to a significant extent, their traditionally prescribed roles. For instance, Fu & Shelton (2002) deliberately drew on their respective sources of expertise as classroom-based teacher and university-based faculty member to co-conceptualize and co-teach a teacher education course that strove to integrate theoretical and practical perspectives, thus pooling their knowledge and experiences (Maynard & Furlong, 1994), equally emphasizing and valuing each (Heikkinen et al., 1992). Such efforts succeed in part because they do not significantly challenge the hierarchy of authority in the educational institutions within which they unfold, although they do alter participation structures within the context of university-based teacher preparation—traditionally the domain of teacher educators alone. Such collaborations can create richer experiences for both participants in and instructors of teacher education courses at the university, but they do so by drawing on, and thus reinforcing, traditional sources of knowledge and authority.

In contrast, when participants in collaborations are challenged to take on new identities and responsibilities, they attempt to "[alter] the traditional roles and power structures that are deeply embedded in the educational system and to which we are accustomed" (Szuminiski, Zath, & Benton, 1999, p. 293). The Alternative Teacher Education (ATE) Program at a university in Georgia offers an example. ATE developed a partnership that brought together university teacher education faculty, school-based supervising teachers, and teacher certification candidates as part of a larger project to "'co-reform'" education at both the K-12 and the university levels (Szuminiski, Zath, & Benton, 1999, p. 296). Szuminiski, Zath, & Benton (1999) explain that the university teacher education faculty, "accustomed to being the most dominant and oftentimes the only voice" (p. 298), broadened their roles in two ways: as colleagues with others in several

teacher education departments and by inviting school-based cooperating teachers and certification students into conversations about planning. The school-based cooperating teachers met with the university teacher education faculty and the certification candidates in biweekly planning meetings and eventually felt themselves to be “co-developers” of the certification students’ experiences, moving from a relationship that was “impositional” (i.e., here is your student teacher) to one that was “interactional” (Szuminiski, Zath, & Benton, 1999, p. 301). And finally, the certification candidates shifted from the role of passive recipient of knowledge toward having input into how their teacher preparation evolved and negotiating their roles in that preparation.

In their analysis of this partnership, Szuminiski, Zath, & Benton point to the uncertainties that persisted among participants: “university faculty were unaccustomed to involving so many people in the decision-making process; supervising teachers were unaccustomed to planning experiences for students; students were unaccustomed to providing input to both supervising teachers and faculty members regarding their own learning” (1999, p. 304; see also Stoddart, 1993, p. 13). The term “unaccustomed,” like the term “expected” in the sociological definition of “role,” points to how roles embody certain kinds of established and fixed notions of identity and responsibility—and, more broadly, experience—and to the discomfort that comes of contradicting these while still adhering to the larger structures of which they are a part.

Revising roles means calling into question the relationships and identities, as well as the responsibilities, of everyone involved in a collaboration. Inherent in each relationship of people in different roles are connections to others occupying other roles, which puts them into particular, established relationships of power. Within established traditional hierarchies, each person’s role is premised on the limits of someone else’s, and there are generally various levels of struggle, both covert and overt, regarding who is in charge and who gets listened to. To break out of this

dynamic, we need to ensure not only that everyone involved in teacher preparation gets listened to but also that we break out of binary, zero-sum notions of power and out of the confines that the construct and particular iterations of "role" impose.

A Case of Revising

Role as a construct functions both as an integral part of how we conceptualize and participate in institutions and as a hindrance to imagining and enacting other, less clearly prescribed—and potentially more dynamic, productive, and educative—relationships and responsibilities. I use the example of a school/college collaboration called Teaching and Learning Together (TLT) to illustrate the potential of revising roles in ways that productively challenge the powerful and power-laden terms associated with role: "status," "established position," "social structure," "social value," "rights and duties," "defined and sanctioned."[i] The premises according to which I designed TLT were that by revising the roles of teacher educator, experienced mentor teacher, high school student, and pre-service teacher, all participants in this undergraduate teacher preparation program would not only gain immediate insights into their own and others' educational experiences that they would be unlikely to gain in a traditionally configured preparation, but they would also develop a set of convictions and resources that would help them in future to recognize and respond to ideas, people, and situations with an inclination toward critique and revision rather than an acceptance of givens.

As has been the case with other efforts to redefine the responsibilities of those involved in teacher preparation, such as those I mentioned earlier, there are ways in which TLT supports participants drawing on the authority of their prescribed identities and traditional roles. In other ways, and like other efforts I mentioned, the project challenges some participants to take on new identities and responsibilities in a familiar context and others to take on new identities and responsibilities in an unfamiliar context. What sets this project apart from those I discussed

previously and from virtually all other school/university partnerships in teacher education programs of which I am aware is the revision of the role of high school student. That revision, in combination with the revision of the other three roles—teacher educator, experienced mentor teacher, and pre-service teacher—makes TLT a unique model from which others in teacher preparation can learn. It is in large part, I suggest, the inclusion of high school students that inspires participants in TLT to engage in more dynamic, productive, and educative relationships and to develop more flexible identities.

Revising the Role of Teacher Educator

The revision of my role as teacher educator had to precede as well as attend the other three redefinitions. I revise my role by removing myself from center stage—the person solely responsible for the college-based preparation of pre-service teachers—the role occupied by most teacher educators in teacher preparation programs. I assume instead the role of facilitator of multiple dialogues intended to create opportunities for participants to benefit from one another's perspectives. I invite experienced mentor (school-based) teachers to collaborate with me within the college-based course as well as create space for a separate dialogue between these experienced teachers and pre-service teachers, both within and beyond the course; I create a space for dialogue between pre-service teachers and high school students and a space for high school students to offer their perspectives in separate conversations, both within and beyond the course; and I invite the pre-service teachers to take up the role of dialogue partner with experienced teachers, with me, with high school students, with one another, and within themselves in these various and multiple relationships and contexts.

The ways I interact with participants in TLT complicate my identity and sources of authority, both drawing on and obscuring them. As someone with experience teaching in the high school classroom, but experience that is now twenty years out of date, I have the authority of

experience attenuated by time, and I explicitly share this source of authority with the experienced mentor teachers. As someone with a doctoral degree in education and a list of publications, I have the authority that comes of both studying and generating theory, but I frame that authority not as the only legitimate source of educational theory but rather as one of many. As someone who holds a faculty position at a prestigious institution of higher education, I have the authority of position, but I re-position myself as one among multiple knowers about education. And as someone who has worked in teacher education for fifteen years, I have the authority of experience that comes from preparing people to teach and supporting their ongoing professional development, and yet by collaborating so extensively with people currently working in schools (teachers and students), by ensuring that they play central and complex roles in this teacher preparation program, I emphasize the importance of time- and context-specific experience and knowledge as these are embodied in multiple players.

In these ways I complicate the terms of definition associated with role: I change my status and de-stabilize my established position by putting myself in a different relation to others involved in teacher preparation; in so doing I challenge and in fact reconstruct the social structure that typically frames and supports teacher preparation; and I redefine both my own and others' rights and duties within the teacher preparation process. As the person conceptualizing and facilitating the collaboration within the context of my education program, I can choose to resist in these ways any prescribed or expected part. I cannot make a similar choice for the other participants, but I can create spaces that they can take up and occupy in a variety of ways.

Redefining the Role of Experienced Mentor Teacher

In part because we offer only a single methods course to pre-service teachers preparing to teach in all subject areas, and in part in concurrence with assertions such as Rigden's that "not until teacher education programs are redesigned to include practicing teachers…work[ing]

alongside faculty" will such preparation be effective (1997, p. 53), I collaborate with experienced, subject area, secondary teachers in the annual process of co-designing and co-teaching the two culminating courses required for certification through the Bryn Mawr/Haverford Education Program. These teachers do the following: work with me during the previous summer to plan the courses; participate in one third of the class meetings at the college, working with pre-service teachers on subject-specific pedagogical approaches as well as on any other pedagogical issues that come up; maintain a weekly, private, email correspondence with the pre-service teachers in their subject area; and serve as critical readers of the pre-service teachers' portfolio drafts, which are due at specified points throughout the year.

The teachers whom I invite to participate are those I have worked with informally over the years or whom colleagues recommend. They are teachers committed to learning from as well as teaching prospective teachers, and they teach in a range of settings, including public and private, urban and suburban, middle and high schools. Because, as mentioned above, we have only a single methods course, we are required by the state of Pennsylvania to offer subject specific pedagogy preparation in some form or other, and I choose this collaborative approach, paying teachers to participate as they might be paid to offer workshops. Each year, approximately five teachers participate, each one working with one, two, or sometimes three pre-service teachers in a particular subject area. These teachers are not those in whose classrooms the pre-service teachers will complete student teaching, thus they participate entirely within the context of the college class and over email.

The teachers' inclusion in the college-based component of teacher preparation constitutes a significant revision of the role of experienced mentor teacher. Typically, experienced mentor teachers play a major role in school classrooms, as cooperating teachers or supervisors, but not in the college context. I also work cooperatively with cooperating teachers and supervisors, but

revising the role of experienced mentor teacher in terms both of place and responsibility challenges the experienced mentor teachers and all the others in the collaboration to think of their identities and relationships differently. Their presence at the college also reconstructs the social structure that typically frames and supports teacher preparation. Their rights and duties shift as well, as does their status, but not to an entirely different set of rights and duties than those to which they and others are accustomed. Rather, their roles are extended, complicated—revised through expansion not replacement or reduction.

The accustomed rights and duties experienced mentor teachers bring to the classroom constitute a traditional source of their authority: they contribute current, classroom-based knowledge, and since "teachers who are currently teaching high school students have a wealth of practical knowledge about what new teachers need to know and do when they become teachers" (Resta, Askins, & Huling, 1999, p. 64), their contributions ensure that these experienced teachers possess a certain credibility with pre-service teachers (Edwards & Wilkens-Canter, 1997). One pre-service teacher describes this dynamic: "[What was most beneficial] was [the classroom-based teacher's] experience of the students. She knows what the students' attention spans and commitments are. She was able to foresee what would work and what wouldn't with my lesson plans."

A somewhat less accustomed aspect of the experienced mentor teachers' role in the collaboration is that of learner, a dimension of their role that may or may not be emphasized or experienced to any great degree when they serve as cooperating teachers. One experienced mentor teacher explains: "Working with the college students keeps me up on the latest trends in education." Another states: "I was able to discuss and consider new and evolving theories of education that would otherwise pass me by in the daily isolation of my classroom." Studies have found that when practicing teachers collaborate with college-based educators, they have the rare

opportunity to gather some new theoretical perspectives to bring to bear on their practice and "thus remain current in their field" (Di Sibio & Gamble, 1997, p. 536). But what makes the role revision in TLT different from a collaboration only with a college-based educator is that the project challenges the experienced mentor teachers to collaborate with and learn from the pre-service teachers as well. One experienced mentor teacher describes the dynamic this way: "I see [the experienced teachers] as resources and, more importantly, as students of the pre-service teachers."

The roles the experienced mentor teachers play within the context of the college-based course are complicated in that these teachers are at once co-teachers, mentors, and learners. Within this more complicated identity and set of responsibilities and opportunities, various sources and manifestations of power and authority are always at play, sometimes conforming to and sometimes contradicting traditional structures and dynamics. At its best, the collaboration fosters reciprocal teaching and learning relationships and a more flexible sense of identity among the experienced mentor teachers articulated above.

Redefining the Role of High School Student

Designed to redress the fact that in almost all formal conversations that shape educational policies and practices in the United States, students' voices are not among those with the power and authority to define what prospective teachers should know and be able to do (Cook-Sather, 2002a and 2002b),[ii] this component of the project has two main parts. The first is a weekly exchange of emails between each pre-service teacher enrolled in the penultimate certification course candidates take, which precedes their practice teaching experience, and a student who attends a local public high school. The dialogue is a private exchange between the pre-service teacher and high school student pairs focused on pedagogical issues. This written dialogue is complemented and informed by the second part of the project: weekly conversations between the high school students and my school-based collaborator at the high school. These conversations

adhere generally to the topics listed on the syllabus for my course (such as creating a classroom environment conducive to learning, designing engaging lessons, creating effective tests, etc.) but also extend into areas the high school students identify as relevant. The conversations held among the high school students are audiotaped, transcribed, and given to the pre-service teachers as part of their required reading for the course. At the end of the semester the pre-service teachers draw on their email exchange, course readings, and these transcripts to write formal analyses of what they have learned from participating in this project. (See Cook-Sather, 2002a and 2002b, for other discussions of this project.)

This component of TLT represents a more dramatic revising of roles than the component involving experienced teachers and thus a greater unsettling of traditional power dynamics. High school students are ascribed far less power in the established educational hierarchy than classroom teachers, and they are rarely asked for their perspectives on school. Although educators have called for greater attention to student perspectives since the early 1990s (Erickson & Shultz, 1992; Fullan, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Levin, 1994; Nieto, 1994; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992), students are still rarely asked to contribute to discussions about what is good or problematic about schooling (Fielding, 2001; Kirby, 2001; Rudduck & Flutter, 1998; Rubin & Silva, 2003; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). And yet researchers and teachers have documented that when teachers listen to students, they can begin to see the world from those students' perspectives (Heshusius, 1995; Rodgers, 2002; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001) and make what they teach more accessible to students (Commeyras, 1995; Dahl, 1995; Lincoln, 1995; Johnson & Nicholls, 1995).

While students are rarely consulted regarding their perspectives on school and schooling, even less frequently are they asked to participate in teacher preparation in any role other than member of the class taken over by a student teacher. A few projects attempt to include students

in more active roles in teacher preparation through establishing email exchanges. Through one such project, university students and elementary school partners held weekly discussions by email focused on literature (Sullivan, 1998). Through another, pre-service teachers and tenth-grade students shared an email exchange focused on writing as a tool for learning across the curriculum (Sipe, 2000). Other school/university partnerships cast pre-service teachers more explicitly in a teacher role, such as the Better Together project and website, which connected pre-service teachers with seventh-grade reluctant readers through pen-pal correspondences and email, a variety of small and large group technology-based activities, tutoring, and classroom visits and teaching (Bowman & Edenfield, 2000). Only one other teacher preparation program of which I am aware positions high school students in the role of mentor of student teachers (Youens & Hall, 2004).

Thus the social structure that typically frames and supports teacher preparation tends systemically to exclude students. TLT challenges this social structure as well as the rights and duties, and the status, of students. As with the experienced mentor teachers, it does not replace one identity and set of responsibilities with another; rather, the students' roles are expanded and complicated. This change is a welcome one to students; they embrace the opportunity to assume an expanded set of rights and duties, to shift their identity and status from student alone to student and teacher.

One high school student who participated in TLT captures the basic experience of most high school students: "Sometimes I wish I could sit down with one of my teachers and just tell them what I exactly think about their class. It might be good, it might be bad, it's just that [I] don't have the opportunity to do it." Within TLT, students are challenged to formulate their thoughts, find words to capture them, and assume the authority to assert them (see MacBeath, Myers, & Demetriou, 2001, for a discussion of this point). One high school student articulates

what is entailed in her change of role within the dialogue: "The topics we spoke on are not commonly discussed with students. We don't often get the chance to give the constructive criticism that so many of us have thoughts on." Others articulate how this change of role within the collaboration prompts them to pay critical attention to, and sometimes change, their role as students in school: "Being a part of this project helped to make me a better student by re-evaluating myself, my study habits, and my teachers' teaching methods."

The revision of roles constituted by the inclusion of high school students in TLT not only challenges the high school students to take on new roles. It also challenges them to rethink their assumptions about themselves as knowers and learners, and it challenge the pre-service teachers to rethink their assumptions regarding who is a legitimate source of knowledge about teaching and learning. The necessity of this rethinking further challenges pre-service teachers in particular to rethink relationships between and among students, teachers, school structures, and educational practices. (See Cook-Sather, forthcoming, for another discussion of this set of issues.)

Redefining the Role of Pre-Service Teacher

Pre-service teachers at the undergraduate level are accustomed to reading and writing about theory, observing in schools and classrooms, and imagining more than enacting their identities as teachers. They are generally not accustomed to interacting with multiple dialogue partners playing multiple, complex roles with the goal of integrating all they hear and experience as well as all they bring into a coherent set of principles for practice.

TLT challenges pre-service teachers to collaborate with experienced teachers, giving but also gaining new understandings. When the pre-service and experienced teachers feel that their respective sources of power and authority balance one another out, they experience this exchange as reciprocal: as one pre-service teacher explains, "It's a great feeling to know that, not only am I going to be using some of Maria's ideas in my classroom next year, but that she is excited about

trying some of my ideas." This is the flipside of the dynamic articulated by the experienced mentor teacher in a previous section of this discussion. The pre-service teacher, like the experienced mentor teacher, is both teacher and learner.

When, however, one or the other, or both, do not feel equally powerful or authoritative, the exchange can feel unbalanced: one pre-service teacher states that she "appreciated the advice the [teachers] were giving to us as experienced high school teachers" but also felt "that it set up a teacher/learner situation in which we, the [pre-service teachers], were listening to all the advice of the experienced teachers without opportunity for input of our own." Depending on how much authority an individual pre-service teacher ascribes both to a particular source of knowledge (i.e., theory, practical experience) and to herself, she may or may not feel empowered in her own role, able to accept experienced teachers' insights, and equally able to offer her own. The majority of participants feel, however, that through the collaboration their roles and responsibilities are expanded and made more flexible, and as a result, they feel that they learn deep and lasting lessons about learning and teaching in revised roles. One pre-service teacher explains: "I think that when practicing educators are present as often and as strongly as they have been during my preparation, future educators can develop a strong feeling of purpose, togetherness, idealism, etc., all leading to confidence in the first few crucial weeks and months of teaching. This program models the belief that teaching should not be a solitary profession, but that we should all learn from and collaborate with each other."

TLT also challenges pre-service teachers to collaborate with high school students, revising both the traditional role of pre-service teacher and the traditional role of student in doing so. Many pre-service teachers resist this revision early on, dismissing the high school students as authorities on educational practice—insisting on keeping them locked within the traditional role of learner. In a particularly extreme case, one pre-service teacher judged the simple sentences in

her high school partner's letters to be "indications of either stupidity, insincerity or both" and she thought to herself: "if this was the level we were going to communicate on, then I was certainly not going to get anything out of the project." Like almost all of the pre-service teachers who participate in TLT, however, this pre-service teacher revised her stance. She wrote in her final analysis of the project, "I made the mistake of interpreting her different (from mine) writing style and her level of comfort with written self-expression as lack of intelligence. . . Now I see that I had abdicated my responsibility in our conversations and in the relationship as a whole." This pre-service teacher ended up devoting a fair amount of time to analyzing her role in the dialogue, her assumptions about her partner's role, and her failure to accept the reconstructed social structure, the redefined rights and duties, and the shifted status of participants that TLT provided. Her failure kept her locked into fixed notions, and enactments, of particular roles and hindered all participants' educational experience.

Other pre-service teachers embrace from the beginning the revisions of their own and the high school students' roles, the authority that each has, and the understandings that result from their dialogue. One pre-service teacher writes about the exchange of letters with her high school partner: "Within each paragraph [in the emails] the dynamic of who was teaching and who was learning changed. We were both students, experiencing teachers, at the same time as I was preparing to become one." Another wrote: "[My high school partner] and I built our knowledge [together], rather than giving it to one another, and neither one of us was ever only a teacher or student in the traditional sense." In these instances, the pre-service teachers embrace the shifting, undefined quality of their relationships and responsibilities and thus prepare themselves to be more dynamic learners, engage in more productive relationships, and develop a more flexible sense of identity.

Conclusion

Revising prescribed roles within the traditional hierarchy of teacher preparation allows participants to gain critical insight into how the education system works and make different choices about how to participate within it. As one pre-service teacher asserts: “People can choose to close themselves into a role, or they can step in and out of many.” Developing such openness and flexibility during teacher preparation can lead to greater openness and flexibility in subsequent teaching. Continuing to step in and out of roles and providing as well opportunities for her students to do the same, another participant in TLT describes her practice after three years of teaching: “I don’t think it always occurs to teachers to ask students about [their opinions on approaches to teaching]. But, after my experience [in TLT], I do it as a matter of course in my classroom.”

Expanding rather than circumscribing the learning opportunities of everyone involved in teacher preparation means that participants need not feel constrained by their status or established position as they are defined and sanctioned within a social structure. Embracing this challenge, one pre-service teacher asserts: “I want to always be thinking, interpreting, exchanging. I realize that the school system will force me into a role that is more closed than I would like it to be, but there is no reason why I cannot interpret it as I like.” Another pre-service teacher articulates her embracing of the challenge this way: “I have come to realize that…my students will provide me with new ideas and my incorporation of those experiences into my identity as a teacher exemplifies the flexibility and constant changing of myself.” The “constant changing of myself” that this pre-service teacher embraces, and which constitutes the first part of the title of this article, captures the greatest benefit of the revision of roles supported through TLT.

The kinds of revision for which I have argued here lead us away from such traditional questions as, “What is the role of the teacher and what is the role of the student?” Rorty (1970) argued over thirty years ago against such dichotomizing of the roles of teacher and student.

Revising roles and moving toward greater flexibility of identity and responsibilities in teaching and learning can lead us to ask instead questions such as, "Who is learning in what ways with whom when?" With this greater openness and flexibility, we can refuse not only, as Ellsworth (1977) puts it, "to let the question of the teacher-student be settled" (p. 140), we can also refuse to let the identities and relationships of participants in teacher education be settled. Ellsworth explains, in relation to the teacher/student dyad, that "[this] means working in and through the oscillating space of difference between teacher and student as positions within a structure of relations. And it's in that space of difference-between that a new concept of teacher-student relation erupts. But paradoxically again, it's a new concept that refuses to settle into any single meaning" (p. 140). I suggest that we also apply this critical perspective to teacher educators, experienced teachers, high school students, pre-service teachers, and beyond these to state and national standards, to parents, to business communities—to other players that carry varying degrees of power regarding teacher preparation.

Akmal & Miller (2003) have identified role definitions as among the catalysts for and obstacles to change in teacher education. To effect a conceptual change (Feiman-Nemser, 1990a) or a cultural change (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998) in teacher education that would allow us to embrace "a kind of wonderful uncertainty" (Greene, 1997, p. viii) that comes with revising roles in ways that expand and complicate them, we should put our energy not into attempting to clarify and fix roles and responsibilities but rather into imagining the multiple possible ways we could inform one another's thinking, facilitate one another's learning, and support one another's actions. While it will always be the case that when we speak and act, we have to stand somewhere—occupy some sort of position in relation to others—and that we must always do so within relations of power, at all times and certainly in educational contexts, rather than evoking fixed roles to name these positions, we can let the "unsettlement" of mind and experience

prompted by unfixedness and unfinishedness lead to learning (Dewey, 1916, p. 326). Indeed, Freire has argued that it is “our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable” (1998, p. 58); we should embrace these notions to give ourselves and others permission to listen to, teach, and learn from a wide variety of current and potential participants in teacher preparation. As I discuss elsewhere (Cook-Sather, in press, 2001a, and 2001b), rather than accept or strive for fixed and finished definitions, understandings, and identities, all learning might be better understood as an ongoing process of translation of selves, never entirely fixed, never entirely settled, and thus always open to further interpretation. Such an approach requires forms of facilitation and participation that embrace uncertainty, contingency, and complexity, that insist on attending and responding to all participants, and in so doing engage in an ongoing process of reinterpretation and revision.

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