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Students as Learners and Teachers: Taking Responsibility, Transforming Education, and Redefining Accountability

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Abstract
As has been the case throughout the history of education in the United States, the current structures and practices of U.S. schools and colleges are informed by particular ideals regarding the potential of education. Through this comparative descriptive analysis, I argue that a major reason why these ideals have rarely been realized is the way that students are positioned in educational institutions, dialogues, and reform. A preliminary argument for rethinking how we conceptualize student role and responsibility frames my description and comparison of two programs, one that involves secondary students in the preparation of high school teachers and one that involves college students in the professional development of college faculty. I then draw on the perspectives of student participants across these two programs to address a series of educational ideals that span K-12 and college contexts: inspiring lasting learning, celebrating humanity and diversity, and engaging in meaningful assessment. I designed the programs that are the focus of my analysis with the goal of improving teacher preparation and teaching, but as I discuss in this essay, they are proving to be promising models for pursuing what may be a more encompassing possibility: fostering in students a sense of and capacity for responsibility in ways that not only address existing educational ideals but that also point to both more transformative and more achievable notions of education and accountability than those currently in place.

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Alison Cook-Sather

Fostering the development of engaged and lifelong learners. Cultivating humanity and celebrating diversity. Meeting AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) for No Child Left Behind and developing a culture of assessment on college campuses. These are all among the ideals that inform the structures and practices of educational institutions in the United States. All of them have at their base assumptions about responsibility — adults', students', schools', society's. A complex concept, responsibility refers to the social force that binds one to the courses of action demanded by that force.[i] To be responsible is to be answerable or accountable for something within one's power, control, or management[ii]; it is to be able to make sense of and respond within one's sphere of association; it is to take action based on one's sense of connection and answerability to the self and to others.

As generally conceptualized within educational settings, student responsibility is constructed as students doing what adults tell them to do and absorbing what adults have to offer. Student accountability here means compliance and acceptance: adherence to what is prescribed, asked, or offered by the adults in charge. Student and teacher responsibility are defined, in this formulation, as separate and distinct: "Teaching is what teachers do. Learning is what students do. Therefore, students and teachers are engaged in different activities," writes Haberman (1996) in his critique of what he calls the pedagogy of poverty — "teachers are in charge and responsible" (p. 121). Within this and other common frameworks for thinking about schools, students are subjects of a particular kind, confined within institutions and directed by adults that contain and control them. Although students at the college level are sometimes considered more colleagues than wards, the sage-on-the-stage model of teaching, the direct delivery of content to students who are expected to absorb it, or what Freire (1990) has termed the banking model of education, in which students are accounts into which faculty deposit knowledge to be drawn on later, still hold sway in many contexts.

Supporting students in taking responsibility as I discuss it here runs counter to conventional wisdom and common practice. In this comparative descriptive analysis I draw on the perspectives of students who participated in two different programs, one that involves secondary students in the preparation of high school teachers and one that involves college students in the professional development of college faculty, to address the series of educational ideals with which I opened this discussion and that span K-12 and college contexts. My intention is to support a rethinking of what it means and what it takes for students at both the secondary and the college levels to be responsible (able and willing to act not only in response to others but also out of their own initiative) and accountable (answerable for their actions) and what implications such rethinking has for how we conceptualize education and the wider accountability it both requires and offers.

Positioning Students as Actors in Educational Analysis and Reform

The educational ideals with which I open this discussion all focus on students as subjects of others' attention, intervention, and assessment. They are ideals conceptualized by adults, who in turn create structures and practices we believe will facilitate reaching those ideals. In general, however, neither the adults nor the ideals conceptualize students as subjects in the more grammatical sense — as primary actors or what Delamont (1976) has called "protagonists" (see also Fine et al., 2007, and Thiessen, 2007). The shift from conceptualizing students as subjected to others or as subjects to be acted upon by others to students as actors or protagonists promises not only to help us move beyond the structures and roles that have hindered the capacity of educational institutions to achieve their ideals but also challenges us to reconsider the notions of education and accountability currently in place.

Proponents of student voice work (Cook-Sather, 2002a, 2003, 2006c, 2009c; Beuschel, 2008; Fielding, 1999, 2004; Fine et al., 2007; Lodge, 2005; Mitra, 2001, 2007; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck, 2002, 2007; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007) and of multicultural, anti-racist education (Asante, 1991; Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Howell & Tuitt, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 2004; Nieto, 1994; Teel & Obidah, 2008) are among the strongest advocates of the need to conceptualize students as actors rather than as the acted upon. The premises underlying my own and others' assertions of this need have been primarily those of equity: of rights and respect. Maintaining and building on those premises, I turn my focus in this discussion to responsibility, not in terms of what students should take on, as prescribed by adults, but rather in terms of what they can and desire to take on when they are part of the process of conceptualizing and actively participating in education.

Over the last 15 years at the secondary level and over the last three years at the college level, I have invited high school and college students, respectively, to act as protagonists in processes of teacher preparation and professional development. While the formal purpose of this invitation to students was improved teacher preparation and teaching, in both cases the programs are proving to be promising models for fostering the development of students with a sense of and capacity for taking responsibility for their own and others' education. Since their advent I have engaged in practitioner research on these programs. Through audiotaping reflective sessions of participants, soliciting mid-semester and end-of-semester feedback, and distributing follow-up surveys, I have gathered participant perspectives on a regular basis. All quotations included in this discussion come from one of these sources, some of which have been included in other publications. Using constant comparison/grounded theory (Creswell, 2006; Strauss, 1987) to analyze the data, I undertook the comparative descriptive analysis I present here. This comparison illuminates the striking similarities across educational context — secondary and college — in the ways participating students have developed their critical capacities, their understanding of and appreciation for differences, and their sense of responsibility and accountability.

There is a prevalent assumption that young people are neither able to offer nor interested in offering insights about teaching and learning. Even at the college level, where students are sometimes considered colleagues in explorations of course content, it is unusual that they are invited to be pedagogical consultants (see Cox & Sorenson, 2000,

for some exceptions), and certainly at the secondary level, the student voice literature shows how rare such consultation is. While the two programs I compare were designed for different populations — prospective teachers preparing to work in public secondary schools and faculty teaching at two private liberal arts colleges — in relation to both these groups, students clearly not only have important pedagogical insights but also the capacity and the desire to take responsibility for revising educational practices.

Teaching and Learning Together (TLT)

Based since 1995 in the secondary methods course I teach at Bryn Mawr College, TLT invites high school students to take up the role of pedagogical consultant to prospective teachers enrolled in the course. An integral part of the penultimate course required for certification to teach at the secondary level in the semester prior to practice teaching, this project has four components. Component one is a weekly email exchange between pre-service teachers and high school students. Each pair explores topics addressed in weekly seminars at the college (i.e., what makes a good teacher, lesson plan, test, etc.) but also includes topics the pairs feel are relevant to teaching and learning. Component two is weekly conversations among high school students convened by school-based educators and held at the students' school. The discussions last for approximately 30 minutes and are held after school or during lunch. Like the email exchange, they are based on the topics explored in the college seminar, and they are audiotaped, transcribed, and assigned as required reading to the pre-service teachers. Component three is weekly discussions in the college course in which all pre-service teacher are enrolled focused on how the email exchange is going and what pre-service teachers are struggling with, learning, and integrating into their plans for practice. Component four is an end-of-semester analysis paper for which each pre-service teacher selects a focus for analysis and draws on and quote excerpts from the email exchanges, transcripts of discussions among the high school students, and college-based class discussions.

The high school student participants are selected by the school-based educators with whom I collaborate. The goal is to recruit a diverse group — male and female students who are assigned to different tracks and who claim different racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds. Students are paid modest stipends for their participation, and the school-based teachers are also remunerated. To date, 175 high school students and secondary certification candidates have participated in the project. Originally supported by grants from the Ford Foundation and the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, TLT has been fully supported by Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges since 2000. (See Cook-Sather, 2002a, 2002b, 2006a, 2006b, 2007b, and 2009c for more complete discussions).

Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT)

SaLT was piloted in the fall semester of 2006 and has continued to develop since then as part of the Teaching and Learning Initiative at Bryn Mawr College. The project's explicit goal is to support generative dialogue about teaching and learning that rarely

unfolds between faculty members and undergraduate students and, through that dialogue, to improve teaching and learning in college classrooms. SaLT is neither formally evaluative nor is it intended to be remedial, and faculty involved choose to participate for a variety of pedagogical reasons.

College students apply to serve in the role of student consultant, and they receive stipends for their participation. Faculty members are invited each semester to participate in a pedagogy seminar and to work with a student consultant, and they receive stipends for their participation. All participants receive detailed guidelines for participation generated and revised each semester by me and student consultants with input from faculty. Faculty are supported within the pedagogy seminars, through which they post weekly to a closed blog and within which they talk together and with me each week for two hours about the pedagogical issues they wish to explore. Student consultants are supported in weekly reflective meetings with me and with other student consultants through which we process what they are seeing, hearing, and experiencing. Together we revisit and reinforce the priorities of the program, including the critical importance of confidentiality and how best to engage in constructive, respectful collaboration.

The faculty member and student consultant plan together a schedule according to which the student consultant observes and/or interviews students enrolled in the faculty member's class. At weekly debriefing meetings, the faculty member and the student consultant discuss what the student consultant saw and/or heard, both people's interpretations of that input, and implications for teaching and learning in the class. At the midpoint and at the end of these partnerships, all participants complete a series of assessment questions designed to offer them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and to document what they have learned and gained through their work.

To date, 68 faculty members (35% of the combined faculties at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges) have worked with a total of 39 student consultants in 88 partnerships. Faculty span ranks and divisions and range from brand new to the colleges to those with more than 40 years of experience teaching. Students span majors, claim a range of ethnic identities, and have varying degrees of experience in educational studies. The project is supported by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Provosts of Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. (For other discussions of this project see Cook-Sather, 2008 and 2009a).

Discerning Shared Commitments and Features of TLT and SaLT

A comparison of TLT and SaLT throws into relief the underlying commitments and structural features these two programs have in common and that support the kind of revision of responsibility, education, and accountability for which I argue here:

- They are founded on principles of student voice work, including the conviction that young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education (Cook-Sather, 2006c).
- They create regular forums for facilitated dialogue about issues of teaching and learning among differently identified and positioned students and between students and prospective and practicing teachers that would be unlikely to

emerge within the existing structures of educational institutions (Cook-Sather, 2002b).

- They create new roles for students within existing educational contexts and relationships (Cook-Sather, 2001, 2006b), positioning students among the authorities on issues of teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, 2002a), inviting them to take their place in the "discourse that is essential to action," and affording them the right to have their part matter (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 18).
- They position students from underrepresented groups in particular not as the "'acted upon' or the objects in education" (Asante, 1991, p. 171) but rather as subjects and actors in the project of working to foster the development of more effective pedagogical approaches and classrooms more welcoming to and supportive of diverse learners.
- Through creating new forums and roles and by positioning students as described above, these programs reposition not only students but also prospective and practicing teachers such that all participants are challenged to see classrooms, teaching, and learning from another angle or perspective (Cook-Sather, 2008) and to reconsider the actual and possible relationships, dynamics, and practices that unfold in educational contexts.
- They provide detailed guidelines, ongoing support, and opportunities for reflection on what is happening in classrooms, for dialogue informed by different perspectives, and for how to make sense of both of those.
- Through all of the above, they prompt and promote meta-cognitive awareness of the dynamic interplay between perspectives, between ideas and practices, and between educational possibilities and actualities.
- They make all of the above the focus of ongoing informal and formal analysis and a catalyst for action.

The fact that both high school and college student consultants write down and share their perspectives, as well as offer their perspectives orally, means that they have to take responsibility for those perspectives. Students must be accountable for what they perceive and present. The structures of these programs, then, are structures of accountability: they support students stepping up to take responsibility for both more fully engaging in and transforming education.

Supported by the underlying premises and practical structures that constitute both TLT and SaLT, both secondary and college students demonstrate an impressive capacity to analyze, help revise, and promote engagement in educational experiences. Such capacity is not effortlessly realized, however. Students and the prospective secondary teachers and the practicing college faculty members with whom they work must strive, from within their respective roles and as partners, to realize this capacity. Such striving is an ongoing process that has both low points, when participants feel vulnerable, uncertain, and even afraid, as well as high points, when they experience real connection and empowerment. At both low and high points, understanding is deepened and revision and/or change are effected.

In the next three sections of this discussion, I draw on student reflections to illustrate how student participants in TLT and SaLT develop the following capacities:

- learn to be better learners by being more conscious of and actively engaged in the learning and teaching process;

- recognize differences among students as well as systemic and societal inequities and nurture themselves and their fellow students who are harmed by those inequities; and
- feel inspired and empowered by watching their own teachers doing what they do in their new roles — attend to and document what happens in their classrooms, listen carefully, try to understand, and imagine how to improve and better account for educational practices.

These capacities reflect the educational ideals we espouse in the United States of inspiring lasting learning, celebrating humanity and diversity, and engaging in meaningful assessment. As I strive to illustrate in the following sections, as students at both the secondary and the college level develop these capacities, they act on their interest in taking responsibility as I redefine it here, they contribute to the transformation of their own and other's education, and they help to redefine accountability.

TLT and SaLT Students Develop Capacity to Pursue U.S. Educational Ideals

To highlight the similarities in the ways in which high school and college students develop their capacities through TLT and SaLT, I have grouped the educational ideals I address across level (secondary and college) and across kind. I begin with inspiring lasting learning, which is most avidly championed by those who embrace constructivist approaches to learning and who argue for the importance of nurturing lifelong learners. Second, I focus on cultivating humanity and celebrating diversity, commitments most regularly articulated by proponents of liberal, multicultural, and/or anti-racist education. And third, I discuss engaging in meaningful assessment within the context of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress for No Child Left Behind at the secondary level and developing a culture of assessment on college campuses. I see this movement across these three ideals as one from students taking and sharing responsibility for their own and others' individual learning within classrooms, to students taking and sharing responsibility on a larger, more human level within and beyond the classroom, to students taking and sharing responsibility for helping reconceptualize accountability at the institutional — secondary and college — level.

Inspiring Lasting Learning

Educators who focus on learning at both the secondary and the college level argue that the most successful learning is that which has a "sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how students think, act, and feel" (Bain, 2004, p. 5; see also Oakes & Lipton, 2007) and disposes students to seek further learning (Dewey, 1916). Progressive educators in particular have argued that constructivist approaches are the most effective in fostering such learning. Constructivism means different things to different people (Davis & Sumara, 2002; Phillips, 1995; Shapiro, 2002, 2003), but constructivist approaches have in common the belief that students actively construe and construct their own understandings (Davis & Sumara, 2002). When students have the opportunity to develop a meta-cognitive awareness of their learning both in order to engage and as a result of engaging in serious dialogue with adults about their learning experiences and needs, they not only construct their understanding of subject matter content, as

constructivist approaches to learning advocate and aim to facilitate, they also construct themselves anew — they translate themselves into new versions of those selves (Cook-Sather, 2006a, 2009c). Within this way of thinking about education, learning neither occurs nor is completed in a single event but rather takes place over time, changing "not just what the learner knows…but also who the learner is" (Dreier, 2003, in Wortham, 2004, p. 716; see also Packer, 2001).

Constructivism rests on the premise that the most engaging, meaningful, and enduring education is that which affords students the opportunity to be actively involved — to be actors in their own learning. Sfard (1998) suggests that when learning is participation, "conceived as a process of becoming a member of a certain community," there is an emphasis on "the evolving bonds between the individual and others," implying that "the identity of an individual, like an identity of a living organ, is a function of his or her being (or becoming) a part of a greater entity" (p. 6). The construction of meaning within and between learners and teachers fosters learners' ability to engage in inquiry and praxis, to create, not simply receive, knowledge, which "emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 1990, p. 58).

When students have opportunities to construct their learning and themselves, to develop a meta-cognitive awareness of those processes, and to share their experiences and insights with the adults with whom they work, they take a step on the path of lifelong learning. Dewey (1916) defined education as "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases [one's] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (p. 76). As actors in this process, and afforded opportunities to become meta-cognitively aware of as well as engaged in it, students ground themselves in present learning experiences and prepare themselves for future learning.

High school student participants in TLT talk about how being invited into a forum to discuss teaching and learning and to assume the role of consultant to prospective teachers provides them the opportunity to reflect on their own education, behaviors, and needs as students, discern and articulate those, and, in turn, have those insights inform their engagement in their education. They talk about how participating in this project prompts them to "step back as a student and just look at how everything was going on in the classroom… how I was being taught and how teachers worked." It helps "to make me a better student by re-evaluating myself, my study habits, and my teachers' teaching methods." It challenges them "to reevaluate what is important to us in a learning experience." Through their participation in this project, high school students become positioned to develop meta-cognitive language with which to think through and communicate their needs and preferences and to take greater responsibility for their learning (Cook-Sather, 2007b, p. 352; Cook-Sather, 2009c, p. 204).

College student consultants in SaLT develop similar insights and capacities. They suggest that participating in this program "can help you learn how to reflect upon and create insights into what's happening in the classroom, why it's happening, and how it could change." To develop such insights, one has to take on a different angle of vision and role, as one college student explains: "You really don't understand the way you learn and how others learn until you can step back from it and are not in the class with the main aim to learn the material of the class but more to understand what is going on in the class

and what is going through people's minds as they relate with that material" (Cook-Sather, 2008, p. 481). Taking on such an angle and role, suggests another student, "can really help you in your own education: As you are sitting in your own classrooms as a student, you can step back and use the skills you have gained in this formal observation process." And, as students suggest, "to be able to change roles and see things from a different perspective… just enriches your life as a student in general."

The perspectives and insights these high school and college students gain as critical, constructive consultants do not remain abstract and theoretical. Rather, they inform in concrete ways how the students think about their education and the choices they make in constructing further learning opportunities. An example from TLT illustrates this point. One prospective teacher had a former high school student participant in TLT in one of his classes during student teaching. One day after class, the school-based cooperating teacher who was overseeing the student teaching experience overheard a conversation between the prospective teacher and the high school student in which the student was giving the prospective teacher feedback. The high school student started out with what he thought had gone well about the lesson and then segued into recommendations for improvement. The prospective teacher sat at a desk beside the high school student listening to him and taking notes on what he said (Cook-Sather, 2002b). Taking this kind of responsibility for his own and others' education helped this student transform that education.

College student consultant reflections on SaLT also illustrate how students act on the insights they gain regarding how they might take responsibility for and transform their own and others' education. Participating in this program "can help make you a more conscientious student: How could I be engaging better with what this teacher is asking of me? How should I communicate to my professor how I experience his class? I think these are questions that the program helps you to ask of yourself." Students not only take responsibility within their own minds, asking themselves such critical questions, they also take more responsibility in their relationships with professors: "I have gained the confidence to talk to my own professors about how their teaching affects my learning. I have also noticed that my course evaluations are more thorough and specific than in the past."

As these few excerpts from student feedback illustrate, the reflection in which student participants engage and the dialogue that emerges within the forums supported by TLT and SaLT contribute to the immediate improvement of learning for high school and college students directly involved and for subsequent groups of students. It thus contributes both directly and indirectly to students' development as learners. Students develop not only insights into learning and language for naming what they experience and see but also confidence to share those insights with others. They are thus equipped to construct deeper knowledge of subject matter they encounter in their courses as well as to construct with each such encounter new versions of themselves as responsible and accountable participants in the educational process. They are better equipped and more inclined to take up and take greater advantage of future learning opportunities, and they understand and act on a deeper sense of responsibility and accountability for their own and others' learning.

Celebrating Humanity and Diversity

Active engagement on the part of students who are diverse human beings is implicit if not always explicit in notions of constructivism and lifelong learning. The educational ideals of cultivating humanity and celebrating diversity make the human and the diverse both explicit and central. I highlight these educational ideals as I move in my discussion from a focus on students taking and sharing responsibility for their own and others' individual learning within classrooms to students taking and sharing responsibility on a larger, more human level within and beyond the classroom.

A commitment to "cultivating humanity" (Nussbaum, 1997) and to developing responsible citizens lies at the heart of liberal education at the college level. In exploring these responsibilities, Nussbaum (1997) emphasizes the importance of "producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world" (p. 8). In the same spirit, Cronan (1998) suggests that liberal education "aspires to nurture the growth of human talent in the service of human freedom" (p. 74). The democratic schools movement and the Coalition of Essential Schools represent efforts to enact some of these principles at the K-12 level. Developed according to Dewey's notion that "all those who are affected by social institutions must have a share in producing and managing them,"[iii] the democratic schools movement acts on the premise that such an "all" includes students. Within this movement, schools adhere to and enact democratic principles; in other words, those principles are embodied, not simply espoused (Apple & Beane, 2007; Gutmann, 1999; Miller, 2002). Like democratic schools, Essential Schools "model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity" (http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/about/phil/10cps/10cps.html). Some alternative schools are designed around similar principles, not just for the purposes of developing citizens of the world but also improving education both in the United States and worldwide (for one example, see Easton, 2002; Easton & Condon, 2009).

While cultivating humanity is necessary within liberal and democratic notions of education, celebrating diversity is not only a social commitment, it is a biological necessity. Supporting Sfard's (1998) argument about learning as participation — that individual growth is dependent on multiple, different constituents and connections — Grobstein (1989) argues that diversity is "essential to the success of any biological entity…[and] of even greater importance for the origin of successful biological systems." Diversity describes and supports "a profound mutual interdependence of variants in the here and now, and an even more profound dependence on variants to meet the challenges of the future." Diversity is often constructed and measured as deficit, and Nieto (1999) argues that, "given the vastly unequal educational outcomes among students of different backgrounds, equalizing conditions for student learning needs to be at the core of a concern for diversity."

Capacity to work with diverse and differently positioned and empowered people in democratic ways does not develop automatically. Within classrooms, cultivating humanity and celebrating diversity require attention both to individual and to collective development. Individually, students are most engaged and successful when academic knowledge and skills are situated within their lived experiences and frames of reference

and thus are "more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Balancing individual growth and success with responsibility to the collective calls for "a pedagogy of opposition, not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160).

Such attention to individuals and to the collective can be fostered both within and beyond the classroom by creating forums within which differently positioned and differentially powered people can enter into dialogue with and learn about and from one another. TLT and SaLT create just such forums and strive to facilitate just such learning. Recognizing differences among students as well as systemic and societal inequities and nurturing themselves and their fellow students who are harmed by those inequities are among the forms that student responsibility can take when supported by premises and practices such as those underlying TLT and SaLT. By putting into dialogue people who do not generally talk to one another about these issues and insisting that they attend to one another's diversity and humanity in responsive ways, these programs encourage students to actively "critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.162) and support their engagement in what Freire's calls conscientization — "a process that invites learners to engage the world and others critically" (McLaren, 1989, p. 195). Raised awareness and developed capacities to negotiate difference position students to be more responsible and more accountable.

A few examples from TLT and SaLT illustrate the ways in which they not only foster sensitivity and alertness (Nussbaum, 1997) to diversity but also inspire and equip students to act on what they perceive. One year during a school-based conversation among high school students who were participating in TLT, an African-American female and a European-American male had this exchange about how students experience racism at their high school:

> F: [Racism] might not affect you but it affects me because it happens to me and not to you and you can't tell me what it feels like. You have no idea how many times I've wanted to go over to a white person's house to study for mid-terms or finals and how many parents say 'No.' Flat out 'No.'
>
> M: Are you serious?
>
> F: Yeah. You don't have to worry about that.
>
> M: Is outward racism brought on you?
>
> F: What? You want to know the names? Every year. On so many levels.
>
> M: You're right. I'm not in your position. I'm sorry. (Cook-Sather, 2007a, p. 392)

In this instance, students unlikely to find themselves in the same classroom and even less likely to engage in this kind of dialogue develop a sense not only of diversity across the

experiences of human beings that strive to learn within the same school walls but also what that means for different students' education.

High school students also share stories within one another and with the prospective teachers about the damage teachers can do if they are not aware of and sensitive to issues of diversity. One high school student explains what happens when teachers "present one side of an issue. Like I'm Korean and we learn about the Korean War and it's like all one side and I sit there. My father knows another story about it. I mean another way to look at it." Another year, a particularly powerful exchange took place when an African-American student came to the weekly meeting at the high school very upset about an experience she had had. She related to the group a story of how she had been told by a European-American adult that she should apply only to traditionally black colleges. The other students comforted the student and supported her in thinking of ways both to repair her self-esteem and to pursue the range of college opportunities she wanted. For some students this was an eye-opening experience. For others it was all too familiar. New to all of them was that this forum offered a supported and supportive space within which this diverse group could see and talk together through different expectations and experiences that this act of discrimination highlighted and to generate together ways to act, in turn, against it (Cook-Sather, 2002b).

College students who have participated in SaLT also share within a supported forum experiences of inequitable treatment. One student describes a recurring experience in which faculty members "look at me and they say, 'Oh, Asian girl,' [or] write on my paper, 'Is English your second language?' I'm fifth generation Chinese American." Or in class, during a discussion about "some theory that applied differently to people of color, [the professor] looked at a girl who happens to be Asian but she's from South Africa, and the professor said to her, 'What do you think?'" A third student laments that she doesn't "feel comfortable speaking the way I would speak at home or with my friends just because I always feel that there's a stigma attached to it and also you are perpetuating stereotypes. I don't want people to attach that to my group of friends and attach that to my entire race."

The projects of cultivating humanity and celebrating diversity should strive for clarity and complexity regarding people's lived experiences and what we might mean by 'culture' itself. One year an African-American college student working as a student consultant for a faculty member through SaLT described how culturally responsive teaching was reframed for her through her work with the faculty member and in conversation with other student consultants from under-represented groups. She wrote: "I assumed I would be looking at race — so how many students of color are in the classroom, etc. Culturally responsive teaching has been redefined for me as not just visible diversity but rather the culture of the classroom that you can work within. My expectation was to look narrowly at what culture meant, and it evolved to much bigger than that."

These examples focus on sensitivity and alertness to issues of race and culture and how high school students who participate in TLT and college students who participate in SaLT develop greater awareness of what these mean — both in and of themselves and in terms of their implications for education. Other forms of diversity also become apparent to students and contribute to humanizing their perspectives and practices. One that recurs regularly in both TLT and SaLT has to do with diversity of students' learning styles and

needs. There is much rhetoric around this form of diversity, but not until students have the opportunity to perceive and analyze it themselves does the reality sink in.

In conversations through TLT, high school student participants explain their insights into students' diverse learning needs and what happens when teachers are not sensitive to those: "I have two teachers this year that just teach the same way and it doesn't work for some people in the class." This student continues: "You have to realize that you're teaching a variety of people, and each person learns differently, some people learn visually, some people learn by repeating stuff, some people — it's just different in how a person teaches, and that's why a teacher should try as much as possible to teach in different ways if possible" (student quoted in Cook-Sather, 2009c, pp. 28-29). A European-American college student consultant in SaLT addresses the diversity of learners identities, positions, and needs from another angle:

> Last week I read through the report on [creating more culturally
> responsive classrooms at Bryn Mawr College] and was struck by this
> passage, "Make conscious with whom you align yourself and why and try
> to complicate, question, and perhaps expand that positioning." In
> response to that question for myself I sat in a different place in the
> classroom [in which I was a student consultant]. In the past I sat in the
> "outside" circle because that's where the people in the class I knew sat
> (who are people of color) and I realized that I was both physically and
> mentally aligning myself with them. Which I don't think was "wrong," but
> I wanted to sit somewhere in the classroom to try and problematize that
> for myself and I think it was successful. Sitting at the table today I felt part
> of the classroom community, which I hadn't felt before. And it confirmed
> for me the importance of literally bringing all the students to the table.

Striking about these insights is not only the new angles of vision these students gain but also the passion and compassion with which they express the understanding they achieve from those new angles. These students obviously care about one another as people, and caring is not only obscured by but actually undermined when students are simply left or encouraged to work in isolation from and in competition with one another and when their only responsibility is to perform and achieve as individuals. Because through these programs students share responsibility for the unfolding of a class or reconceptualization of an educational practice they critique, they assume a broader accountability, which builds their capacity to more often take on such responsibility and accountability.

Having the opportunity to gain such insights and participating in forums within which they can share those insights makes students more responsible to their peers and to the teachers whose classrooms they enter. The insights the high school students demonstrate above — into their peers' experience of racism or learning needs and what those suggest for how students might perceive and comport themselves in classrooms — find their analogues in college students' insights into how their own classroom participation might change based on their new perspectives. One student explained: "[In one class] we were talking about ethnic identity development, and all of the students of color were speaking and the white students were not. I mentioned that to the prof that

evening, and she divided us into groups the next day and changed the reading — she included an article that was about white ethnic development. So that article got the class talking."

Each of these students, and others I do not quote here, gain through their participation in TLT or SaLT greater insight into the diversity that constitutes humanity, develop greater capacity to perceive and value that diversity, and develop a sense of responsibility that inspires them to act in support of their own, others' and their teachers' efforts in the classroom — to be answerable, accountable — not just as people embodying roles but also as human beings. Participating in these programs both positions and inspires students to act both in response and out of their own initiative to make classrooms more educative and human spaces where people connect as human beings. In cultivating their humanity, students both recognize the need and ready themselves to take responsibility for supporting others in their development within and beyond the classroom, to "function with sensitivity and alertness" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 8), to engage in and try to ensure for others more democratic and inclusive practices.

Engaging in Meaningful Assessment

Efforts to take and share responsibility for their own and others' individual learning within classrooms and on a larger, more human level within and beyond the classroom have implications for engagement in meaningful assessment. Once students are afforded the opportunity to take such responsibility, they can help reconceptualize accountability at the institutional — secondary and college — level, within and beyond the context of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) at the secondary level and developing a culture of assessment on college campuses.

Accountability efforts tend to define and measure student achievement according to standardized instruments developed by adults within and beyond the schools' walls. NCLB defines AYP as an individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of students achieving to state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math. It sets the minimum level of proficiency that the state, its school districts, and schools must achieve each year on annual tests and related academic indicators.[iv] The movement to create a culture of assessment on college campuses brings some of the same assumptions to the college level. The outcome of a commission impaneled by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, this movement is premised on the argument that colleges "'should measure and report meaningful student learning outcomes,' that they should use tests to make comparison possible, that accrediting agencies should make these and other performance outcomes 'the core of their assessment' and that colleges should make the results publicly available "as a condition of accreditation" (Traub, 2007).

While the impulse to ensure that all students achieve and that all educational institutions are accountable for that achievement makes sense in principle, Darling-Hammond (2004) critiques NCLB as a "one-way accountability system that holds children and educators to test-based standards they are not enabled to meet, while it does *not* hold federal or state governments to standards that would ensure equal and adequate educational opportunity" (p. 6; see also Hussey, 2008). Concerns about creating a culture of assessment at the college level also focus on the ways that assessment becomes

conflated with certain notions of accountability. Many in higher education "worry about the impact of increasing expectations for accountability, about whether these expectations will alter the educational process and about how assessment data will be used" (Thompson, 2008). The chief concern is "how accountability is being framed." Thompson (2008) advocates a shift to an academic perspective of accountability, with "an internal locus of control with regard to defining standards and judging academic quality" rather than a marketplace locus of control.

At the base of some of the concerns about kinds of accountability imposed by federal and more local governing bodies are discrepancies among definitions of achievement and how to assess it. Externally imposed standards and measurements are juxtaposed to context-specific and participant-informed approaches. Drawing on extensive research in the United Kingdom, Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) argue that academic achievement is largely dependent on (1) "the complex set of personal and interpersonal dimensions that, together, help to build and sustain pupils' trust in school and their commitment to learning" and (2) "guidance from pupils about which classroom strategies and experiences help them learn and which get in the way of their learning" (p. 188), and yet such findings from their research do not fit neatly with the government of England's strategies for improving learning. Rather than embrace premises espoused by the pedagogy of poverty (Haberman, 1996), the banking model of education (Freire, 1990), and the decontextualized — and, some would argue, dehumanized — approaches to assessment we currently use as accountability measures, we might look at how a revised notion of student responsibility might help redefine accountability.

In one of the few studies completed on the relationship between student voice and school achievement, Mitra (2004) offers us some useful starting points for rethinking what we mean by achievement and how to assess it. She found that in the U.S. schools she studied, certain kinds of student voice work helped "(1) to instill agency in students, or belief that they could transform themselves and the institutions that affect them, (2) to acquire the skills and competencies to work toward these changes, and (3) to establish meaningful relationships with adults and the peers that create greater connections to each other" (p. 681). According to Mitra (2004), "Research in developmental psychology finds agency, belonging and competence to be necessary factors for adolescents to remain motivated in school and to achieve academic success (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, et al., 1993; Goodenow, 1993; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Stinson, 1993)" (p. 655). However, as she also points out, "Most often schools reinforce preconceived expectations of youth and sort them into categories (Giroux, 1983). Based on these labels, students develop a sense of self. For example, students slotted as 'burnouts' in Eckert's (1989) famous study develop an identity based on marginalization and a lack of agency" (Mitra, 2004, p. 664). In contrast, Mitra argues, "When students believe that they are valued for their perspectives and respected, they begin to develop a sense of ownership and attachment to the organization in which they are involved (Atweh & Burton, 1995). Scholars have found that an adolescent's belonging to her school is positively related to academic success and motivation (Goodenow, 1993; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Ryan & Powelson, 1991)" (Mitra, 2004, p. 669).

High school students who participate in TLT articulate how their participation meets some of the most basic needs to be valued described above and also how such valuing could contribute to students as well as adults and educational institutions taking a

different kind of responsibility. Students lament that, "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 you don't have the opportunity to do it" (student quoted in Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001, p. xii). When students are heard, they feel both validated and better able to take responsibility: "It was nice to be able to express our concerns about teachers in a constructive way that would (hopefully) prevent some of the problems we see in our teachers from developing in future teachers" (student quoted in Author, 2009c, p. 2). The desire to take responsibility is evident in these student comments.

Young people need to practice and to assume leadership roles to prepare for adult responsibilities (Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 1998; Mitra, 2004). One way to afford them the opportunity to do so that also addresses how we might re-conceptualize responsibility and accountability is provided in the contrast between the approach to assessment supported through SaLT and the standard instrument of assessment and form of accountability on college campuses: the end-of-semester evaluation form. The common practice of gathering feedback at the end of a semester — a practice that has come to constitute in most college and university settings one component of faculty members' accountability (Aleamoni, 1999; Cook-Sather, 2008a; Caulfield, 2007; Goldstein & Benassi, 2006; Hativa, 1996; Kohlan, 1973; Marlin, 1987; Melland, 1996) — might inform the revision of subsequent iterations of the course, and thus speak to an institutional sort of accountability, but it does little for the students currently enrolled. It assumes that student feedback is generic — that it can be applied to any class — rather than recognizing that student feedback is relevant to that particular class and participants and not necessarily to other ones. It assumes as well that while students can offer their perspectives and opinions, it is the faculty member who decides, on his or her own, what to listen to and whether or not to act on student feedback. For these reasons, gathering end-of-semester student feedback constitutes a form of accountability that can reproduce the traditional model of instruction according to which students are recipients not co-constructors of their education (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006a, 2009a).

Gathering student feedback at the midpoint can help faculty members gain access to the student perspective and, if they choose to share student feedback with the class, it can promote "two-way communication with learners" and facilitate "open discussions about course goals and the teaching-learning process" (Diamond, 2004, p. 226) in which students feel "empowered to help design their own educational process" (Keutzer, 1993, p. 239). Furthermore, gathering and discussing student feedback allows for the possibility that concerns might be addressed and changes made within the same term (Caulfield, 2007; Clark & Redmond, 1982; Diamond, 2004; Hofman & Kremer, 1983; Keutzer, 1993) as well as for future classes. About his experience of gathering midcourse feedback for the first time in his course, one faculty member who worked with a student consultant through SaLT said: "'[Having a student gather feedback on the class and share it with me] gave me confidence that [the feedback] was thorough and trustworthy, unlike end-of-the-semester course evaluations'" (Cook-Sather, 2009a, p. 233). College student consultants in SaLT comment on the shared responsibility they feel having participated in this alternative form of assessment: "Students are working with faculty to build courses, to build their learning experience." They describe the shared process in which they are engaged: "I found that this collaborative approach worked very well for us, that Professor

Z and I were able to feel like colleagues who were working toward the same goal but from different sides of the problem" (Cook-Sather, 2009a, p. 237). Here student desire and capacity to share responsibility are realized.

These student comments emphasize re-conceptualizing both assessment and accountability as shared responsibilities of students and teachers, as well as educational institutions. The kind of insight, compassion, commitment, and engagement the students quoted in this discussion demonstrate point the way to a different way of conceptualizing accountability. Rather than the imposition of external accounting methods, accountability can be understood as the challenge to engage and excel because it is meaningful and satisfying to do so but also the desire and the capacity to go beyond existing notions and practices to redefine education as a reciprocally responsible process.

Students Taking Responsibility, Transforming Education, and Redefining Accountability

The participant reflections I have shared in this discussion emphasize the ways in which student participants in both TLT and SaLT learn to be better learners by being more conscious of and actively engaged in the learning and teaching process; recognize differences among students as well as systemic and societal inequities and nurture themselves and their fellow students who are harmed by those inequities; and feel inspired and empowered to attend to and document what happens in classrooms and work to improve and better account for educational practices. Student comments suggest that they want to take these responsibilities but are rarely afforded the opportunity to do so. A high school student participant in TLT stated, "We don't often get the chance to give the constructive criticism that so many of us have thoughts on," and a college student participant in SaLT explained, "As an education student I was always thinking about these issues, and I wasn't always invited to share this kind of feedback in class." At the same time, as I indicated at the opening of this discussion, simply affording students the opportunity to take responsibility does not ensure their doing so. It is challenging, daunting, potentially vulnerable making, and sometimes scary to assume responsibility for one's own or another's learning for the same reason that the potential is so great: because to do so is to be accountable — to act in response and to take the initiative to act based on one's sense of connection and answerability to the self and to others. The uncertainties, self doubts, and struggles students experience when they take on this new role — like the uncertainties, self doubts, and struggles the prospective teachers and practicing faculty members experience in their own learning processes — are necessary dimensions of an experience that also has the potential to be transformative.

Because of the hierarchical nature of schooling and society, teachers must explicitly — and sometimes repeatedly — invite students to take responsibility; students cannot simply assume it (Cook-Sather, 2009c). Indeed, most students "have been silenced all their lives" (Giroux, 1992, p. 158). Therefore, student reflections on the kinds of responsibility they want to take rest on the premise of teachers affording them the opportunity to do so. High school student participants in TLT and in other contexts as well emphasize the importance of having agency within the classroom and in larger decision-making processes. They hope to have agency in making choices about their engagement, in questioning what is presented to them, in struggling in productive ways

with content. They explain: "I need to be able to question why we are learning and what we are learning. There's no challenge otherwise and no reason to use your brain." They understand that if they take responsibility for their learning, their learning will be deeper: "With confusion comes understanding. This is Mr. Z's motto. He game plans all of his lessons for controlled floundering. He leads things to the next level to where you make your own point of view. You sort of come around to it on your own then. He gives you the basics" (Cook-Sather, 2009c, p. 65).

College students in SaLT also want to have a sense of agency, to share their questions about what is happening in classrooms and to inform changes made, and their comments reflect the greater authority they have in the role of student consultant. Shifting from the traditionally passive role of student, one student consultant explains: "In past discussions I've always been talking about what the profs do to us and it's been a one-way street. And now I am able to look at it as a relationship in the classroom; if we're complaining about something that is going on, it's also the students' role to step up and say something about that." From the " in-between" role of student consultant, college students "recognize my partner and myself as both learners and teachers simultaneously. This perspective has influenced the way I see myself in my other classes, I am more aware of the classroom dynamics and teaching styles in all of the classes I am in now, and I consistently think of ways classes could be improved instead of just accepting them as static." Once students take on this responsibility in one context it spreads to others: "It's funny because I feel a need to fulfill this role in all my classes now. I'm constantly writing down observations and I'm slowly but surely arriving at a point where I feel comfortable discussing my observations candidly. I'm realizing that the teaching and learning experience is meant to be a collaboration between all parties involved."

A central component of taking the kind of responsibility I discuss here is greater understanding of others' roles and responsibilities in the educational process. High school student participants in TLT explain that participating in this project "made me realize the teacher's point of view. I never really realized what they go through, that they even care about this.' Another student realized "how much the teachers have to think about what they're doing and that they don't just get up there every day and do their thing. That they actually think about ways that they can improve themselves and they work really hard to do what they do." And a third student explains how these insights make her more responsible as a student: "I think it kind of made me think about how to be a better student almost 'cause it makes you think that like a teacher is up there and they worked hard to come up with this lesson plan and if you're not going to put in a hundred percent then you're letting them down in a way" (Cook-Sather, 2009c, p. 205).

College student participants in SaLT express comparable insights into the experiences of the faculty members with whom they work. They describe how they "didn't realize there was so much work involved in thinking about teaching." They learn that "that professors are very vulnerable. You don't think about that as a student." But once they do think about it and gain insights into their teachers' roles and responsibilities, they think about how to take more responsibility for their education from within their new role: "I am able to articulate what makes a class 'good' or 'bad' with much more clarity and feel more empowered to address these points with other students or professors in appropriate ways.'

A college student consultant explains what happened when she and other students had the opportunity not only to give constructive criticism but also to co-construct a course:

> Toward the end of the semester, my professor and I agreed that I would help him in planning for a new course that he was going to be teaching the following semester. After several planning meetings with just him, myself and the TA for the class, he decided that it would be fun and interesting to invite some other students to participate in the discussion. For an hour over lunch, three other students and I talked with the professor about interesting assignments to plan for, how much or how little reading to assign, what it would be like teaching a new class to a small group of seniors from several different majors, and just what, in general, goes into planning for a course. We were all really excited to be involved in that sort of process, and found that the more honest and frank we were, the more creative and excited the professor had the freedom to be. At the end of the conversation, the professor said, "Wouldn't it be great if all classes were planned this way?" And, in fact, it would. Allowing students to enter into a dialogue with professors about the classes they teach gives a sense of responsibility and contribution to all involved. I think this lunch epitomizes the goals that [SaLT] is working toward, and how students can become more active in their own education and increase the feeling of community in a learning environment. It also shows how the student consultant role can be expanded to include more than just those who actually wear the title, and how any student input can be a great resource for professors.

The excitement and engagement this student feels, the responsibility she embraces, and the vision for educational practice and reform that this story illuminates vividly illustrate what can happen when we re-conceptualize responsibility and afford students the opportunity to help redefine accountability.

Conclusion

In comparing the experiences of high school student participants in TLT and college student participants in SaLT, it is striking how similarly they talk about their desire for responsibility and their capacity to take it up — to become accountable. I have focused in this discussion on how we might rethink what it means and what it takes for students to be responsible as it is redefined here, and I have offered some ideas for the implications such rethinking has for how we conceptualize education and accountability within and for that education. Responsibility as I define and argue for it here fosters in students a greater capacity not only to address existing educational ideals but also more transformative and more achievable notions of education and accountability because it actually asks much more of students, sets much higher standards, than some of the existing goals of schooling. In addition, it is truly open-ended, and thus possibly self-regenerating and self-enriching. Supporting students in becoming responsible in the ways

I discuss here has the potential to mitigate structures and practices that generate resistance, cynicism, isolation, mistrust, and confusion and replace them with learning communities, challenges, and a kind of accountability in which, as one college student put it, "students have just as much responsibility as professors."

The kind of responsibility student consultants in TLT and SaLT take help us not only approach more closely but also move beyond the ideals of educational institutions at both the secondary and the college levels: inspiring lasting learning, celebrating humanity and diversity, and engaging in meaningful assessment. Moving beyond constructivism in regard to subject matter and into the notion of students constructing themselves, students deepen their understanding of subject matter and become richer, more responsive versions of their learning selves. Taking up opportunities to cultivate humanity and celebrate diversity through dialogue they rarely have within structured and supported ways of responding to inequities, students become more human and offer others similar opportunities in turn. And embracing the kind of accountability I call for here and loosening our focus on AYP and creating a culture of assessment as it currently conceptualized, students are more engaged and willing to learn, thus more likely to meet AYP and other assessment measures.

Our ultimate goal is not reaching these particular ideals, however, but the nurturing of a new form of responsibility that takes us even further beyond them. As the reflections of student participants in TLT and SaLT suggest, when students are afforded opportunities to see critically, from a different angle, what does, does not, and could happen in classrooms, and when they are invited to participate in conversations about what they see, they become protagonists in the stories and revisions of their school lives and they feel empowered to articulate and act on what they see. In doing so, they transform their own and others' education, within and beyond the specific classrooms and moments upon which they focus. They challenge us to redefine accountability not as the counting of standardized test scores or responses on formal end-of-semester college course evaluations but rather as shared responsibility for everyone's more engaged and educative learning.

The idea of education implied here is one that expands students' sphere of influence not to displace adults' but to be integrated with it; it affords students greater agency not to replace adult authority but to complement it. Education thus conceptualized strengthens students' sense of connection, affording them opportunities to build their capacity, and making room for them to take responsibility. Education thus conceptualized makes accountability within students' power. A college student consultant captures the potential in this way: "Participation in [this program] has really made me feel more responsible for my own education. I no longer think that professors are responsible for having all the answers and making a class perfect and wonderful to suite my own needs. It is up to the entire community to make learning spaces function, so that means students have just as much responsibility as professors."

In his June-2009 speech in Cairo, U.S. President Barack Obama argued that young people "more than anyone have the ability to re-imagine the world, to remake this world." We undermine our own educational goals when we constrict and restrain your people with in schools, narrowing fields of study, how students engage with those, and the ways we assess students' mastery of them. Were we to create more forums and new roles through which students could act both in response and out of their own initiative

and feel answerable for those actions, we might arrive at a more transformative and a more achievable notion of education. Joining Obama's assertion regarding young people's capacities with the notion of responsibility I discuss here and including students in our efforts, we might imagine education as a process of repeatedly gaining new angles of vision — on subject matter, on the learning process itself, on one's own and others' experiences of learning — and, through reflection — both internal revisiting and dialogic exchanges with others — developing a meta-cognitive awareness that is increasingly nuanced and sophisticated and on which one can and desires to act in more informed ways. This conceptualization of education would help is to develop young people able to go out into the world as more responsible, more accountable, citizens. Working in collaboration with learners, meeting the challenge of sharing responsibility as they meet the challenge of taking it on, we have the potential to achieve a form of reciprocal accountability regarding students' — and our — ongoing education.

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