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**“Change Based On What Students Say”:
Preparing Teachers for a Paradoxical Model of Leadership**

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Abstract

In this article the author discusses how a radical approach to teacher education encourages both pre-service teachers and high school students to embrace a paradoxical model of leadership. A project that positions high school students as teachers as well as learners in an undergraduate secondary teacher certification course challenges pre-service teachers to learn to teach by listening to high school students, and it challenges students to learn to speak and take action within their school lives. As participant reflections illustrate, this project enacts the paradoxical model it advocates: it contradicts received notions of leadership as hierarchical, top-down, and synonymous with a single person—in this case, the teacher—in a position of authority; it challenges both pre-service teachers and students to embrace the seeming internal contradiction of being at once followers and leaders; and it represents, on a larger scale, resistance to the current climate and predominant acceptance in the United States of federally mandated standards and scripted approaches to teaching and learning.

The assertion from which the first half of this article’s title comes—“The best way to master the art of teaching is to really listen to student feedback and to change based on what students say”—issued from a high school student who had participated in a project called Teaching and Learning Together (TLT). This project takes a radical approach to teacher education by positioning high school students as teachers as well as learners within the context of an undergraduate teacher education program.¹ TLT not only assumes that students are

¹ The project is based in the penultimate course required to earn secondary teaching certification through the education program I direct at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, two selective colleges in the northeastern United States. The project was begun in 1995 with support from the Ford Foundation, maintained between 1997 and 2000 with support from the Arthur Vining Davis

legitimate authorities on issues of teaching and learning within the context of teacher preparation, it also encourages them to be agents of transformation in their own learning and schooling. In these ways the project runs directly contrary to current conventional wisdom about educational leadership, embodied in acceptance of federally mandated standards, and it challenges pre-service teachers to contradict what have become orthodox pedagogies—scripted approaches to teaching and learning—that teachers in public schools are pressured to embrace. TLT defines education and challenges participants to enact the educational process not as the one-way transfer of knowledge from teacher to student in preparation for performance on a standardized test but rather as a mutually informing, dynamic, human relationship within which knowledge and understanding are co-produced by teachers and students, within which teachers follow as well as lead and students lead as well as follow, and within which both pre-service teachers and students learn to resist the imposition of oppressive, disempowering, and commonly accepted educational practices.

By actively repositioning a constituency seen as the “least able and least powerful members of the educational community” (Fielding, 1999, p. 21), and by ensuring that their voices are among those that shape the development of pre-service teachers’ image of the teacher as leader, TLT argues in direct contradiction to top-down models of leadership (Alvarado, 1997; Coyle, 1997; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Owings & Kaplan, 2003; and Wynne, 2001) and supports the development of contemporary leadership qualities acknowledged by theorists as essential: collaboration and participation, motivation, and interpersonal communication (Bush and Bell, 2002). It explicitly challenges the traditional hierarchy according to which prescriptions for educational practice are generated by university-based researchers or federal mandate, passed down to district superintendents and school principals, who in turn impose these mandates on teachers, with students on the receiving end of this transfer. In challenging this hierarchy, it does not intend to diminish the power, expertise, or agency of the teacher. It insists, rather, that within the teacher/learner dynamic, the one with more structural power, who is more liable to dominate, must attend more to listening, and the ones with less structural power, who are more apt to be dominated, must assume greater agency. Teacher expertise is enhanced rather than diminished

Foundations, and has been supported since by Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. See Cook-Sather, in press, 2002a, 2002b, and 2002c for other discussions of this project.

through being informed by student perspectives, and the leadership students can take within their own learning and in their school contexts has the potential to transform education in ways that could benefit all concerned.

The radical commitment at the heart of TLT is captured by the mandate to “change based on what students say,” but the project is not premised on unreflective acceptance of student perspectives or on embracing paradox simply to be contrary. It does not assume or assert that teachers, pedagogical practices, and schools should change based *only* on what students say but rather partakes of a wider, shared commitment to effect “major shifts on the part of teachers, students, and researchers in relationships and in ways of thinking and feeling about the issues of knowledge, language, power, and self” (Oldfather, 1995, p. 87). TLT shares a premise with those who have long been critical of schools for ignoring students’ experiences and insights (e.g., Fielding, 2001b; Fullan, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 1994; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996; Smyth, forthcoming; Weis & Fine, 1993) and who have repeatedly implored educators to counteract educational policy making and practices that systematically exclude students’ perspectives. It is also shaped by an awareness of the challenges and complexities identified by those who have attempted or studied educational change based on students’ advice (e.g., Alverman et al., 1996; Evans, 2002; Gallas, 1995; Mitra, 2001, 2004; Pekrul & Levin, 2005; Rubin & Silva, 2003; Thiessen, 1997). It heeds as well the cautions that we need to interrogate critically certain kinds of efforts that claim to empower students (Bragg, 2001; Fielding, 2004a and 2004b; Orner, 1992; Silva, 2001; Thomson & Gunter, 2005). It is premised on the understanding that to change based on what students say and to question that process require a critical examination of the structures and practices that characterize traditional approaches to education, a constant “questioning [of] the ‘truth’ of [our] own thought[s] and selves” (Gore, 1992, p. 69), and a commitment to paradox and unsettledness rather than to convention and certainty in teaching and learning (Ellsworth, 1997).

To prepare prospective teachers for a paradoxical model of leadership constituted by the commitments outlined above, TLT provides a number of fora premised on democratic, critical, and constructivist principles. Within these fora, prospective teachers “[learn] to speak by listening” (Freire, 1998, p. 104), embrace the “mutuality of learning between the teacher and the student” (Fielding, 1999, p. 21), and learn how to “foster leadership in others” (Fullan, 2001, p. x) as part of their own learning to lead in classrooms and schools. In the following pages, a brief

description of TLT and the pre-service teachers and students who participate in it provides the context for a discussion of two sets of perspectives, each of which illustrates, from different angles, how listening and responding to what students say contribute to the paradoxical model of leadership for which I argue. The perspectives of the pre-service teachers illustrate how engagement in TLT fosters the development of teachers who learn to speak and act by first learning to listen to students and then, in turn, develop a commitment to eliciting and responding to student perspectives as an integral part of their approach to teaching. The perspectives of the students illustrate how having a strong voice within the context of teacher preparation fosters the development of students who are more engaged, critically aware, and able to speak and take action within their schools and lives.

Description of Teaching and Learning Together

Based in the methods course pre-service teachers complete through the Bryn Mawr/Haverford Education Program in the first semester of their senior year, prior to their student teaching semester, TLT consists of four components, all framed by the larger question of how to improve schools and teaching. The first component is a weekly email exchange between pairs of pre-service teachers and students who attend a local high school; the email exchange is based loosely on topics explored in weekly seminars at the college (i.e., what makes a good teacher, lesson plan, test, etc.) but also encompasses topics the pairs decide on their own are relevant to teaching and learning. The second component is weekly conversations among all the high school student participants convened by my collaborator, a school-based educator, at the students' school; these discussions are audiotaped, transcribed, and assigned as required reading to the pre-service teachers. The third component is a weekly discussion in the college-based seminar of how the dialogue with the high school students is going, what pre-service teachers are struggling with, learning, and integrating into their plans for practice. And the final component is an analysis paper written by each of the pre-service teachers at the end of the semester that draws on the email exchange, transcripts, and class discussions. (See Cook-Sather, in press, 2002a, 2002b, and 2002c for extended descriptions of these components of this project.)

The pre-service teachers who participate in TLT are 80% female and 90% white, and most of their education prior to college unfolded within the Honors and the AP tracks of their schools. The high school students who participate include roughly equal numbers of males and females (46% and 54%, respectively) who come from a variety of cultural and ethnic

backgrounds in about the same proportions that they constitute at their suburban public school (70% European-American, 10% Indian, 6% each of other Asian students, African-American students, and Latino/a heritage students). These students have been assigned to different tracks in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades of their high school (45% labeled “Gifted,” 37% labeled “Regular,” and 16% labeled “Special Education”). Recommended by teachers with whom I have worked, these students are not selected according to any standard measure of who the “best” students might be but rather according to who might be interested, engaged, and willing to speak their minds. Permission for their participation is secured from the students themselves, from their parents or guardians, from the school, and from Bryn Mawr College’s Internal Review Board. Like other “experts,” they are paid for their contribution to the preparation of future teachers.

Learning to Learn to Speak by Listening

Schools have evolved “over the course of two centuries without listening to student voices” (Arnot et al., 2004, p. 3), and teacher preparation has embraced this tendency. The culture of schooling that keeps students captive to dominant interests, notions, and practices (see Berman, 1984; Burbules, 1986; Cook-Sather, 2003; Fielding, 2004a; Franklin, 2000; Giroux, 1985; Greene, 1983; Popkewitz, 1988; Rudduck, 2002; Schlechty & Burke, 1980; Schutz, 2003; Thomas, 1985) “prevents practitioners from listening to students’ own creative ideas about how systems can change and meet their needs” (Cruddas & Haddock, 2003, p. 6). This is ever more the case as school in the United States are increasingly driven by the need to demonstrate proficiency on standards specified by federal mandate. In the drive to “improve” schools, we ignore our most “generous commentators and insightful critics” (MacBeath, Myers, & Demetriou, 2001, p. 78) and fail to learn from them what “is dysfunctional about much of what transpires in schooling...and how schooling might be different for [students]” (Smyth, forthcoming).

Although constructivist models of learning, critical and feminist pedagogies, and other counterhegemonic approaches have counteracted in some teacher education programs the traditional emphases on prospective teachers learning to be the only ones in the classroom in charge and in control of procedures and content, many classrooms are still run according to individualistic, instrumental, and undemocratic principles (see Fielding, 1999, for critique of these principles). As mentioned above, pressures to satisfy the requirements of federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind as well as national and state standards exacerbate this

phenomenon, and very rarely in teacher preparation do we see any complicating of the dynamics of power and authority that characterize relationships between teachers and students (see Youens & Hall, 2004, for a counterexample) and contribute to models and practices of school leadership. Embracing a more paradoxical model of leadership means teachers doing more listening than talking, more following than guiding, more negotiating than dictating, even, perhaps especially, in contexts that are not conducive to this kind of practice. TLT challenges pre-service teachers to engage in two mutually informing and recursive processes that move them toward this model of leadership: (1) learning to listen and (2) learning to speak and act differently.

Learning to Listen

Learning to listen to students means learning not to speak *for* them—a practice whose effect “is often, though not always...a reinscription...of hierarchies” (Alcoff, 1995, p. 250)—but rather to speak *with* them. Real conversation, Delpit (1988) suggests, calls for “a very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears but also open hearts and minds” (p. 298). Learning from students requires “a way of listening that [values] diversity in ‘ways with words’” (Ballenger, forthcoming) and in ways of being; it requires understanding teaching itself as listening (Schultz, 2003).

The pre-service teachers who participate in TLT do not always enter the project prepared and able to listen to students. Many, in fact, approach it with this attitude: “being in the Haverford [College] environment for four years, I just did not think that I could learn anything from [my high school partner]...At the beginning I came in to [TLT] with the idea that [she] could probably learn something from me.” After a semester of email exchanges, readings of transcripts of the high school students’ conversations, class discussions of the correspondence and the conversations, and critical reflection on the project at the end of the term, most pre-service teachers have significantly changed their attitude toward students and their orientation toward practice.

The pre-service teacher I just quoted above stated at the end of the semester that, regarding her belief that she wasn’t likely to learn anything from her high school student partner, “I was so wrong. I learned SO MUCH from her and the way I structured my [final analysis of the project was around] three main issues that I learned that struck me as, ‘I’m not listening. I’m not listening. I’m just saying things to her, and not listening...She was listening to me and I was not listening to her.’ You need to hear the student’s voice, because that’s the reason of

teaching.” To understand hearing the student’s voice as the “reason of teaching” is a far cry from dismissing student voices as void of possible insight.

Several pre-service teachers explain how they learned to listen with open hearts and minds and began to shift their relationships and ways of thinking. In her reflection on the project, one pre-service teacher explains: “[There] was a really big turning point in the dialogue project where I realized that I was dominating discussion [in the exchange of emails] and that’s not what I believed... I know on paper I can say, ‘Oh, I really want student voice to be a dominant part of my classroom.’ But, when it really comes down to it, can I somehow foster an environment where that’s true?” Yet another pre-service teacher asserts: “The interaction between [my high school student partner] and me was teaching me how to listen to a student, to analyze her thoughts, to apply them to the formation of my own teaching persona. . . The relationship we were building brought my reflections back to my own goals of being an effective teacher and interacting with future students.” Finally, a fourth pre-service teacher says: “What’s so special about the project is that we are focusing on their voices, ‘cause otherwise we could just learn all the theory, learn all this and never apply it, and never communicate to young people. And I think what was important, where I saw my role, was as a listener. I was going to listen to them. And as a teacher, that’s what I want to do for my students. I’m going to listen to them because they are extremely articulate, extremely intelligent, they know what’s wrong with school, they know what’s missing, and they’re constantly asking for it.”

Each of these pre-service teachers emphasizes listening or learning to listen to students as central to her development as a prospective teacher, and each illustrates a movement toward a more paradoxical model of leadership. The first points out that she was “just saying things,” and even though her high school partner was listening, she herself was not; this pre-service teacher initially enacted then critiqued a traditional model of teaching and leadership. The second pre-service teacher offers an even more refined analysis, suggesting that although there was dialogue, she was dominating it; she was committed to but not yet enacting a more paradoxical model. The third pre-service teacher builds on the foundation of listening to argue for an integration of what she hears into her evolving identity; she articulates how both the process of listening and what is heard can shape a teacher-leader. And the fourth pre-service teacher claims that her role as a teacher will be premised on listening because, she asserts, students have not only important but also authoritative perspectives on school and what they need from it; she will

follow as well as lead students. Essential to each of these pre-service teacher's formulations is the commitment to a *process* of listening; none of them talks about having heard students and thus being done with listening. Nor is any of them silenced herself by her recognition that she was silencing or dominating students; rather, each shifts her relationship and revises her way of thinking and feeling about the issues of knowledge, language, power, and self inherent in teacher/learner relationships, and each commits herself to speaking with, not for, students.

Learning to Speak—and Act—Differently

A recognition that one needs to listen and hear before speaking—retune her ears and then rethink her assumptions and approaches—can lead to powerful re-imaginings of pedagogical relationships. One pre-service teacher articulates this process clearly: “I remained mildly frustrated until I realized that I was expecting [my student partner] to speak in my language. Amid our discussions of student voice and its value, I had neglected to realize that his learning, his method of articulation, was through experience and concrete examples. I had sought to give him voice while failing to hear the sound of his individual words.” Her failure to hear her student partner, even though she had been trying to listen, highlights another important dimension of learning to speak by listening. This pre-service teacher integrates her insight into her thinking about her future practice: “Although many students may be capable of thinking abstractly, they may not have practice doing so or be comfortable with it. Therefore, if I come into a classroom assuming they can, I may immediately alienate them. I must instead associate concrete examples with what I am teaching.” This approach is advocated in many teaching resources and manuals, but to learn it through actual experience of trying to listen to a student is a far more profound and lasting lesson. As another pre-service teacher puts it: “Telling someone that students should be heard is an effective argument in itself, but actually listening to students and hearing what they have to say and integrating their input into your own life is astronomically more effective.”

Another pre-service teacher realized the importance of listening and learning to speak and act differently as the result of a different kind of experience. Half way through her dialogue, she learned that her high school partner was labeled learning disabled when her partner wrote to her: “Sometimes teachers treat me differently because I am in special education. Would you treat a student differently if they came up to you and you knew they were in special education?” After

initially reverting to old assumptions about students labeled learning disabled, this pre-service teacher made herself try to focus on the student with whom she was corresponding instead, to ask her why she was treated this way, to listen to what this particular student had to say. Reflecting on this moment, the pre-service teacher wrote: “I thought about [my partner’s] question and realized I would have treated her differently had I known. I would have acted on my assumptions about learning disabled students and never would have gotten very far in the dialogue.” This pre-service teacher recognizes that falling back on assumptions would have hindered the dialogue and, conversely, that asking questions and listening furthered it. She continues: “[My partner] made me realize that my conceptions about students with learning disabilities were incorrect. By sharing herself with me and helping me to destroy an unfounded assumption, [she] helped me to realize that teaching learning disabled students is not something to be viewed with apprehension. I actually now hope to have the opportunity to teach students like Sally who have enormous potential but just need some extra help and a good teacher.” Through learning to listen, this pre-service teacher commits herself to a different kind of action informed by a different kind of awareness.

Genuinely listening in order to learn to speak leads to a much more reciprocal, mutually informing teaching and learning dynamic while it enacts a kind of leadership on the part of both pre-service teachers and students in sharp contrast to traditional models. One pre-service teacher explains how she experienced this dynamic during her exchange in the semester prior to student teaching: “[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.” Another pre-service teacher explains how she has continued to create this dynamic two years after graduating and going on to teach: “This project taught me to value students’ opinions on approaches to teaching. I don’t think it always occurs to teachers to ask students about [their perspectives]. But, after my experience, I do it as a matter of course in my classroom.” Yet a third identifies this kind of listening to students as central to her ongoing development as a teacher: “The dialogue project helped me to realize that I NEED student input and energy in order to sustain myself as an energetic and passionate teacher. Now, five or so years later, I still find myself asking for lots of student perspective and input, in both formal and informal ways.” Not only do these pre-service teachers learn to lead by following, they continue to do so as they evolve as teachers.

The sense of teaching *with* students that these pre-service-turned-practicing teachers convey reflects their rejection of traditional notions of leadership (teaching) as individualistic, instrumental, and undemocratic, of leadership (teaching) as hierarchical, top-down, and synonymous with a single person in a position of authority, and of a leader (teacher) as one who precedes and guides others who follow or come after. Rather, the teaching/leading/learning relationship these teachers describe is relational, democratic, critical, and constructivist. Such a model of educational leadership is more challenging to enact than traditional models, however. One pre-service teacher makes this clear when he describes the realization he came to about how easy it is to misinterpret and inappropriately judge students if one doesn't listen carefully to them, let them lead a teacher to a deeper understanding of them: "This realization has, in many ways, made teaching harder for me. I see now that if I want to help all of my students achieve, I need to know them, to work with their skills and their abilities, and I need to somehow do this all in the framework provided by a particular educational system." Learning to listen and learning to speak and act differently do not render teachers immune from the challenges students, schools systems, and they themselves pose. However, they do hold the promise of more responsive and responsible leadership in teaching and learning.

Learning to Learn—and Teach—by Speaking

The perspectives of students who participate in TLT illustrate how having a strong voice within the context of teacher preparation fosters the development of students who are more engaged, critically aware, and able to speak and take action within their schools and lives. TLT fosters this development by providing a space for students to articulate their perspectives on teaching and learning, which leads to critical reflection on own learning experiences, which in turn leads to action taken to challenge and change what isn't working.

Students acknowledge how rare it is to share their perspectives on schooling and be heard by pre-service teachers: "The topics we spoke on are not commonly discussed with students. We don't often get the chance to give the constrictive criticism that so many of us have thoughts on." They appreciate the chance to "get my opinion out there," and they recognize the importance of pre-service teachers hearing diverse perspectives: "It's great that there were several of us [high school students participating in the project] too because the opinions were mixed and not everyone can learn the same way." Finally, they appreciate the willingness pre-service teachers demonstrate to listen: "[participating in the project] made me respect teachers more. I never

really thought that they wondered about some of the things that [my pre-service teacher partner] asked me. And just to think that they actually wondered about that or cared about that made me respect them a little more.”

Through providing space and time for student voices to be heard, TLT allows students to gain critical distance on their schooling experiences and what they need from them. As one student states: “[Participating in this project] made me step back as a student and just look at how everything was going on in the classroom. It made me look at how I was being taught and how teachers worked.” When students have this kind of opportunity, they derive insights about their teachers and their learning experiences. One student explains: “The email correspondence forced me to think about certain complaints I have had about teachers, and think about how that could be improved upon.” Thinking about how teaching could better serve them pushes students to identify and articulate their learning needs or, as another student put it, “reevaluate what is important to us in a learning experience.”

Talking about good teaching inspires students to become better students; their analyses of how teaching could be better illuminate as well how the students have already improved and can further improve their own approaches to learning. One student explains: “This project has helped me in a lot of ways. I came from South America about four years ago, to this country, and I still, up to this date, I found myself at a lower level than I wish I would be in being a student, intellectual-wise. So this project, just having discussions and meetings after school every Wednesday, has helped me in my thinking process and my thinking skills. I think they’ve developed a lot.” Another student make a similar point: “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.”

While having the opportunity to speak their minds, improve their skills, and clarify their needs as learners are all valuable, reflecting and sharing within a closed forum are not enough. One high school student who participated in TLT lamented: “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.” TLT supports students in finding and forging a language with which to articulate their perspectives (see MacBeath et al. 2001 for a discussion of the importance of this point) and gives them the confidence to assert those perspectives. A short vignette illustrates what can happen when a high school student both

gains critical insights into education and develops the confidence to share those. A former high school student participant in TLT ended up in one of the high school classes taken on for student teaching by a pre-service teacher participant in TLT. One day after class, the cooperating teacher, my school-based collaborator in the project, overheard a conversation between the pre-service teacher and the high school student in which the student was giving the pre-service teacher feedback. The high school student started out explaining to the pre-service teacher what he thought had gone well about the lesson and then segued into recommendations for improvement. The pre-service teacher sat at a desk beside the high school student listening to him and taking notes on what he said. This is a vivid illustration not only of “[taking] students’ experiences and meanings seriously” (Kamler, 2001, p. 38) but also of shifting who speaks with authority and who listens (McLaren, 1989)—of who leads and who follows at different moments in the teaching/learning relationship. It is a far cry from teachers marching through scripted curricula and students simply accepting what they are presented.

While the focus of dialogue, analysis, and revised practice in TLT is most often explicitly pedagogical, there are other, less teaching-and-learning-based but no less relevant foci that also arise. I offer just one illustrative example of an instance of racial discrimination that became the focus of conversation one week among the high school students and the impetus for action among both the high school students and the pre-service teachers. One year, 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 white adult that she should apply only to traditionally black colleges. The other students comforted her as she became increasingly distraught in telling her story, and they supported her in thinking of ways both to repair her self-esteem and to pursue the range of college opportunities she wanted. Not only did the students band together to decry this act of discrimination and support the student who had experienced it, the pre-service teacher who was the student’s dialogue partner used the resources available to her at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges and her facility with accessing information via the internet to help the student pursue other options. We also addressed the incident in our college-based seminar, and the other pre-service teachers contributed their knowledge and suggestions for resources and strategies. For some students and pre-service teachers, this was an eye-opening experience. For others it was all too familiar. New to all of them was sharing a supported and supporting space within which this diverse group of

differently positioned individuals could see and talk in various configurations through ways to fight against and move beyond the barriers both the original act of discrimination but also the subsequent reactions could have caused.

All of these experiences that students have through their participation in TLT—getting their opinions “out there,” gaining critical distance on their schooling experiences and asserting what could be changed to improve them, and asserting their newfound agency in individual and larger contexts—contribute to the fostering of a more paradoxical model of leadership in which the learners are leaders as well as followers. And yet, while TLT accomplishes these things, it also raises questions: Which student voices get elicited and attended to? What about the contradictions in what students have to say? What happens when students exercise their newfound agency in unreceptive or even hostile and dangerous contexts and relationships? These questions admit of no easy answers. Although I attempt in designing TLT to include students who claim and are labeled according to various dimensions of diversity, I cannot ensure that every perspective is included, and even regarding those students who are included, as Ellsworth (1992) argues, “every expression of student voice [is] partial and predicated on the absence and marginalization of alternative voices” (p. 103). Regarding the contradictions in students’ voiced perspectives, at best they foster an understanding among pre-service teachers that there is, as one pre-service teacher put it, no “defined formula” for being a teacher, but at worst they can prompt pre-service and subsequently practicing teachers to stop listening, to stop asking because it is simply easier to lead in a traditional, authoritarian way than it is to listen and follow diverse perspectives. And finally, although TLT strengthens students’ sense of self-esteem and agency, in doing so it runs the risk of setting students up for subsequent disappointment, disillusionment, and perhaps retribution when they attempt to exercise their agency in other contexts—in classrooms with more authoritarian teachers or among less critical peers who simply want to get through the work.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges and potential drawbacks of listening to students and changing based on what they have to say, the reflections of participants in TLT argue overwhelmingly that pre-service teachers who participate in this project are prepared to challenge the dominant notions and practices of schooling, particularly in this era of high-stakes testing, scripted curricula, and reductive and stifling forms of accountability, and students are prepared to

question the forms of schooling in which they are engaged, the kinds of teaching they experience, and the kinds of action they can take to challenge both. Developing this kind of critical awareness and commitment to action prepares both pre-service teachers and students to assume leadership roles in schools that both contradict traditional models of leadership and model a new way of teaching, learning, and leading. With Fielding (1999) I embrace the conviction that “at the heart of an educative encounter there is a mutuality of learning between the teacher and the student” and that students are therefore not “objects of professional endeavor” but rather “partners in the learning process” and, sometimes, “teachers of teachers” as well as learners (p. 21; see also Cook-Sather, in press and 2002; MacBeath, 1998, and Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). Working toward a more “radical collegiality” (Fielding, 1999) through fostering within teacher preparation a paradoxical model of leadership allows us to pursue a redefined professionalism that constitutes itself by “reaching beyond itself and by dissolving the traditional distinction between professional and non-professional” (Nixon et al., 1997, p. 25)—in this case, teacher and student—rather than limit the possibility for more broad-based participation on the part of other members of the educational community (Harris & Lambert, 2003)—in this case, students. When pre-service teachers and high school students experience, embrace, and begin to enact the model of leadership advocated here, not only do they experience education as a mutually informing, dynamic, human relationship within which knowledge and understanding are co-produced by teachers and students, they experience both leading and following as reciprocal not mutually exclusive activities, and they begin the lifelong work of resisting the imposition of oppressive, disempowering, and commonly accepted educational practices.

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