

4-2018

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Beltramo, J.L. (2018). Developing Mutual Accountability between Teachers and Students through Participation in Cogenerative Dialogues. *International Journal of Student Voice*, 3 (1).
<https://ijsv.psu.edu/?article=developing-mutual-accountability-between-teachers-and-students-through-participation-in-cogenerative-dialogues>

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International Journal of Student Voice

A peer-reviewed, independent, open-access journal

Pennsylvania State University

Volume 3, Number 1

IJSV

Spring 2018

Developing Mutual Accountability between Teachers and Students through Participation in Cogenerative Dialogues

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Citation: Beltramo, J.L. (2018). Developing Mutual Accountability between Teachers and Students through Participation in Cogenerative Dialogues. *International Journal of Student Voice*, 3 (1).

Abstract: In this study, I explore cogenerative dialogues as potentially supportive spaces for the development of mutual accountability and reciprocal learning between teachers and students, even within contexts dominated by high-stakes accountability and its associated challenges. In cogenerative dialogues, teachers gather with small groups of their students outside of instructional time to discuss classroom teaching and environment and to construct plans by which to improve student learning and wellbeing. Through a design-based case study, I worked with two science teachers, Lorena and Ellen, from urban high schools to establish and enact weekly cogenerative dialogues with their students over a period of five months. The high schools which framed the backdrop of this study served almost exclusively low-income Latino communities and

had recently adopted strict measures of high-stakes teacher accountability. Findings indicated that, within the contexts of cogenerative dialogues, Ellen and Lorean engaged with their respective students in cycles of reflection that promoted *mutual* accountability—an instantiation of which stands in stark contrast to the high-stakes accountability impacting so many teachers and schools today. I found that this cycle of mutual accountability was marked by three particular stages: Responsibility, or the solicitation of various stakeholder perceptions of problematic areas of classroom teaching and environment; Responsiveness, or the co-construction among teacher and students of potential solutions to such problems; and Report-and-Review, or moments where members of the dialogues reflected on, and held one another to account for, their endeavors within the enacted solution. At the same time, however, pressures associated with high-stakes accountability systems operating throughout the two high schools constrained the extent to which these stages of mutual accountability could fully emerge within the cogenerative dialogues. Thus, I argue that cogenerative dialogues can serve as important albeit limited spaces where teachers and students can, to a degree, re-appropriate 'accountability' as a mutually supportive element of relationship and learning, even when surrounding environments promote neoliberal, high-stakes interpretations of this concept.

Keywords: Mutual accountability; cogenerative dialogues; teacher accountability

Introduction

For many teachers throughout the United States, *accountability* has become a “bad word” (Ruben, 2011) and perhaps for good reason. In the prevailing model of accountability found among contemporary U.S. schools, teachers are rewarded or sanctioned by administrators based on classroom observations and students’ standardized test scores. This neoliberal, high-stakes system of accountability was originally instituted through federal and state legislation as a way to improve student learning by motivating teachers (Dworkin, 2005). Yet, in many circumstances, it has had the opposite effect. For example, studies have associated neoliberal, high-stakes accountability with teacher demoralization and deprofessionalization (Lavigne, 2013), constrained autonomy in teaching (Ruben, 2011), and alienated relationships between teachers and students (Kostogriz, 2012).

In response to these challenges mediated by high-stakes accountability, scholars have advocated for the instantiation and study of more localized, democratic forms of accountability that are oriented more toward learning and development than punishments and rewards (Morrell, 2017; Oakes & Rogers, 2006). The study here examines how cogenerative dialogues—a powerful example of student voice in schools—can help promote one such form of democratic accountability: mutual accountability between teachers and their students. This study found that cogenerative dialogues supported the conditions necessary to develop mutual accountability, but were also limited in substantial ways by the impact of high-stakes, neoliberal accountability systems pervading the sample schools. While the investigation took place in the U.S., its findings hold implications for educators in international settings who seek

to establish more localized forms of accountability amidst neoliberal, high-stakes policy contexts.

High-stakes, Neoliberal Accountability Structures in Education

Accountability here is understood as an underlying element of all social interactions, wherein individuals are expected to provide a rationale behind, and evidence of, their normative actions (Giddens, 1984). While several forms of accountability operate within schooling systems, recent policy trends in the U.S. and other Western nations have espoused and supported a particularly prevalent model—high-stakes, neoliberal accountability (Dworkin, 2009; Kostogriz, 2012). Since the 1980s governmental departments in the U.S. and elsewhere have adopted approaches to surveil and evaluate schools and teachers by reducing complex, multidimensional components of performance to simple measurements (e.g., teacher evaluation rubrics) and by weighing those measurements against resource allocation to maximize efficiency (Ranson, 2003). Scholars such Kostogriz and Doecke (2011) characterize this approach as neoliberal accountability and stress that its aim is to identify and eliminate those teachers deemed incompetent and/or unwilling to meet desired expectations for instruction and its outcomes.

With the international spread of content standards in the 1990s, neoliberal accountability has taken on greater dimensions of standardization and high-stakes testing to levy rewards and sanctions for teachers and schools. States have adopted achievement tests based on subject-specific standards and issue these tests to students across grade-levels (Lavigne, 2013; Ryan, 2005). Increasingly, achievement

scores on such tests determine teacher bonuses, contract renewal, or termination, as well as school closure, continuance, or reconstitution; thus, high-stakes accountability seeks to standardize content while intensifying consequences for student achievement or lack thereof.

Studies suggest that high-stakes and neoliberal approaches to accountability have led to a host of unintended consequences that challenge equitable student learning opportunities (Ranson, 2003). For example, accountability reforms based on standardized tests effectively can narrow the classroom curriculum to those subjects appearing on such exams and redirects teachers' attention only to those students at the cusp of passing (Lavigne, 2013). When this occurs, the complex mission of teaching (and schooling)—with its varied and rich goals for students—is objectified and reduced to helping students raise scores on a limited subset of academic skills (Ryan, 2005). Moreover, the emphasis on teacher surveillance characterizing neoliberal accountability arguably deprofessionalizes the field of teaching, consumes valuable teacher resources, and heightens anxiety among educators (Kostogriz, 2012). Perhaps most dangerously, coupling teacher accountability with achievement scores may alienate teachers from students, encouraging them to treat their students as a means toward higher evaluation scores and deterring them from spending tightly budgeted classroom time on the “affective labor” necessary in developing caring student relationships that supporting meaningful learning (Kostogriz, 2012).

Mutual Accountability and Sociocultural Learning Theory

As alternatives to neoliberal, high-stakes forms of accountability, scholars (e.g., Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Ranson, 2003; Ryan, 2005) have “advocat[ed] for...bottom-up accountability structure[s] where those who are most impacted by educational outcomes hold those in power accountable for producing and maintaining equitable access” (Morrell, 2017, p.460). One such “bottom-up” or democratic form of accountability gaining increased traction in the literature on education and social sciences more broadly is mutual accountability (Brown, 2007; Henderson, Whitaker, & Altman-Sauer, 2003; Merrifield, 1999).

Mutual accountability is understood here as a system of cooperation “grounded in shared values and visions and in relations of mutual trust and influence” (Brown, 2007, p.95). Where social interactions manifest mutual accountability, participating individuals engage in regular dialogue that aims at negotiating commonly shared “goals, identifications, and interests” (Brown, 2007, p.95). These dialogues of mutual accountability tend to occur within a cycle of three spiraling stages of interactions: responsiveness, responsibility, and report-and-review (Henderson et al., 2003). At the stage of *responsiveness*, stakeholders offer their diverse perspectives and develop intersubjectivity (i.e., common understandings) (Merrifield, 1999), identify and deliberate around shared problems, and eventually generate potential solutions (Brown, 2007). In *responsibility*, participants settle on a common plan of action, divide the labor of this plan, and create shared expectations around its goals or outcomes (Merrifield, 1999). Arriving at *report-and-review*, stakeholders then discuss and evaluate those actions and outcomes (as well as the relationships and resources inherent to them), and identify

new challenges that may have resulted, thus marking a re-engagement in the cycle (Brown, 2007; Henderson et al., 2003). Translated specifically for schools, such mutual accountability would be illustrated by instances when students “hold teachers, for example, accountable for providing learning opportunities that meet their needs” and teachers “hold learners accountable for taking learning seriously and for making an effort to participate fully” (Merrifield, 1999, p.10).

Sociocultural theories posit that learning is an integral part of the process of mutual accountability. From this lens, individuals participate in communities that revolve around a shared practice—a collective endeavor that defines their individual actions (or enterprises) and social relations (or mutual engagements) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In communities of practice, members negotiate these enterprises and engagements—their participation in the group—with one another, and then hold each other accountable for meeting related expectations (Wenger, 1998). Group members also negotiate, construct, and utilize shared repertoires, which represent the values, tools, and speech they hold in common. By holding one another to their enterprises, engagements, and repertoires, members are able to identify instances when related expectations are unmet due to tensions, contradictions, or discontinuities that emerge within the group’s practice. When the conditions are supportive, these moments of conflict can serve as areas for growth and learning, particularly when group members hold one another accountable for development so that the collective practice may operate more smoothly.

Individuals’ proximity to their shared practice and a diversity of perspectives also matter for mutual accountability and the learning it supports (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In communities of practice, a diversity of perspectives within a

community is needed to identify when tensions emerge in a practice, and thereby highlight new areas for members to grow and learn (Wenger, 1998). In communities of teachers, diversity may exist, but it often lacks the perspective of other parties involved in the practice of teaching who could identify contradictions less visible to teachers and thus identify new opportunities for learning.

Review of Literature on Student Consultation and Cogenerative Dialogues

Scholars have argued that student voices can provide such generative, peripheral perspectives necessary to locating areas for growth in schools and classrooms (Cook-Sather, 2002; Mullis, 2011). For nearly two decades, researchers have explored what teachers can learn via student consultation, or “talking with pupils about things that matter to them in the classroom and school and that affect their learning” (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007, p.7). Studies have found that, through student consultation, teachers have learned about student lives outside of school (Kane, Maw, & Chimwayange, 2006; Morgan, 2009), about student learning needs and preferences (Mitra, 2001; Mullis, 2011; Pedder & McIntyre, 2006), and how to construct more engaging, relevant lessons and curricula (Seiler, 2011). Research also suggests that when students are consulted about classroom instruction, they report greater engagement in school (Cook-Sather, 2002; Morgan, 2009; Pedder & McIntyre, 2006; Seiler, 2011), stronger relationships with teachers (Cook-Sather, 2006; Kane et al., 2006; Mullis, 2011; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007), and more ownership over, as well as more reflection on, their own learning (Cook-Sather, 2002; Morgan, 2009; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

The contexts in which student consultation—and other forms of student voice—are most impactful support several particular conditions: the spaces and facilitation necessary for students to express their perspectives, an audience to actively listen to these perspectives, and direct influence of such student voice on educational decisions (Lundy, 2007). In studies of indirect forms of student consultation—where researchers survey or interview groups of students about their experiences in school and then relay this information back to teachers and school leaders—students often report a lack of influence on school and/or classroom policies and view their participation as a singular instance of consultation that is too easily ignored (Elwood, 2013; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Thus, this study examines a more direct, sustained form of student consultation often referred in the literature as cogenerative dialogues (Roth & Tobin, 2005).

In cogenerative dialogues, a teacher meets with a representative focus group of her students on a weekly basis outside instructional time to generate and deliberate suggestions for improved opportunities—and a more responsive environment—for student learning (Tobin & Roth, 2006). These conversations typically center on such questions as: How have activities and the classroom environment supported and/or impeded student learning? What related improvements should be made to bolster student engagement and learning? (Emdin, 2007). Research on cogenerative dialogues has identified several affordances for teacher learning. In particular, studies have suggested that cogenerative dialogues can help teachers to learn about and include within the curriculum interests of students (Beltramo, 2017a); to create more culturally responsive and inclusive classroom environments (Emdin, 2007), and to build and exchange social capital with their students (Beers, 2009). Within this literature,

studies have hinted that cogenerative dialogues might also contribute to a sense of mutual accountability. For example, several investigations found that participating students often develop collective responsibility for their class work (Bayne, 2009; Beers, 2009; Martin & Scantlebury, 2009). Roth and Tobin (2005) propose that cogenerative dialogues held mostly among coteachers can represent an alternative to teacher evaluation. However, extant research has yet to fully explore how or if such dialogues might help mutual accountability develop between a teacher and students in a classroom. Thus, this study asks: In what ways and to what extent can mutual accountability emerge among teachers and students who engage in cogenerative dialogues?

Methodology

To explore this question, I employed a multicase investigation to study the “quintain” (Stake, 2006)—or focal phenomenon—of accountability manifestations emerging within and across two cases of cogenerative dialogues. In multicase studies, versus comparative case studies, more attention is focused on common properties across cases so as to present a clearer portrait of the quintain (Stake, 2006).

Framing the Cases

After receiving ethics approval for the study from my institutional review board, I recruited participants from Ambition (all names pseudonyms), an urban charter organization serving largely students from historically marginalized communities. In 2008 Ambition instituted a teacher evaluation system reflecting a neoliberal, high-stakes accountability approach, where the vast majority of a teacher’s composite annual

evaluation mark was derived from a combination of two formal observations and her/his students' achievement scores on state and/or benchmark standardized tests. Failure for a tenured teacher to meet the threshold mark for evaluation resulted in a probationary period, after which time the teacher would be required to demonstrate substantial improvement in student achievement and classroom observation scores, or risk the possibility of termination.

The two participating teachers selected for this study, Ellen and Lorena, offered special purchase for studying the types of accountability that could manifest in cogenerative dialogues. First, the participants' veteran status ensured that they were beyond the induction period, when the Ambition's evaluation policies focused more on providing novices with supports and less on holding them accountable for student achievement. Second, Ambition very recently adopted a standardized curriculum plan (known as a "pacing guide"), which anatomy/ physiology teachers were required to follow and which was reinforced by monthly benchmark exams tied to the pacing guide and a summative life-sciences test mandated by the state. Thus, Ambition anatomy teachers such as Ellen and Lorena had experience with both low-stakes accountability (i.e., evaluation tied primarily to observations) and high-stakes accountability (i.e., evaluation tied substantially to student test scores and standardized curriculum). Third, studying participants from two separate schools offered possible insights into how cogenerative dialogues (and their instantiations of accountability) might manifest in similar ways.

Each of the participants selected for the study was a veteran high school anatomy teacher, with more than ten experience years in the classroom (see Table 1 for

more information). Ellen and Lorena were known and respected within their respective schools as teacher leaders, and each at some point had also served on curriculum committees for the district.

Table 1

Teacher Participant Demographics, Experience, and School Information

<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Race/ Ethnicity</u>	<u>Teaching Experience</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>FRL</u>
Ellen Galván	Female	Latina	13 years	Ambition East	97%	3%	97%
Lorena Silva	Female	Latina	11 years	Ambition West	99%	1%	92%

Note: FRL stands for the percentage of students who qualify for Free/Reduced price lunch

This multicase study was nested within a design research framework (Design-based Research Collaborative (DBRC), 2003), meaning that at each site I collaborated with the participating teacher and her student focus group to enact, develop, and learn about the cogenerative dialogues as catalysts for teacher learning. The dialogues, which typically ran 25-75 minutes immediately following instructional hours, included the teacher and 4-6 of her students (see Table 2) from each site and were held each week for 16 weeks in the second semester.

Table 2

List of Student Participants at Each Site

Ambition East (Ellen)	Weeks 1 – 8: Alejandro, José, Lina, Patricia, & Vanessa Weeks 9 – 15: Angel, Dylan, Lina, Maria, Melvin, Nelson, & Vanessa
Ambition West (Lorena)	Weeks 1 – 16: Antonio, Carlos, Emmy, & Mateo

My methods of data collection closely followed procedures of previous design research and case studies into cogenerative dialogues (e.g., Bayne, 2009). To understand how accountability was manifest through the cogenerative dialogues themselves, I participated in, videotaped, and transcribed each dialogue. Additionally, I observed weekly blocks of Ellen and Lorena's anatomy classes (as well as an entire week's instruction at both the front and back end of the sixteen-week study) to note any changes in their teaching and/or classroom environments. To explore the teachers' and students' perspectives on any potential changes, with every participant I conducted (a) weekly informal 'debriefs' immediately following each dialogue, and (b) multiple formal interviews held at various points throughout the study.

My approach to data analysis consisted of three cycles of coding and memoing (Saldaña, 2013). I began by rereading each piece of data chronologically to get a sense of developments in participant actions and perceptions over the course of the study, and also to develop a set of provisional codes. I then organized these provisional codes into broad units, which contained related events or descriptions, and memoed around relationships that seemed to emerge within each unit. The final cycle of analysis consisted of pattern and axial coding, whereby I analyzed and compared the data within and across various related subcodes, focusing on the properties, dimensions, interactions, and consequences of phenomena captured in and across the subcodes and, when appropriate, creating matrices to compare and contrast the organized information.

One pattern emerging from the data—that the participating teachers frequently acted upon student suggestions in their classroom—necessitated an additional and

separate analysis. To test the claim of teacher responsiveness, I located within the dialogue transcripts student recommendations for classroom changes. I then cross-referenced this list of student suggestions from each site against records of Ellen and Lorena's classroom teaching and those occasions when each teacher made an instructional move that aligned with (and thus appeared to respond to) a student suggestion offered in an earlier dialogue.

Findings

I think it [the dialogue] was a great process. I mean, you had a great process with the teacher and students just talking about how it [a lesson] went and how it could go better. Then we go and see how our solutions go in the next class, and then talk about it in the next meeting. It's just a great process. (Dylan, Ellen's student)

Data indicated that over the course of the study, a strong sense of mutual accountability developed within the cogenerative dialogues among the participating teacher and students at each site. As Dylan (above) and other participants recognized, this mutual accountability seemed to manifest in an iterative process, or cycle, that closely reflected Henderson and colleagues' (2003) stages of responsiveness, responsibility, and report-and-review. Running through and underlying this process was a major theme of relationship development among the participants at both schools. At the same time, however, in each stage noted above, members of the cogenerative dialogues encountered salient tensions that helped reveal some of the limitations of mutual accountability in its application to teachers and students situated within the

current neoliberal, high-stakes policy context surrounding schools and districts like Ambition. In the subsections that follow, I detail how mutual accountability was supported (and at times constrained) within instances of responsiveness, responsibility, and report-and-review, as well as through a process of relationship development.

Responsiveness

In the first stage of mutual accountability, Henderson and colleagues (2003) propose that stakeholders demonstrate *responsiveness*, by openly sharing perspectives, deliberating perceived challenges, and identifying common points of interest within these issues. Interactions in the setting of cogenerative dialogues at both sites of the study demonstrated this reciprocal responsiveness among participants, particularly as teachers (and students) sought out and listened to various perspectives around instruction; discussed the rationales and values of learning that grounded these opinions; and identified and grappled with problems that were perceived to have surfaced in the classroom.

A common thread among all dialogues across both sites was the elevated position that student perspectives seemed to hold within the dialogues (Emdin, 2007; Roth & Tobin, 2005). As illustrated in the following transcript, nearly each meeting began with the teacher or myself asking students to share their thoughts and feelings around previous anatomy lessons.

Author: So, I noticed that Monday and Wednesday last week, Ms. Galván started off with those mini-quizzes on Schoology. What do you think about those?

Patricia: I like them. I mean, they're not that hard. I usually get nervous about tests but not those—

Lina: Yeah, it's not like they're worth a ton of points...

Vanessa: Plus, it's good [to get quizzed] because then you see how you're doing and how much you get or don't get the new vocabulary.

Here, three students from Ellen's dialogue voice their opinions about short quizzes that Ellen had used to begin her previous class periods, highlighting the quizzes' low-stakes nature and benefits for self-assessment. In such dialogues, student perspectives often served as a springboard for much of the conversation that followed, as Lorena explained when discussing her interactions with students during a cogenerative dialogue:

It's something you have to do here [in the dialogues]—get their perspective. What did they think? Is [my instruction] useful or not? ... And it helps because the students'll see certain things that are going on that you might not. It's also helpful to figure out, are they learning it?

As Lorena noted, the students' perspectives offered her and Ellen a variety of new insights, which not only helped these teachers see what students found engaging and valuable, but also understand how and the extent to which students learned from classroom interactions.

Students and teachers both acknowledged that much of this information could only be shared within, and thus may have been exclusive to, an open setting where

discussion was fostered and expected. Lorena and Ellen expressed that within the dialogues, they felt not just an obligation but a “curiosity” to continually elicit and explore student perceptions of classroom life, in part because the students helped triangulate the teachers’ assessments of their own teaching’s efficacy. At times, listening to student perspectives encouraged the teachers to reorient their reflection toward student affective concerns and away from more rigid pedagogical structures, such as common strategies, as Ellen explains:

As teachers, we’re always busy thinking in lesson plans and strategies. But then we get in the dialogue, and students tell me the group strategy’s not working because some feel left out or uncomfortable, and then it’s like, “You’re right. I need to consider your emotions before I implement any strategy.”

For Ellen, interactions with her students during these dialogues helped re-center her pedagogical decisions around the affective learning needs of students, rather than privileging any particular teaching strategy that she was planning to enact.

At points within each cogenerative dialogue, Ellen and Lorena also felt compelled to share their own perspectives on teaching, especially when instructional matters were questioned by students. In these instances, the teachers took the opportunity to explain their thought processes and rationalize teaching decisions they made earlier in class. For example, late in the study, Ellen tasked her students with applying certain principles of the respiratory system to design an experiment that would measure carbon dioxide levels in exhalation. When students such as Maria and Angel perceived challenges with

the design portion of this assignment, Ellen responded by highlighting the importance of struggle in learning and creative processes:

Maria: Yeah, experimental designs are confusing. My group needs a lot of help! [laughs]

Angel: We have no clue, either. Can't you just show us one way to do it?

Ellen: See, maybe I need to make this clearer to your class. Instead of being told exactly what to do, we're doing experimental design so you learn how to do something on your own and so you learn about a process. I know it can be frustrating, but remember, the reason I'm setting up the experimental design is to prepare you for what's going to be expected of you in later grades, and in life too.

In the exchange captured above, student questions prompted Ellen both to clarify and justify her goals for student learning within the project.

The exchanges of perspective around issues of classroom environment, teaching, and curriculum often created opportunities for the teachers and students to develop intersubjectivity about topics in those areas (Merrifield, 1999). As twelfth grader Emmy explains below, these dialogues helped the participating students and teacher at each site to understand not only what the other meant with regard to anatomy class, but also how they experienced and made meaning of it:

You're both learning, the teacher and the student. The student is learning how the teacher is thinking while she's doing the lesson plans and how she's going to teach us. And then the teacher is learning what the student knows about it and what the student thought of it, like, if they liked it or didn't like it, or what they could do better.

A dimension of this intersubjectivity that emerged within the dialogues—one less emphasized in literature on, but nonetheless foundational to the development of, mutual accountability—was the perspective-taking that seemed to occur among members. In their final interviews and focus groups with me, the majority of students made reference to the idea that they could now see aspects of the classroom from the viewpoint of their teacher, or as Carlos explained it, “I can see how she views us now.” This led students like Antonio (below) to demonstrate empathy for their teacher and to critically reflect on their own participation as their teacher might:

Now I know how Ms. Silva feels when we're messing around, like when we're talking or we're packing up and she's trying to teach something. Now every time she says, "Don't pack up yet," or "Listen up," I just listen to her because I know how it feels... It's not right. So, I guess I try to understand her point of view more. I seen her perspective more.

While the perspective exchanges facilitated mutual understanding among the dialogue participants at both sites, such discussions were not without conflict or tension. Rather, and perhaps most importantly, the exchanges of perspective fostered by the cogenerative dialogues at each school invariably led to the identification of teaching

problems. Such issues included the unintended consequences of instructional moves, challenges to student learning, and/or hindrances to the teacher's efforts at creating supportive learning opportunities. In many of these occasions, students pointed to particular class activities that led to confusions or misunderstandings about particular anatomy content, similar to the discussion of Ellen's design experiments captured above. In other cases, student comments (like those below) underscored more enduring problems in the classroom, particularly around student engagement and participation, both themes of the dialogues at each site:

Carlos: I'm tired of school and the reason why is because I see the same routine every day. I'm just bored and tired of it. I would like something new.

Lorena: Can you tell me a little bit more on routine?

Carlos: Everything the same every day, nothing new. Like, we do the same activities...It's, like, warm up, then PowerPoint notes, then classwork with worksheets, then exit slip... Then class ends and then go to the next and do it again...Because, Miss, I don't know—I need something more to keep me going.

As seen in this excerpt of a dialogue transcript from Lorena's site, tensions identified by one or more students were not always immediately recognized by other dialogue members. Instead, negotiations between diverging parties often ensued, with opposing sides citing evidence to persuade the other or bring their perspectives into greater alignment.

Such identification and negotiation of problematic classroom areas were frequently initiated by teachers as well. In some of these instances, Ellen and Lorena would acknowledge that expectations for student participation were not being met by their students, even those participating in the cogenerative dialogues. At other times, however, without prompting from the students, the teachers would present what they saw as a challenge to their instructional practice and then seek student insight and feedback on this issue.

Underlying this discussion of responsiveness is the assumption that views being expressed during dialogues are the full and authentic perceptions of each participant (Emdin & Lehner, 2006; Roth & Tobin, 2005). The students in Lorena's dialogues claimed to be honest and forthright, even in their discussions of tensions in Lorena's teaching; however, Ellen at times was less convinced that the feedback she received accurately portrayed students' perceptions:

I feel like with the discipline environment of the classroom, like with me in charge, I wonder how much of that sneaks into the student dialogues some times. That's where I'm skeptical of the kids feeling safe enough to be completely honest with me.

Ellen questioned whether these dialogues could fully overcome the institutional separation dividing teachers and students, and thus worried that student dialogue members were withholding information that she deemed vital to her professional improvement. Ellen's skepticism was not without grounds, as in two debriefs following

dialogues, a student admitted that he felt uncomfortable sharing a comment with Ellen for fear of how she might view his work ethic in the future.

Responsibility

After identifying tensions and contradictions within classroom learning activities, participants in the cogenerative dialogues typically progressed into the *responsibility* stage of mutual accountability (Henderson et al., 2003). In this stage, they began to address these problematic issues by specifically discussing anatomy content or seeking responsive solutions in the form of new classroom repertoires and enterprises.

In most instances, the tensions identified within the cogenerative dialogues related to classroom instruction and/or a learning, as illustrated in the transcript below:

Lorena: Monday was with [the substitute teacher]. What do you guys think of that lesson, the one about the lab with the senses?

Antonio: It was fun, I guess, but my group didn't get to finish it, so—

Carlos: It was, like, fun testing all the senses and all. But I don't think we knew what we were supposed to do.

Here, such conversations allowed students like Antonio and Carlos to share their challenges or confusions around learning activities. In response to these tensions, at each site the teacher or myself typically proposed teaching alternatives that might address the problematic issue raised by a student. At times, students were divided in their estimation of the most efficacious alternative, and in these cases, it generally fell to Ellen and Lorena to somehow negotiate a compromise that everyone could support. In

other instances, when consensus was quickly reached around one of the propositions, the teachers reported feeling more certain in their enactment of such an instructional change (especially when it represented a risk they had been less willing to try earlier). Often Lorena and Ellen actually experimented with a given proposition also in courses outside their anatomy periods.

Less often but still somewhat frequent were occasions when students suggested a solution that had not been first proposed by the teacher or myself. For example, when Angel raised the issue of social exclusion within group projects in one of Ellen's dialogues, it was another student—Melvin—who first proposed a negotiated solution:

Angel: I want to bring up something about group projects. See, I like that you let us choose our groups, but I feel like mostly it's a choiceless choice. Because I know each time [we pick groups], me and Dylan are always waiting over on the side, saying, 'Pick me, I'm here, we'll work with anybody.'

Ellen: So, Angel brings up a really important issue. Should I start choosing your groups then so no one's feeling left out?

Melvin: Why not let the persons choose one person they want to pick. Like, if it's groups of four, maybe we should let each person choose one person they want to work with and then you [Miss Galván] could put those partners together with other partners to make the [groups of] four. So they're not always going with the same people all over again.

Unlike options offered by the teacher or myself, these student-generated ideas rarely gained unanimous approval without some opposition or further suggestion; thus a degree of a negotiated compromise was necessary to reach a consensus. Indeed, later in the dialogue quoted above, Melvin's suggestion sparked a debate among the students, some of whom opposed any teacher involvement in partner selection and instead presented a modification of Melvin's proposal.

As noted earlier, not all identified problems and their solutions related to issues of teaching; at each site, discussions were held in the dialogues around ways that the students could improve their own participation in the classroom. For example, in Lorena's dialogue, conversations of this type generally revolved around students completing homework tasks and not distracting their groupmates during collaborative learning activities, as seen in the transcript below:

Lorena (speaking to Carlos): Why weren't you able to finish [the lab report]?

Emmy: It's because he's always messing around—

Mateo (speaking to Carlos): You gotta slow down. Focus more. It's fun clowning around, but we can't be doing that all the time.

Several of Ellen's dialogues centered on how students could more actively participate in whole-class discussions. While Lorena and Ellen reiterated their openness to adapting their instruction and to facilitating student participation, they also outlined plans—

supported by the dialogue members—that called for students to take responsibility for and make changes to their class participation.

In some circumstances students offered suggestions for classroom improvements that directly conflicted with curriculum goals set for the teachers by their pacing plans, as seen in the transcript below:

Dylan: Miss, we should do, like, that egg drop thing again...I think I could build a way better one now.

Ellen: But we just spent a whole week on that task. And we haven't even finished [studying] the nervous system unit yet—

Dylan: I know, but it was a lot of fun and I think our group could build a much stronger helmet 'cause now we know how to brace the egg—

Ellen: I get that, but let's just think more about how we can finish up this unit.

Ellen noted that at these times, she would consider but usually decide against acting on student suggestions, especially when those suggestions ran up against the set curriculum for the course:

I definitely want to take the feedback and taking into consideration things that are being shared, but there are certain items where I'm like, "Well, I can't do that so much because it does go against the overall goal..." So that's been a tug-of-war: Should I do what they suggest or should I stick to the goals?

Report-and-review

Reflecting Henderson and colleague's (2003) stage of *report-and-review*, the teacher and students at each site—after having agreed to a course of action for a given week—would hold one another to account for their involvement in, and discuss the general outcomes of, these consensual plans (Roth & Tobin, 2005). Such efforts of report-and-review took place both within and outside the cogenerative dialogues afterschool, involved all participating members, and led to responsive changes in repertoires and enterprises by both teachers and students.

At each site, students used certain means to hold their teacher accountable for following through with the suggestions for classroom improvements that had been discussed and agreed to in earlier dialogues. Students thanked and commended the teacher for acting on their proposals, and when the outcomes of such plans were not ideal, students would offer further recommendations for improvement. For example, after Ellen's dialogue group watched a short video clip of her instruction from the previous week, I asked members to comment on what they saw:

Vanessa: Ms. Galván was doing what we said [in the previous dialogue].

We wanted more time on the project and she was giving it to us.

Lina (addressing Ellen): And you were letting us choose our own groups, I liked that! I just wish we could have more people in them next time.

In the rare occasions when students felt that Ellen or Lorena had not made efforts to undertake a suggestion, it would often be gently repeated over consecutive meetings. Outside the cogenerative dialogues, students would even give their teacher reminders of previous suggestions during instructional time. Such means by which the students at each site influenced their teacher's decision by giving advice and watching for evidence of its enactment prompted both Ellen and Lorena (below) to characterize the student members of their dialogues as 'evaluators' and 'mini-administrators':

It's funny because I'll look at them the way I look at my evaluators—to see what they're thinking and is everything going okay for their learning. They notice what I do, how I take their suggestions, all the time. It makes me more aware of myself but in a good way.

For Lorena, above, student members of her dialogue took on an evaluative role, helping to critique her teaching based on their learning needs, and thus influenced her thinking around practice in ways similar to an instructional coach or evaluative administrator.

Student members from each site studied here also held one another accountable for their participation, within the dialogues afterschool and during instructional periods (Wassell, Martin, & Scantlebury, 2013). In the dialogue setting, several students emerged as leaders who encouraged their peers to share perspectives on or offer suggestions for certain issues at hand. Particularly in Lorena's case (below), students expressed their disappointment when a member failed to follow through with expectations they had agreed to for classroom participation:

Lorena: So what'd you guys think of class today?

Carlos: I don't know—you should ask Antonio.

Antonio: Miss, I was done. I was sleepy with my head down. I'm sorry.

Mateo: We were tired, too. But we still managed to listen in class.

Carlos: We can't be doing that. Especially you, now that she [Lorena] knows us better.

Mateo: Yeah. 'Cause we're the ones giving suggestions to her but then messing up.

Antonio: Yeah, I know. I need to change. I'ma be a changed man.

In this exchange, students Carlos and Mateo chastise their fellow dialogue member Antonio for failing to actively engage in class, which they perceive as a contradiction to their role as trusted student advisors to their teacher. Similarly, Lorena and Ellen used this space of cogenerative dialogues both to praise students when their participation aligned with the expectations set by the group, and to have critical conversations when this participation fell short.

These efforts at accountability collectively led to responsive changes by teacher and student members of the dialogues. At each site, the vast majority of student suggestions for improvements were leveraged by both teachers as adaptive changes to their classroom environment, teaching, and/or curriculum (cf., Beltramo, 2017a). Analysis of dialogue transcripts and the video tapes of instruction following each dialogue shows that Lorena enacted 84% of her students' 87 suggestions targeted for immediate implementation. Many of these student recommendations centered on ways

of making Lorena's curriculum and teaching more relevant and engaging to her anatomy periods. A similar analysis revealed that that Ellen acted on 78% of her students' 59 suggestions targeted for immediate implementation, most of which related to ideas for facilitating a more comfortable environment for student participation in classroom discussions.

Analysis of field notes and videotapes of classroom observations pointed to substantial changes among the students' participation as well. Those students involved in Lorena's cogenerative dialogues demonstrated greater engagement and less distraction at the end of the study, even as some of their peers "checked out" as second semester seniors. Even more evident were changes among the students in Ellen's dialogue, as students who initially were intimidated by speaking in class were participating in and even leading class discussions by the study's end (for fuller discussion of this finding, see Beltramo, 2017b).

Just as importantly, this stage of report-and-review served as an essential platform for individual and collective reflection on the process of classroom learning improvement (Beers, 2009). As Lorena notes below, she and Ellen reported that the dialogues afforded them greater opportunities for reflection:

I think the dialogues also made me be reflective, because every week I had to make sure I was reflecting on my lesson with the kids. Because they'd say, "Yes, this lesson worked" or "That didn't work. Can we just do this instead?" And so I have to really consider that. So it forced me to make sure I was even more reflective than I already am.

Reflection was not exclusive to the teachers, however; many times when students shared their perspectives on certain elements of class, they also justified their opinions by reflecting on their own learning needs and preferences, and thus engaged in some degree of metacognition (Cook-Sather, 2002; Morgan, 2009). For both teachers and students, then, cogenerative dialogues represented an integral space for learning about the repertoires and endeavors they undertook within the classroom.

As in the other stages of mutual accountability, a salient constraint emerged in the participants' work around reporting and reviewing the outcomes of previous dialogues. Ellen and Lorena felt encumbered in their enactment of student suggestions by conflicting expectations from administrators, who ultimately decided the job security for these teachers. Indeed, analysis of the few instances where student recommendations or feedback did not translate into classroom changes revealed that such suggestions tended to push against the structures under which Ellen and Lorena taught. For example, after one of Ellen's formal observations, her evaluating administrator questioned her use of student-chosen work-groups (a focal suggestion of her student dialogue members), and expressed an expectation to see heterogeneous groupings based solely on achievement.

Lorena reported even greater tensions between the expectations of her students and those of her administrators; as mentioned earlier, important themes across Lorena's dialogues included the need to make anatomy curriculum and teaching more relevant and engaging for students. Yet, like Lorena states below, often student suggestions with regard to these themes took time or pulled her away from the district's

strict pacing plan and pushed her into content areas that were not included in the monthly benchmark exams she was tasked with giving:

These pacing plans..., we're behind it now. First semester I was on it. In second semester, I was like, 'Okay, I want the kids to get here.' But now I just want them to really learn, and so they need to be engaged. I want them to learn about their health and see how I can help them apply this to their own lives. How can I get them to get something out of this that's important for them? Do projects, right? Like the ones we talked about [in the dialogues], right? But then I'm running out of time in the pacing [plan]—I'm behind. So yeah, pacing is an issue and sometimes I don't really care but...in every single meeting, they [administrators] ask me, "How is it going? Where are you on pacing?"

Here Lorena articulated the pressure she felt from administration to adhere to the pacing plan, and at times, this resulted in her choice to forego acting on a suggestion from the dialogues that would have strayed from the mandated curriculum. Each time this occurred, students reported some disappointment in ensuing dialogues, but ultimately expressed their understanding in statements like, “Miss Silva has to obey principals like us, too.” (Carlos).

Relationships

Across the stages of mutual accountability described above emerged a parallel process of relationship building that occurred among the members of the cogenerative dialogues in both settings (Kane et al., 2006; Mullis, 2011; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

As members spent these hours together, week after week, comments (like those by Vanessa below) highlighted a growing comfort level and familiarity between the teacher and students:

I found [the dialogue] very helpful for both the student and the teacher because it helps the teacher understand what the student needs to have more support, and what they can do to give them more, I guess, confidence in class. Just to have a kind of bond between them so that they would know what's going on, and how it's going to work.

When I pressed the participants to share why the dialogues had brought them closer, some suggested that the space encouraged a feeling of safety that allowed members—particularly, the teacher—to be vulnerable and open with others. Vanessa, for example, noted that she can “give some crazy suggestion” because her teacher would “probably even try it out.”

The conditions of comfort, familiarity, and openness found in this study seemed to promote shared identify and solidarity (Cook-Sather, 2006; Wassell & LaVan, 2009), particularly among the participating students, who frequently made reference to “our group” or “us dialogue students” in their interviews with me. The dialogues also helped to bridge the teacher-student divide, making each side more approachable to the other and eventually forming some fairly strong bonds:

It [the dialogue] takes your knowledge of a student as an individual to a whole other level. It gives you a glimpse into who they are, not just as a learner, but as a person. I think that knowledge is essential for

relationship-building... It creates that bridge. It makes you approachable, and it makes the students approachable for me. (Ellen).

Discussion

This study sought to understand both the extent to and ways in which cogenerative dialogues might help manifest among teachers and students a sense of mutual accountability, something that scholars have set in contrast to the current discourse of accountability today, which tends to emphasize more neoliberal, high-stakes approaches. Evidence suggested that school policies related to high-stakes accountability (particularly calls for standardization backed by teacher evaluations) limited to some extent the degree to which cogenerative dialogues could foster mutual accountability, in two specific ways. First, the findings indicate that Ellen felt that, in some moments, students purposefully withheld information during a dialogue so as not to upset her. Thus, the influence of neoliberal accountability and its stress on hierarchy between teachers and students may have limited (at least to some degree) the full exchange of perspectives between members, and in turn may have also constrained opportunities for facilitating full student voice (Lundry, 2007).

Another tension seemed to occur at the stages of reciprocity and response-and-review, where cogenerative dialogue members typically discussed plans for classroom improvement. As seen in other investigations of cogenerative dialogues (e.g., Emdin, 2007) and other forms student voice (e.g., Mitra et al., 2014; Cook-Sather, 2006), a neoliberal and high-stakes approach to accountability constrained the teachers' will to follow through with some classroom changes proposed by students. When students

asked for such changes as more responsive groupings that got away from heterogeneous approaches or more project-oriented learning that strayed away from mandated pacing plans (and their accompanying benchmark tests), Ellen and Lorena reported feeling unable to undertake these suggestions. In this way, the influence of students, and the degree to which students could hold teachers accountable, was limited (Lundry, 2007).

Yet, where students felt comfortable enough to voice their opinions and suggestions honestly, and where the teachers felt able to integrate such student suggestions within their standardized curriculum, mutual accountability between these two parties blossomed to a greater extent. Across the stages described within the cogenerative dialogues at each site, mutual accountability was manifest particularly through interrelated principles of learning, agency, trust, and reciprocity. As proponents of mutual accountability have theorized (Brown, 2007; Henderson et al., 2003; Merrifield, 1999), members of the cogenerative dialogues reported instances of learning at each stage of the cycle described above. In the stage of responsiveness, members gained greater understanding of one another's perspectives, including insights into the problems that they perceived in the classroom (Beers, 2009). Through the problem-solving discussions found at the stage of responsibility, participants often brainstormed adaptive changes that represented both possible solutions to the conflicts at hand, as well as new enterprises and repertoires for the students and teacher to undertake in each classroom. A spirit of reflection, critique, and cajoling within the stage of report-and-review helped each member grow and develop in these new enterprises and repertoires.

Previous scholarship primarily envisions learning as an outcome of mutual accountability (Brown, 2007), but here it also seemed to feed back into and support this accountability approach by facilitating shifts in agency. Elmore (2005) suggests that for democratic forms of accountability to function, there must occur a shift in agency from those in power to those of less power, for example, from teachers to students. But from a situated learning perspective, agency is not something that can be simply given; rather, it is created through capacity building and learning (Emdin, 2016). As seen in Ellen and Lorena's respective dialogues, students learned about their teacher's viewpoint, new ways of participation in the classroom, and even new forms of learning activities. This may have represented the capacity building that enhanced student agency in their relationship with their teacher (Bayne, 2009; Mullis, 2011). Thus, agency is not won by some and lost by others but is increased for all stakeholders—the teachers and students involved in cogenerative dialogues all developed their enterprises and repertoires and thus created agency for themselves (and each other).

Elmore (2005) also suggests that such agentive shifts occur in concert with the fostering of trust and reciprocity, which in turn offer additional support to mutual accountability. Findings from this study reflect Elmore's theory. Throughout the stages of responsiveness, responsibility, and report-and-review, the teacher and students at each school developed close relationships based on trust through perspective-taking, intersubjectivity, and collective assent (Beers, 2009; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Together with such trust also developed the "dense relations" of mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998) and reciprocity, where both teacher and students worked to help the other out.

Conclusion

The findings emerging in this study hold several implications for educators in the U.S. and internationally who are seeking to engage in forms of student voice such as cogenerative dialogues. First, the findings suggest that cogenerative dialogues and perhaps other instantiations of student voice may be subject to the same pervasive undercurrents of high-stakes, neoliberal accountability impacting other dimensions of schooling in developed countries (Ranson, 2012; Ruben, 2011). Thus, educators investing valuable time and resources into student voice might begin to anticipate tensions like those detailed above when student voice initiatives conflict with pushes toward curriculum standardization and teacher surveillance. At the same time, because cogenerative dialogues and other forms of student consultation make room for mutual accountability and afford students the opportunities to demand more responsive classrooms, these student voice measures may also signal those remaining spaces where teachers like Ellen and Lorena still have agency to operate out of concern for equitable learning opportunities by addressing the learning needs, interests, and aspirations of their students. Finally, the findings suggest that forms of student voice like cogenerative dialogues may help reorient teachers toward the “affective labor” of their job, or the work aimed at establishing relationships of personal care and appreciation between teachers and students, which scholars argue is currently under threat by neoliberal, high-stakes accountability systems (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013). Future research therefore might continue exploring how cogenerative dialogues and other forms of student voice might engender mutual accountability and more authentic teacher-student relationships in schools, so that accountability could be re-appropriated

from its status as a “bad word” among teachers to becoming a supportive dimension of both classroom and professional learning.

Questions for Further Consideration

The following questions are intended to be of use for individuals or groups to use in responding to the provocations of this articles.

- As in Lorena’s situation, when teachers and students seek out curriculum and learning positioned outside state-mandated standards, what steps can they take to gain support from administrators and other key stakeholders and policymakers?
- How can other methods of student voice (e.g., participatory action research, student consultation, etc.) inform enactment of and research on cogenerative dialogues, and perhaps offer suggestions for the dilemmas faced by the participants in this study?
- How can mutual accountability between teachers and students be integrated with other forms of accountability found in schools?
- What roles can students and student voice play in resisting the associated challenges of neoliberal, high-stakes accountability found in schools today?

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