

Cogenerative Dialogue Praxis in a Lighthouse School: Contradictions, Ethical Concerns,
Expansive Learning, and “Kids Being Kids.”

by

Ian Teague Stith

B.S., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 2002

M.S.ed., University of Pennsylvania, 2003

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Wolff-Michael Roth, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Supervisor

Dr. G. Michael Bowen, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Departmental Member

Dr. David Blades, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Departmental Member

Dr. Eileen Van der Flier-Keller, (School of Earth and Ocean Sciences)

Out of Department Member

Dr. Christopher Emdin, (Teachers College, Columbia University)

External Examiner

Supervisory Committee

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(School of Earth and Ocean Sciences)

Dr. Christopher Emdin, External Examiner
(Teachers College, Columbia University)

ABSTRACT

This study grew out of my work with Maggie, a teacher at Blueberry Vale elementary school in suburban western Canada. Maggie and I began to use *cogenerative dialogues* after we identified and sought a method to address a number of issues in her class. Cogenerative dialogue praxis is meetings of students, teachers, researchers, and others designed to facilitate the process of improving the teaching and learning taking place. To this time this praxis has been used exclusively at the secondary education level. As such this study developed its overarching question: what will happen when cogenerative dialogue praxis is introduced to an elementary school class? To address this question I focus on: the activities in question and try to account for the various mediating factors each action experiences; human agency, which helped me understand the role the individuals play in instigating change to the system; and an ethical understanding of responsibility. From this analysis I form these specific claims: Cogenerative dialogue praxis is an authentic research tool which, when conducted properly, can address some of the ethical issues inherent in classroom research; cogenerative dialogue praxis facilitates the discussion of the ethical issues that are part of the research setting (e.g., class); cogenerative dialogue praxis is one viable solution for teachers to ethically mediate the various activity systems that constitute a class; cogenerative dialogue praxis contains internal contradictions such that there is the potential for its openness to collapse by its openness to any comment; a significant amount of time may be spent “unfocused,” during cogenerative dialogues but many of these moments can be contextualized positively in terms of building relationships, introducing new teaching topics, and so on; during my cogenerative dialogues the group developed and implemented a model to address a problem through cycles of *expansive learning*; and finally I learned from Maggie how teachers work with researchers, as researchers, evaluate their own work, and can direct research studies in new directions. These topics are important to my study but also introduce further discussion in regard to ethnographic research methods, current teacher praxis, and the continual development of cogenerative dialogue praxis.

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Glossary

Agency is a person's power to act within a *structured* social activity. Agency is dialectically tied to *structure* in this way, as they mutually presuppose each other. In other words people have some power to access and appropriate the *resources* in their daily lives. For example, agency can be displayed as a person asks for directions when lost.

Authenticity reflects a commitment to fair, ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical research. Generally this implies that sociological research encourage learning to take place for all those involved, in terms of self learning, about each other, and the research process. Tied to this is the intentional open nature of the research allowing for participants to be involved to whatever degree they see fit. That said, authentic data reflect data collected in this manner.

Capital is evident in various forms, for example "student/teacher relationships," all analogous to economic capital or money, used within a given field as exchange value. Social capital is defined as the social networks or connections an individual might have with others. Cultural capital can be mannerisms, dispositions, or practises that have status value. Educational credentials or cultural goods, such as books or technology, can also be considered cultural capital in its objectified state.

Cogenerative dialogues are meetings of stakeholders of an educational setting intended to improve teaching and learning. Originally developed as a form of debriefing session with coteachers, this praxis encourages an open exchange of ideas among the

participants. The group equitably works together to create an actionable plan for enaction in the classroom.

Dialectical relationships describe two or more entities that are both mutually exclusive and mutually presuppose each other. This is exemplified by the relationship between agency and structure. In this case the agency of those involved is constructed by the structure of the activity and in turn this agency constructs the structured activity. These entities are co-constructed such that one cannot exist without the other and yet are distinctly different.

Lifeworlds are the world as perceived by and acted upon by individuals. This implies that the material world can be defined in terms of resources differently depending on the structures in which individuals live.

Practises are patterned forms of action as articulated and described through narratives. In this study, for example, the students and teacher describe their practises during the cogenerative dialogues and interviews conducted.

Praxis is the doing of work and the living of life, the lived work and experience of engaging in forms of human activity.

Resources exist as both human and nonhuman and are dialectically related with structure. In the classroom, for example, students access resources such as textbooks, calculators, or other students as they act towards some object. Physical objects are resources only such as they are acted upon.

Schemas are the general procedures people follow in social life and are dialectically related with structure. Schemas are not stagnantly defined but rather are every changing

as social life develops and in turn construct social life. For example, there are particular schemas for how one participates in an interview that determines it as such.

Structures describe social life as constructed by ever changing schemas and resources. Structures are dialectically linked with agency as people's social life is constrained by its structure that is in turn constructed by their actions.

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To Kelly

Chapter 1

Introduction

My Personal Story

I began my post-secondary education as an engineering student, but as it became time to apply for jobs I realized my interests had moved away from the corporate and towards social changes. This realization led me to earn my Master's of education degree and teaching certification. This change in career path does not suggest though that all I learned by earning my engineering degree had or has been forgotten, I gained much from the logical and problem based orientation of engineering that applies directly to teaching and researching. What I did not carry with me from engineering though, was the rational and certainty of results associated with mechanical systems. Rather, as I taught and earned my Master's degree I learned the basics of understanding social interactions and educational research. I learned to see things as connected, or with only loose boundaries between, and likewise I came to see teaching and research as inseparable. This is also when I first was introduced to cogenerative dialogue praxis (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000). Cogenerative dialogues are meetings of stakeholders of an educational setting: students, teachers, student teachers, researchers, supervisors, administrators, or anyone with a vested interest in the teaching and learning going on there. These meetings focus on discussion of the mutual experience these stakeholders have to develop understanding between them and improve the teaching and learning that is taking place. In my case, as part of the certification curriculum, I regularly met with a few students, the other coteacher, and my supervisor and was able to learn about the challenges the students faced in their daily lives and how my own teaching could improve. Additionally, this experience served as an overlap point for my simultaneous role as teacher and researcher. During these cogenerative dialogues I was able to delve deeply into questions I had about

education and at the same time explore the topics introduced by the other participants I hadn't considered yet. I continued this praxis as a full time teacher, working with students during lunch and after school to learn from them and improve my teaching. Now as a researcher and student I have taken an analytic look at cogenerative dialogue praxis as it developed in the study I conducted with the students and teachers at Blueberry Vale Elementary School¹.

The Story of this Study

Blueberry Vale Elementary School is a small school in suburban western Canada and served as lighthouse school² for the large study of which I was a part. This school was chosen to serve in the capacity for various reasons including a previous research relationship with the University. Two people in particular at Blueberry Vale were associated with the larger study, the Vice-Principal and a teacher, Mr. Reed, and so these served as the points of contact for me as I developed a relationship with the staff. After observing and informally working with a few teachers at the school I was encouraged to talk with Mrs. Maggie Stone as she was someone generally open to working with academics and was a student of one of the primary investigators of the larger study. At this point my study had not developed any particular focus but rather I meant to first become, as much as was possible, in/with Maggie's class and the school (Roth, Masciotra, & Boyd, 1999). Therefore I spent time participating in the class in various capacities, tutoring at lunch, working one on one with students during class, etc. In total I made fifteen visits to the classroom prior to beginning any formal research. In this way I

¹ All names of places and people are pseudonyms.

² In the context of the NSERC CRYSTAL grant a lighthouse school is a school that serves as a test bed and leader in the development of pedagogies that promote science literacy.

was able to experience the class first hand along with the students and Maggie, although, of course from a different perspective.

Throughout this time Maggie and I discussed what could be done with the class and how best to improve the learning going on. Maggie and I informally identified various issues that were present in the class, including homework performance, certain students' behaviour, and the math curriculum. To address the variety of issues we found as evident we decided that we would organize a group of students to regularly meet for cogenerative dialogues, in this case called "students in action." This decision then formed the general question of my study; what will happen when cogenerative dialogue praxis is introduced to an elementary school class? To this point in the development of cogenerative dialogues they had only been used at the secondary level, as will be explained in detail later. Every attempt was made for Maggie and I to discuss the study openly throughout, starting with this primary choice and continuing as the student participants were selected. The student participants were chosen based on a number of factors. First, only the students who were given permission by their parent or guardian were considered. Second, there were logistical issues to consider such as music lessons, sports team practice, and so on during lunch period, which ruled out some students. Third, Maggie and I wanted to have a mix of female and male students to try and get a range of opinions. Fourth, some students were not interested when asked. Fifth, the number of students was intentionally small as to allow maximum time for each to speak and to minimize the resemblance to the regular class atmosphere. Finally, Maggie and I discussed who we thought would be willing to speak up and have opinions about the class in general. During the first series of cogenerative dialogues four students primarily were involved, although originally Maggie

and I had intended to change and expand the group over the course of the first series; Bob, Mark, Amy, and Lacie. The change in participation did not happen for logistical reasons, such as setting aside time to talk with potential new participants, and communication between Maggie and I. During the second series, the next school year, the participants did change as eventually the group expanded to a maximum of seven female students at one meeting. Gender was one issue that came up in discussion during the first series of cogenerative dialogues so Maggie and I intentionally set up a female only group after the second meeting in the second series. Over the course of the second year, overall nine students participated in at least one cogenerative dialogue: Mary, Molly, Rachel, Amanda, Alice, Lisa, Katie, Sarah, and Mark (same student as first series).

This first series of cogenerative dialogues began in April of 2006 and continued through the end of the school year, in total there were eight cogenerative dialogues recorded and transcribed. The second series began in September of 2006 and continued until the mid year break, in total there were six cogenerative dialogues recorded and transcribed. In addition to video taping the cogenerative dialogues, field notes were taken during class, interviews were conducted at various times, and other group functions were taped. The interviews provided additional time for the participants to voice their opinions about the study or anything of concern, as such they did not focus on a particular set of questions, rather they were structured as conversations. The videos recorded were available for use during the cogenerative dialogues to add to the discussion.

In general, the roles Maggie and I played were those of facilitators of the discussion, to suggest new topics if the conversation trailed off and to remind the students of their

goals for each meeting. It is important to note that each person in the context of the cogenerative dialogue is seen as equal and so it was not only a time for the students to speak but also a time for anyone to introduce a topic of concern with regard to the class. Therefore, as will be evident throughout the excerpts provided, both students and the adults introduce new topics that the group subsequently discusses. Generally cogenerative dialogues were introduced to the students as an opportunity for them to voice their opinions about the class and discuss these directly with Maggie and I. During both series the meetings usually took place once a week during lunch with students, Maggie, and I.

As the first and second series of cogenerative dialogues progressed more specific questions arose related to the general question:

- What are some of the ethical concerns of the cogenerative dialogue as praxis?
- How can cogenerative dialogue praxis potentially assist teachers to mediate in school?
- How has Maggie changed over her own development, and what can I learn from her?
- Is the cogenerative dialogue really open to anything?
- What about kids just being kids, as in “unfocused” talk?
- Can the cogenerative dialogue be part of an expansive cycle of learning?

These questions are addressed through each analysis chapter presented here. As will be explained at the beginnings of each analysis chapter there was a particular context in which the addressed question arose and the chapter was written.

Method

This study was designed as generally ethnographic in that I describe what took place during the classes and the cogenerative dialogues. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of the cogenerative dialogue I worked as a part of the class and was able to discuss common experiences with the other participants (Roth, Masciotra, & Boyd, 1999). In this way and by focusing on what actually took place and what was said I aimed to avoid getting in the heads of the participants. It is not my intention to make specific claims as to why certain people made decision or draw relations between events; rather I discuss what took place, as I understand it by participation, the comments of the participants, and the potential implications of this to instructional design. I did not start with an assumed outcome for the study, as there was no way of knowing what might happen once the teachers, students, and I began to work together. This was particularly true as cogenerative dialogue praxis is intended to provide resources for change. Although I have had experience with cogenerative dialogue praxis, each setting and person turned out to be different such that in the past the events unfolded in their own way each time. Particularly given the lack of any cogenerative dialogues previously being done in elementary schools I was interested in seeing whether the promises of the praxis would also hold at this level. What I did assume, though, was that once Maggie and I decided to implement cogenerative dialogues, I had built solid relationships with her and the students such that the cogenerative dialogues could be productive meetings. I could not assume that the students would want to talk during the discussions or stay on task but Maggie and I did try to encourage this as much as possible.

During this study I used Guba and Lincoln's (1989) authenticity criteria to guide my work. Especially given that my study involved young children it is vital that I considered the potential long-term effects, also considered by Olitsky and Weathers (2005). Guba and Lincoln (1994) stipulate that the study be judged if it is fair, ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical. Generally the aim is that the study allows there be open negotiations, the participants come to understand themselves and others better, are empowered to act, and questions how this action is stimulated and facilitated. In my study I addressed these criteria as I made different decisions and struggled with conflicts as they arose. Because this study began without any particular focus, it seemed fair to allow a problem to arise out of the context for me to study. That being said it was impossible for me to account for every want and need of all the students I worked with in addition to Maggie's and my own, but by experiencing the class as it happened their problems became mine and vice versa. From the onset I tried to make myself available to any concerns the participants had.

Development of Cogenerative Dialogue Praxis

Cogenerative dialogues are generally meetings that take place outside of the normal classroom activity, but are still very much a part of the general school activity and countless other social systems the students and teachers exist within. The actors of the cogenerative dialogue are the general participants in any class: teachers, students, and other people that may be involved, such as researchers. These actors equitably work together towards some actionable plan for the transformation of teaching and learning in the class. That is to say that the participants work together, discuss, and form a plan that

they will enact during the regular class period with the intention of improving learning (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000; Tobin, Zurbano, Ford, & Carambo, 2003). In this vein specific rules are followed to allow each participant's voice to be heard, social barriers reduced, and constructive criticism encouraged (Roth & Tobin, 2002).

Cogenerative dialogues arose as the dialectical partner of *coteaching* in the studies Wolff-Michael Roth and Ken Tobin conducted among new teachers in urban schools in the United States (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmermann, 2002; Roth & Tobin, 2002; Roth & Tobin, 2004b). At that time student teachers worked with each other and their partner teacher to teach the class together and at the same time (coteaching). The cogenerative dialogue gradually transformed into a necessary dialectic pair with coteaching by allowing for a meeting of theory and practice (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmermann, 2002). The cogenerative dialogue arose in this context as all involved, including the supervising professor and/or researchers, met together to discuss issues that arose in the class. This then went a step further as students became involved, their roles in terms of research changed (Elmesky & Tobin, 2005), and concepts surrounding communal responsibility developed (Tobin, Roth, & Zimmerman, 2001). It is important to differentiate this praxis from interviews, meetings, or conferences, as the topics that arise do so at the participants' discretion. A specific agenda is not followed, nor is the teacher or researcher the final authority on any decision that is made; rather the goal is for the group to decide with the adult acting to facilitate the process.

Cogenerative dialogue praxis has been used and discussed to address various educational issues and as I report here it is important to understand the current work being done elsewhere and how my work fits. As described, cogenerative dialogue praxis

first developed in conjunction with coteaching, but subsequently it has taken a more central role for some qualitative researchers in an attempt to make their work more authentic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I review three different articles here that both reflect the current state of the art and influenced my study. Two of these articles are not focused on a discussion of cogenerative dialogue praxis rather it was incorporated as part of their methodology. In “Expanding our understandings of urban science education by expanding the roles of students as researchers” Elmesky and Tobin (2005) provide an overview of five years of ethnographic study with urban high school students. Focusing on the reeducation of a teacher in a new environment and on summer research projects they discuss the potential for students to work as researchers and how this naturally occurs in the classroom. Similarly, Olitsky and Weathers (2005) discuss some of the ethical issues surrounding the use of student researchers. In this case cogenerative dialogues were used as sites for the participants to review video of the class and discuss mutual experiences. Finally, I discuss the work of Lehner (2006) in a high school in New York City as he deals with co-teachers and conflict resolution. Although there are many other works available pertaining to cogenerative dialogues I choose these three because of the variety of topics they address. Particularly in terms of methodology, it is vital to review how other people have used cogenerative dialogues to gather data and subsequently discuss some of the potential questions its use develops, be they ethical or logistical. Likewise, it is important to see how others have interpreted how cogenerative dialogues should be carried out, in terms of group size, available resources, and rules. Given the focus of this study I want to be able to place my work in with the established field.

Overall these articles provide three major findings relevant to my work. Both Elmesky and Tobin (2005) and Olitsky and Weathers (2005) discuss the use of student researchers, or more generally the importance of the inclusion of students in the research process as openly as possible. Olitsky and Weathers (2005) bring to the forefront some of the ethical concerns with this inclusion though. Specifically, in regard to the intention of reducing the power difference between participants, there is the concern whether this can actually be achieved. In their study there were difficulties related to the learning of the theoretical language used in analysis and presentations and so there existed some power barriers to be resolved despite their efforts to equalize the field. This kind of issue leads then to the need for continual reflexivity throughout the study as to keep ethical concerns and the participants voice in play at all times. With this in mind the cogenerative dialogue serves as a valuable space for open conversation and reflection to take place among the participants so issues can be collectively dealt with. Olitsky and Weathers (2005) in fact were able to discuss the use of language during their study and cogenerate solutions to conflict. Developing the relationship to deal with conflict is one of the major aspects of cogenerative dialogue praxis as was originally developed paired with coteaching. Lehner (2006) suggests the use of the one-on-one cogenerative dialogue to allow for communication between coteachers who are having major problems. Generally, students are involved in the format but in this case major time needed to be spent working through their differences in approach. The cogenerative dialogue provided a different setting for issues to be discussed openly and collaboration to play out.

Chapter 2

Outline of Thematic Structure

In this chapter I explain how this dissertation is laid out and why I have chosen to organize it as such. The dissertation is organized around the questions described in chapter 1 and by two overarching themes. At the beginning of each chapter there will be an introduction to provide both the context in which I wrote the chapter and how it connects to these themes. The context of each chapter is explained at these intervals to construct a more complete picture of how the study developed over time and to situate the questions being addressed in relation to each other.

This dissertation was not written with a particular overall conclusion as the goal, rather questions arose and were addressed as the study was enacted, therefore some text will be repeated as certain aspects of the study are concentrated on. Chapters 4 through 9 are written such that each develops its own arguments or conclusions, thus I provide specific context and background for each to situate the analysis. In this sense then each chapter was written separately to both stand independently and contribute to the overall analysis. These chapters are written in this way thereby reflecting the changes the study and I underwent over the course of the two school years. As stated though, the overall themes described below tie the dissertation together and allow a general conclusion to be formed at the end. Overall, I felt it was important to document and analyse the new questions that arose in real time to accentuate the unknownability of the outcomes of both the study and the cogenerative dialogues taking place.

Overall Themes

This dissertation tells the story of my study, but also it tells the story of my development throughout that period of time. As will be explained throughout, my

outlooks on my role and what was happening evolved as I conducted the study.

However, the themes that describe my overall interests remained steady. Specifically, there are two themes that tie this work together. The first is exploring new frontiers for cogenerative dialogue praxis. This theme developed out of my own experience as a teacher/researcher who implemented cogenerative dialogues as praxis and saw its benefits. Coming from an urban education environment³ I was/am curious as to how cogenerative dialogues can be used in different situations in which education takes place. Rather than beginning this study with this question as an intention, it became a relevant topic of interest as issues arose in the class. The following analysis and discussion present some examples of the challenges I faced as I put cogenerative dialogues into practice in a new setting.

The second theme that ties the analysis and discussion together is the understanding of the roles of people in social processes. This theme developed out of this study and my own previous work, as it is a vital part of any educational research. Each chapter presents a process of making sense of what took place, as I examine each situation from varying viewpoints based on my own experiences and those of the other participants. Sometimes I focus on the ethical questions pertaining to how people relate and are responsible to each other, whereas other times I focus on how people instigate changes to the social system they are a part of. Beginning with my time as a teacher I have always worked to avoid assumptions about people, and this trend continues in this study. Making sense of the countless activities that took place to construct my study is not the goal; rather, I see a growing and changing analytic method of these systems. With an explanation of the two

³ I use the term “urban education” here as it commonly used in the United States of America. In so doing I refer to the issues of poverty, segregation, hegemony, disenfranchisement, and so forth associated with education in the urban areas of the USA.

main themes in place I now outline each chapter to both summarize the topic of concern and to note the relationship each has with the main themes.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of my study. Although in each subsequent chapter the particulars will be reiterated as to how the theoretical approach is suited for the specific questions there addressed, chapter 3 gives more of the foundations of that theory. Beginning with cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), I explain some of the reasons why I have chosen this approach for my work and how it applies in general. Next I discuss how CHAT has developed out of the understanding of the dialectical relationship between an individual and a societal consciousness. This understanding dictates how the subject of an activity is related to the object, the real motive of that activity. I do not begin with the person and look at their actions in isolation; rather, I begin with the activity and understand how those actions are mediated there within. Overall CHAT allows me to better understand the complex nature of the social interactions that I was a part of and observed. The relationship between those I worked with and myself also relates to my theoretical understanding in terms of responsibility. In chapter 3 I explain my understanding of the *ethics of responsibility* as this concept has formed how I participated as a researcher and understood the social processes I analysed. Similar to CHAT my understanding of responsibility mandates that I take a holistic view of the interactions I experienced and observed.

Chapter 4 is the beginning of the analysis that forms my study as a whole. This chapter is concerned with the questions I began to ask as I started my work at Blueberry

Vale Elementary School. The title, “Who gets to ask the questions,” is descriptive referring to questioning during cogenerative dialogue, that is, to who controls the agenda and topic of the praxis. Beginning with the question of the participation of the researcher in the cogenerative dialogue, I then go on to question the inclusion of the students and teacher in the research process. Overall I am interested in how this praxis fits in with authentic research, and as such I present cogenerative dialogue as an ideal tool to instigate interaction and participation among the participants in classroom research: students, teachers, and researcher. This chapter relates to the first theme, as I analyse cogenerative dialogue praxis as part of a research method. In regard to the second theme of understanding social processes chapter 4 presents cogenerative dialogue as tool to facilitate the discussion of the ethical issues that are part of the research setting (e.g., class).

Chapter 5 continues the general questioning outlined in chapter 4, but focuses specifically on my second theme by examining the role teachers play in the complex social world that is the classroom. I begin with an analysis of the classroom from the differing perspectives of the students, the teacher, and the whole school using CHAT as a framework. This analysis is then taken a step further as I form a CHAT based ethical argument for the responsibility of teachers to be mediators of the various systems that constitute the classroom. Following this analysis and related to my first theme, I introduce and argue for the use of cogenerative dialogue praxis as one means for teachers to enact the roles of mediators. This chapter again relies on my own work as a teacher researcher to provide data and context for the analysis. This analysis in turn relates

directly to the inclusion of Maggie (the teacher I worked with during this study), as I started to reflect on her role in the school and in the researcher project.

Chapter 6 focuses on the story of Maggie as I learned from her during the interviews, cogenerative dialogues, and informal discussions conducted throughout the study. My intention was to work as a member of the class and likewise I intended to include the participants as such. Maggie and I talked about how we felt the study was going, topics to include at cogenerative dialogues, her own studies, and schooling in general. The focus of this chapter is on her own development, specifically five aspects of her teaching life; (a) defining research, (b) working towards a Master's degree, (c) re-evaluating her practicum experience, (d) working with professors, and (e) participating in research studies. This chapter is included for a number of reasons first, of which being that it adds to a more complete account of what actually took place during the study while addressing my second theme. Also, I felt that as a part of the research team it was important to report on her struggles as the study continued, particularly because her story is relevant to the struggles many teachers face in the field. Additionally her story introduces further discussion in regard to "teaching as research" and situating the teacher practicum as a form of research. With respect to my first theme, this chapter is important as it touches upon the struggles Maggie faced as a teacher dealing with new praxis, cogenerative dialogues, and working as a teacher/researcher.

Chapter 7 examines cogenerative dialogue praxis in regard to its intentional open nature. During the course of this study, I encountered numerous moments when it felt as if the discussion was excluding some of the participants. In other words, I felt as if the open nature of the discussion was compromised in some way in real time. Maggie

corroborated this feeling, particularly in regard to the interactions of male and female students. In chapter 7 I analyse these issues by relating the open nature of cogenerative dialogues to the internal contradictions Derrida (2005) identifies as necessary to the development of democracy. Additionally, I use Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) to describe how the participants' interactions imply categorizations in line with traditional gender categories. Using MCA allows me to make sense of interactions without assuming the intentions of the participants by focusing on the discourse and is in line with my second theme. In regard to my first theme, I identify these moments of exclusion as examples of challenges I faced and that are potentially realized as cogenerative dialogues are introduced to new settings. The contradictions identified in this chapter do not imply that cogenerative dialogues are inherently flawed; rather I point to these as driving forces of change within the system.

Chapter 8 focuses on one of the challenges we (the participants) faced as the study continued: the apparently off-task or unfocused behaviour of ourselves. The study was designed with an open format to encourage the questioning of the classroom; therefore we (the participants) sometimes were in the challenging situation of whether to stop certain behaviour or let it work itself out in the spirit of the self-regulating nature of cogenerative dialogues. Similar to chapter 3, this chapter looks at one of the real potential problems I faced as I tried to work with the elementary students and apply cogenerative dialogue praxis to a new setting. From my analysis I found that (a) a significant amount of time may be spent "unfocused," but that (b) many of these moments can be contextualized positively in terms of building relationships, introducing new teaching topics, and so on. This chapter relates directly to my first theme as it explores the

introduction of cogenerative dialogue praxis into new settings and the possibility of teachers questioning its practicality. As someone with experience I too want to show that there still are questions that arise that must be dealt with. By addressing a potential aversion teachers/researchers may have to unfocused conversation, this chapter is important to the continuing development of cogenerative dialogue praxis both theoretically and practically. Related to my second theme, this chapter deals with how unfocused moments are socially developed by all those involved. I do not set out to blame an individual for a comment; rather I look at the activity as unfolding with influence from everyone involved.

Chapter 9 is the final analysis chapter of this study and is concerned with simply learning from my experience doing cogenerative dialogues at the elementary level. Specifically I trace how the participant group developed and implemented a model to address the problem of poor homework performance. To understand this social process I rely on the concepts of *expansive learning* and *agency*. Expansive learning is a central concept of CHAT and helps me make sense of the cyclic nature of negotiation and examination that took place during my study. Agency helps me understand the role the individuals play in questioning their practises and instigating change to the system. Both of these social concepts address my second theme of trying to understand how the social activities were constructed. Overall I found evidence of expansive cycles and student agency, which I exemplify by articulating and explicating the homework issue that had arisen during my stay in this classroom. This chapter is intended to add to the argument for cogenerative dialogue praxis transitioning to new fields and opens the door to many more questions that can be asked about its role in elementary schools.

Chapter 10 is the conclusion for this study and the last chapter of this dissertation. Here I review the findings and arguments I make throughout the chapters while creating a more complete picture of the study as a whole. Likewise, I review the thematic relationships that exist between each chapter with reference to my own original intentions.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

With this chapter I present the two main theoretical concepts that form the framework I use throughout my own research analysis. These concepts have developed in different fields yet all overlap and effectively reinforce each other. I will begin with Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as developed from the founding work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and continues today by various academics. Along with the development of this framework I incorporate the founding principles of the structure/agency dialectic as described by William Sewell (1992). These two concepts are different yet tie directly with each other to form a loosely bound framework because both situate the individual's actions as mediated by societal forces. The influence and importance of society is taken to a more theoretical and philosophical level with the second theory I present, the ethics of responsibility as developed by Emmanuel Levinas and other philosophers. Similar to CHAT, yet more difficult to specify in terms of analysis, this definition of responsibility greatly influences all aspects of my research, from data collection to analysis. These theoretical approaches are reiterated throughout some of the following chapters as their applicability varied for each analysis. As stated, each chapter stands independently and as such I rely on a variety of theoretical frameworks throughout in addition to those presented here. I restrict my discussion here to CHAT and ethics as these two frameworks have substantially influenced my work and are evident despite the lack of explicate reference throughout.

I chose to use the theoretical frameworks I present here because of my own intentions as a researcher. I wanted and want to avoid assumptions for why certain actions are taken by the participants. As a teacher I often found myself drawing conclusions for students actions and then attempting to change the situation such that negative behaviour was

avoided. In a certain way this made sense as the students and I were directly working together in the classroom so I had first-hand involvement in the activities of the students. But in another way, I made many assumptions about why certain students did things and what they were thinking. As a researcher I realize that I do not have the luxury to take these assumptions and print them for others to read; rather I have learned that I must move away from trying to get into students' heads and into the world that I can directly observe and interact with. That being said, I also intended to include the participants of whatever projects in which I am involved in every capacity possible. The concepts of authentic research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and participant research (Kincheloe, 2003) have opened my eyes to the violences and unethical treatment participants may receive through educational research. The theoretical approaches I used and present here address these intentions in different ways and will be explained as the foundations of the approaches are discussed.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

In my study I use cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), which has shown to be an ideal tool for analyzing and theorizing educational settings (special issue of *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 11[1]). Because the minimum unit of analysis of cultural-historical activity theory is the activity as a whole (Engeström, 1987, 1993, 2001; Leont'ev, 1981), it constitutes an ideal framework for analyzing the experiences of the participants in the classroom without reducing them to any set of psychological or sociological factors. This relates to my intention as a researcher, to avoid assumptions about what goes on in the heads of the participants (which is forever elusive and inaccessible). In the context of

CHAT, *activity* is not some school task, which teachers often denote by the term “activity,” as in “science activity,” but a societally motivated activity such as trading, hunting, and, rather late in cultural-historical development, schooling. Cultural-historical activity theory allows me to frame the participants in a given activity as subjects with a particular object of intention. In other words CHAT allows me to analyse the school context as a series of actions directed towards some object, such as getting a good grade or learning how to avoid the attention of bullies. Furthermore, in cultural-historical activity theory, any action is understood as a transitive relation between subject and its object of activity, which is mediated by the entities that are constitutive of the particular activity (Figure 3.1) (Engeström, 2001), a topic to be discussed in more details below. That is, events cannot be reduced to any one aspect of an activity system because they all are codependent—the system is the *smallest* unit, the element so to speak. In the case of teaching in general, the teacher and the students are subjects whose actions on the object are mediated, for example, by the division of labor that assigns them different roles. This

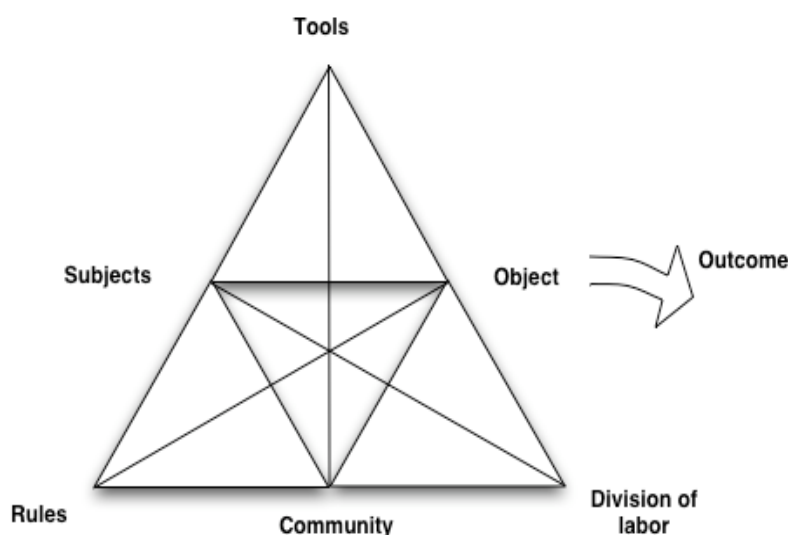


Figure 3.1 The basic cultural-history activity triangle

relates to the first theme of this dissertation, with the cogenerative dialogue I see the interactions of the students as mediated by the tools associated with the system, tools such as the language used or the desks sat at. In addition CHAT does not allow me to reduce the activity in the classroom to the singular person without influence from the others. This is in direct relation with my intention to include the participants of the study because with CHAT it is impossible for me to situate anyone outside of the research activity: I am forced to account for them.

In terms of my second overarching theme CHAT allows me to account for the various activities the students and teachers are involved in simultaneously in school. In everyday life it is easy to observe how any school, even at a cursory level of analysis, is composed of various systems that need to be negotiated. For example, because of the poor performance levels on legislated standardized high-stakes tests, a school may be in a constant state of test preparation. This itself can be thought of as an activity system separate from but overlapping with another system focused on possibly the political issues between staff and administration, or the systems surrounding the implementation of standardized curriculum. CHAT therefore allows me to understand these systems as existing at the whole-school level and evident at the classroom and interpersonal level, because, as should be evident, schooling is concretely realized in and through classroom-level events. Or on a more personal level CHAT allows me to understand that possibly the social intentions of a boy towards a girl influence and alter the classroom, despite even overt attempts to separate them by the teacher. In my case these overlapping systems are vital to account for and articulate, as I want to avoid assumptions about the actions of the students and involve their opinions to the highest degree possible. Overall

CHAT helps develop the themes of this study and addresses my intentions as a researcher in an extremely effective manner.

So far I have provided only cursory description of what CHAT is and how it relates to my work, this was intentional as to introduce a more in-depth analysis. To truly understand CHAT one must begin with one of the questions that have been wrestled with by everyone involved with social research, the question of consciousness. Understanding the origins and reality of consciousness leads me to then question some theoretical approaches for treatment of the individual. In the case of CHAT the social beings that humans are is reflected in the inseparability of the subject from the activity. So, given the social nature of consciousness and the subject, it is only natural to question how people can make meaning out of the world at all. CHAT also provides me with a framework for this process as well. Building on these concepts I then specifically address: the mediation of actions, the outcome of the activity, change, and learning. Finally I present a specific application of CHAT as used by social scientists and again relate the outline presented here to my own work.

Consciousness

Vital to the theoretical base of CHAT is the understanding that the consciousness of an individual is dialectically related to the other people in society, and that questions of what goes on in the heads of individuals are moot. Beginning with the work of Vygotsky consciousness is separated from mysterious actions in the head and instead analysed as a collective event. This is vital because,

individual consciousness is wholly incapable of giving us a history of the development of human thought, for it is conditioned by an earlier history

concerning which it cannot of itself give us any knowledge. (Wundt, 1921, p. 3)

In other words if the analysis of human development is restricted to what takes place in the head of individuals the picture will always remain incomplete. Rather social scientists must focus on social interaction, as this is the sphere where consciousness develops.

Psychological characteristics of individual consciousness can only be understood through their connections with those social relationships into which the individual is drawn. (Leont'ev, 1978, p. 80)

With a focus on interaction CHAT situates consciousness as distributed among the participants in the activity. Not that each person is thinking the same thought at the same time collectively, but rather, that without communication consciousness does not exist. Communication, verbally in the form of language, carries meaning given the society in which it developed. As will be described in detail below, meaning is formed through the relationships between activity, action, and operations and as such without activity meaning cannot develop. Language is unique in that it allows meaning to develop without need of a physical object to refer to; rather it represents an ideal form of the objective world. Language communicates the properties, the connections, the relationships that construct the social world that individuals live within (Leont'ev, 1978). In line with this are the role artifacts play as they are created as part of a given culture and continue to develop and change as society changes, thus representing and reflecting the various influences that defined it as such. These artifacts in turn develop culture and consciousness as well, as they continue to mediate our actions with the world and each other in the activity. CHAT is founded on the concept of developed consciousness through social interaction as part of the activity, but that does not imply that the subject is

reducible to action and reaction. Rather, it is vital that I understand the role of the subject in the activity as a whole.

The Subject/Object Relationship

CHAT does not posit the subject of analysis; instead the subject is contextualized within the activity in which he/she is engaged. What this means practically is that the subject cannot be extracted from the activity, he/she cannot be analysed as a lone entity in space with independent attributes that are only enacted as the world comes into play. CHAT acknowledges and embraces the relationship the subject has with the world and therefore analyses each action as mediated and indirect. Unlike some earlier and even current work CHAT does not allow for the actions of the subject to be directed towards some object as if the action takes place outside of a structured activity. For example the action of picking up food to eat at dinner cannot be simplified to exclude the mediating factors of the fork, the plate, the context, or the other people present, instead this action is analysed within the greater activity of dinner. Furthermore the object of the activity is similarly contextualized, as it is dependent on the activity as well. To continue with the dinner example, the object may be the food on the plate, which is only food when it is objectified as such by the subject; otherwise it remains part of some other activity and is objectified differently. Therefore CHAT describes the relationship between the subject and object as dialectic, they are mutually dependent and mutually exclusive. The subject of dinner can never be the object of dinner and vice versa, yet without one another they cease to exist as such. Given that this is the case, I must then understand how the activity itself comes to have meaning for the participants and how their actions fit.

The Activity, Actions, Operations—Meaning

The activity is the foundation for analysis in CHAT and therefore allows me to describe the overall structure of CHAT as a theory. It may seem awkward to concentrate only on the activity for analysis given that during our daily lives we perceive what appear to be actions that have particular intentions. But what is missing from an analysis based on actions alone is the complex mediation the world plays between the subject and the object of the action. Actions are more than simply cause and effect reactions to stimulus; rather there are goals behind them with change at its heart. Actions are intentional, in that people act with a purpose. This is different and not to be confused with operations, which are unconscious, and unintentional. For example, eating dinner is a series of actions and operations that formulate an overall activity. There is a goal formed by the individual to eat the food, without this goal, the food would not be eaten, for it is not inherent that once dinnertime has come we must eat. It is an intentional action to pick up the fork to then pick up the food, but this action is constituted by operations in the form of the turning of the hand and gripping by the fingers. Infants must think about how to pick up the fork, how to hold it so the food does not fall, and how to direct it towards the mouth, but as adults these actions have become operationalized such that they are simply performed so the overall action can be completed. Therefore activity, action, and operation exist at different levels with operations at the lowest level of phenomena. Moving away from a focus on actions is difficult given their presence in observable world, yet without the activity they have no meaning.

Meaning is the most important aspect of consciousness because *meanings* allow humans to interpret the world (Leont'ev, 1978). Despite the presence of even a seemingly

objective action, it is never the case that an action has an inherent *meaning* in the world. Describing the way *meaning* is formed requires more detailed understanding of the relationships between activities, actions, and operations. These levels are dialectically connected, in that they presuppose each other and mutually constitute one another, yet they do exist at different levels. Therefore, I must begin with the activity and then move to the other levels in order to understand each part.

The overall relationship is visually presented as such in Figure 3.2. Specifically, actions are given *sense* as they relate to the activity. Continuing with the example of eating dinner, it is clear that the action of lifting the fork to the mouth to put food in it has a different *sense* depending on if it is done during a job interview dinner, as compared to breakfast on the couch in the living room. Both actions may appear the same and could be described similarly, yet they are clearly different. Furthermore the operations that allow the action of picking up the food to be realized are only given context by the action, in other words the action *references* the operations. Again, the operations and action presuppose each other, in that one can only exist given the other, yet the *reference* depends on what the action actually is. Finally, now that the action concretely *references* the operations and the activity gives the action *sense* I can say that *meaning* has been

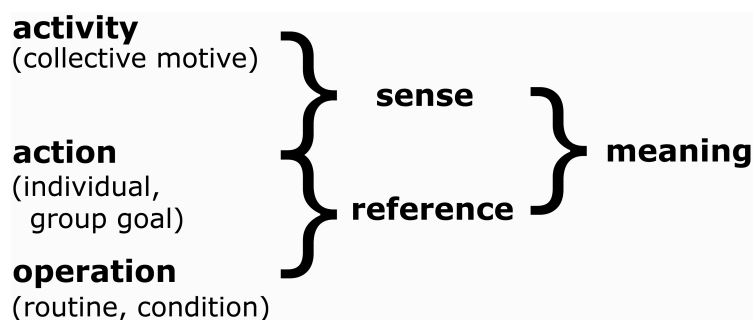


Figure 3.2 Relation between activity-action-operation

formed.

Given the example of eating dinner I see that the actions that physically realize the activity have *meaning* given the cultural setting in which the activity takes place. And again it is vital to see *meaning* as part of an evolving process as the actions are realized and influence the activity, which in turn simultaneously, culturally, influences the actions. The question then becomes how do these actions, which are what I see in every day life, actually take place in the activity?

Mediation of Actions

CHAT necessitates and outlines how to analyse actions as culturally mediated within the general activity. Currently the activity is theorized as a triangle (Figure 3.1), which has developed from the first stages of the direct relationship between subject and object to its current form (Engeström, 2001). The triangle is composed of the mediating entities within the activity: the tools, the rules, the division of labour, and the community. The triangle is useful in that I am able to differentiate between concrete mediation, such as with tools, and cultural mediation as in the division of labor, although each entity cannot be separated from the activity at large and so is never isolated entirely. In addition, visually the triangle allows the user to see potential areas of conflict and contradiction between the subject and object, such as with different language use, a tool. This is important as contradiction is situated as the engine of change within CHAT, a topic to be expanded on later.

Returning to the example of eating dinner it is clear that each action is mediated by each entity, some more easily visible than others. Beginning with the tools, it is clear that

when eating dinner, let's say in a restaurant, forks, cups, plates, etc., are used by the subjects in actions towards the object, the food. In addition, any conversation that arises during dinner is based on a common use of language, which is also a tool. Again, conflict can potentially exist here as language can be used differently among participants, which is easily observable when slang is used or with emphasis placement. In restaurants there are rules in play as well, rules governing when to order what, how to approach the food, where to sit, etc. These rules are culturally developed and simply cannot be ignored entirely. For example, the waiter may find it strange to order the main course before an appetizer or drinks, whereas it is possible that this is the desired order of the diners. At play here is also the role the community plays in regard to the meal. Although dinner as an activity could be thought of in regard to one diner, there are still the other people in the context that influence the actions to subject. For example, even if the diner totally ignored the other patrons in the restaurant he or she would still need the waiter to move the food and the cooks to prepare it, what is relevant here as to influence is debatable but it is clear that dinner cannot take place without the community at large.

Finally there is the mediation of the division of labor in the activity. If the subjects were a family of parents and children it would be clear that some roles exist and that power is unevenly distributed, if not at least in terms of economic capital. Furthermore, there is the relationship between the patron and the staff, which is based on particular cultural norms such as tipping and service with a smile. In the end it is impossible to account for every factor of mediation but activity theory does not claim to present an entirely complete system, rather the goal is to avoid assumptions and better understand how and why actions take place.

The Outcome of the Activity

In the course of a normal day it would seem that actions have direct outcomes and occur without mediation or cultural influence, but what CHAT insists is that the outcome with meaning is not of action but of the activity. Referring back to how meaning is formed, action is dependent on the activity to have sense and therefore meaning; furthermore, meaning will only be known after the act has been completed (Roth, Lawless, & Masciotra, 2001). In the example of eating dinner there is not a guarantee that by the subject sitting at the table with food on the plate that a successful dinner will result. Actions take place towards the object of food, but the outcome is only realized when the activity is complete. For example, if conflict arises during the course of the activity, such as if the table broke, one of the tools, then the activity would not continue as it had, changes would need to be made. Vital to the formation of the outcome, too, is concept of responsibility; this is explored in more detail later.

In terms of who is responsible for the outcome of the activity there is an understanding that each subject has a stake in what is produced. Despite any lack of voice or unequal distributions of power the activity does not continue as such without the subjects doing what they do, and so they each have a responsibility for the outcome. In terms of dinner, each person eating or involved determines what the outcome is, even simply by standing in the same room, some amount of influence exists. This concept is vital to research in that the researcher is forced to acknowledge the intentional or unintentional influence he/she have with regard to the context they study. In is not possible to observe a classroom, for example, without some amount of influence existing

simply by presence. The question could follow, what about two-way mirrors and the like, does not this dismiss the influence of the observer?

The answers to these types of questions are found in the meaning created, in that without action and therefore sense, meaning cannot be created. So, a researcher outside of the activity entirely cannot share in the meaning created. This relates back to the use of the cogenerative dialogue and the role of the researcher as directly involved. With direct participation the researcher is able to concurrently and jointly construct meaning for the cogenerative dialogue. Besides the intentionally open nature of the cogenerative dialogue and the need to formulate specific goals, the simple act of sitting together and talking is an activity itself. Any activity such as this inherently has an outcome jointly created, but in the case of the cogenerative dialogue this process is brought to the forefront and exposed.

Contradiction and Change

Although CHAT, particularly in reference to the basic activity triangle (Figure 3.1), may seem rigid and static in reality CHAT offers specific and realistic means for change to occur in the system. It must be remembered that the activity system is open to outside influence, one reason why a feedback loop does not properly describe the relationship between subject and object. In fact outside influence, such as changes to the division of labor when an employee is promoted, change the activity by developing contradictions between elements. Contradictions are defined as “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). In this example the language (tool) used previously may not be appropriate anymore resulting in

contradiction. For example the promoted person may have to change the language used with his/her new subordinates with whom he/she had been previously worked alongside as equals. This process is vital as the mediating elements are never uniform or eternally consistent, as they mediate more than one activity at a time and change in one activity system invariably affects others to which it is connected. Contradictions are therefore seen as the seeds of change, yet by simply existing there is no guarantee that change will occur. CHAT does not structure human interaction such that the individual's role in the activity is assumed, rather the subject's ability to instigate change, power to act, or *agency* is central to the changing activity.

Agency is "the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of *resources* in terms of cultural *schemas* other than those that initially constituted the array" (Sewell, 1992, p. 19). In the case of the teacher this could be thought of as the capacity to use a technique or method from one area and apply it to another, for example. Such as, a teacher using reading techniques in a math lesson demonstrates the use of a resource in a context it is not normally associated with. Agency though, is of course conceptualized as dialectically related to the structured activity. In other words, the subject mediates how the activity is structured, which in turn affects the agency of the subject, these two entities presuppose each other and are inseparable. Structures can be thought of as "sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action" (Sewell, 1992, p. 19). Schemas are the "generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life" (Sewell, 1992, p. 8) as termed in CHAT the rules of the activity. Therefore, to summarize, CHAT conceptualizes the activity as structured by dialectically related

elements that change over time given internal contradictions or agential subjects. This leads then to further question agency, and how it can develop itself as part of the activity. Or in other words how does learning take place within the activity, as knowledge is not conceptualized as something to be placed *in* a given subject?

Learning

CHAT situates learning as part of the process of identifying and addressing contradictions between and inherent within activity systems. In line with this, learning is not an individual act or simply a process inside the heads of the participants; rather it is distributed between everyone through interaction. For example, between a teacher and student knowledge does not travel in a one-way direction from the teacher's head to that of the student, rather knowledge is changed through its negotiation by the two. One acknowledged basis for this type of distributed, or collective, learning is found with *situated learning* and the process of *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this theory of learning, "learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practises of community" (p. 29). In other words learning takes place as people are introduced to activities that they, over time, become a part of through participation and interaction. In this case newcomers work on the peripheral level of the activity as they lack experience, but their role is understood as necessary, vital, and contributing to the outcome of the activity. In the classroom specifically, this concept is complicated by the contradictions inherent in schooling designed as a system where the students can never achieve *full participation*. It is clear

from the example of schooling that activities take place within overlapping communities of practice and that negotiation of these is complicated. Schooling therefore cannot be separated from its political nature or economic impact for purposes of analysis and this must be incorporated into the process of learning for students. Full participation then, is a process of “becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations” (p. 53). In other words, being a full participant is the ability to negotiate these systems at a level a newcomer could not. This of course does not imply that a newcomer is segregated from a definable core of knowledge or that a line must be crossed to move to the centre of the community, rather newcomers exist on the periphery as possessing the potential to change their behaviours and roles in the system. Learning then is a process of identity definition by the participants as part of the activity system. This is difficult to conceptualize in regard to schooling, as the system of which the students are part is not the system in which the supposedly learned skills will be applied in the future. For example, learning to do science experiments, which involves working with peers and predictable outcomes, develops a different identity than would the experimentation activity in the professional setting. They are different in one sense that the community of practice is different in a school than in an academic setting. Framing learning in this way changes the questions of retention and knowledge transfer to questions of social participation.

Of course, it must be remembered that these communities of practice are in a constant state of change and redefinition as newcomers become full participants and older members move out. There is then always a conflict inherent in the social system created by these participants between what was common throughout the system and how the new

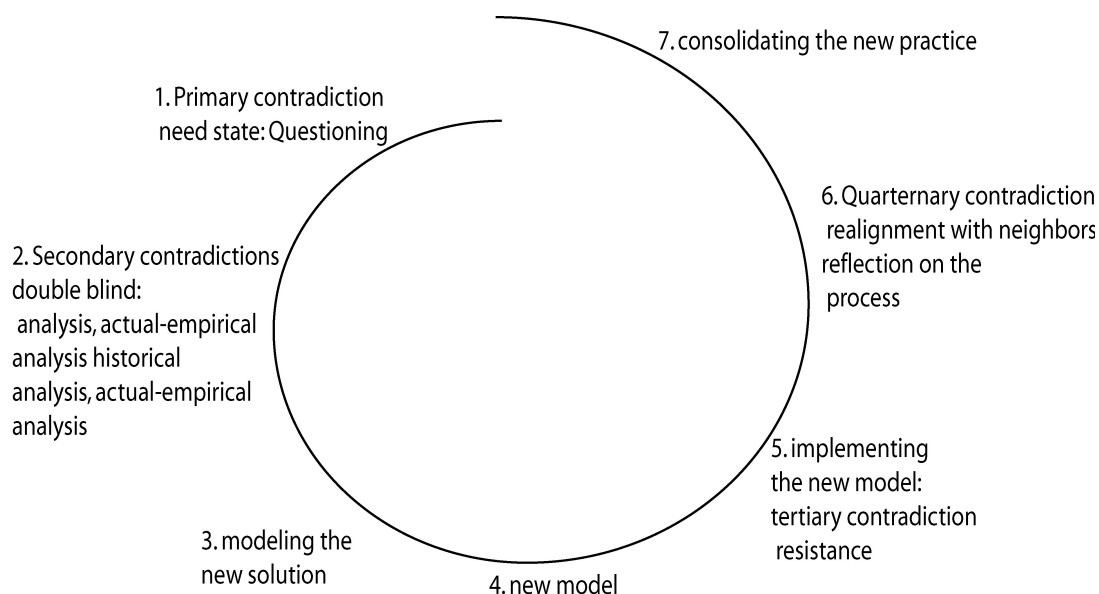


Figure 3.3 The expansive cycle of learning

system is defined. This conflict is never satisfied, or then change would stop, as human agents influence the community. This implies then a driving internal contradiction, the negotiation of which can be analysed as a cycle of *expansive learning* (Engeström, 2001). This process can be graphically represented as a continuing cycle of questioning, modeling, and implementation (Figure 3.3).

As disruptions and contradictions in the activity become more demanding, internalizations increasingly takes the form of critical self-reflection and externalization, the search for novel solutions, increases. (Engeström, 1993, p. 46)

In an everyday sense this process is evident as people continually change their practises to reduce contradiction in the system in which they are participating. In a more overtly communal sense this process can be seen as corporations change advertising strategies as trends change. This process though is not guaranteed to produce a continually expansive outcome, rather, it is dependent in part on the active participation of the individuals that constitute it. If questioning contradictions in the system slows or

discontinues positive change will as well, it is therefore not enough for contradiction to exist, it always does, learning must be conceptualized as an active process.

Accepting a collective and active concept of learning with continual change from contradiction as a foundation implies a nonlinear formation of knowledge and learning. As opposed to finality of a linear model, which ignores the continual influence of the individual, a cyclic model underscores the unsubstantiated notion of static knowledge.

CHAT does not define knowledge in the linear way because actions cannot be separated from the activity (Engeström, 1993). This is important related to educational research as the actual activity cannot be re-enacted nor reflected upon later because these constitute different activities. This is exemplified by the fact that apparent knowledge acquisition in the classroom activity does not guarantee transfer to new activity systems, and in fact is a baseless expectation. Instead learning could be thought of as,

a developmental process that involves both the internalization of a given culture of practice and the creation of novel artifacts and patterns of interaction. (p. 46)

In other words learning involves understanding and participating in a given cultural activity, in the case of school, the classroom. Furthermore, learning also implies agency in the form of creatively changing the activity and the subsequent interactions of those involved. In an effort to make this process clearer and CHAT in general I will now provide some examples of its actual application to research.

Applications

CHAT serves as a valuable tool for any researcher involved in the study of human interaction, but how would its use appear in actual research? The following is an example

of how CHAT has been applied in the work of Engeström (2001) in regard to the medical profession, in which specifically he analyses the overall effectiveness of a health care provider in Finland. This example is included as it demonstrates how CHAT can be applied to a large system of activities such that the contradictions become evident. Furthermore, CHAT allows for a formal explanation for how these contradictions lead to change in the system while reaffirming the role the individuals play in the system. Following this example I present my basic understanding of cogenerative dialogue praxis in terms of CHAT. Based on this formulation the actions that constitute the cogenerative dialogue are specific and intentional yet they cannot be separated and decontextualized outside the activity system as a whole.

Engeström (2001) analyses the expansive model of learning previously discussed given the context of the healthcare system in Helsinki, Finland. In this study three particular activity systems are discussed as all coming together to produce an overall outcome, in this case, gaps, overlaps, and discoordinations between the general health care facilities, the children's hospital, and the patient's family. Generally, contradictions arise as a patient moves from one system to the next as symptoms are treated and care strategies planned. For example, a child is referred by the general health care facility to go to the hospital for specialized care. This care is then received and a plan is implemented for continued treatment of the child, but this plan is never conveyed back to the general healthcare provider whose job it is to continue the care. In this study meetings were held called "Boundary Crossing Laboratories" in which the two medical facilities, the researchers, and video accounts from patients were all present. Of importance to CHAT is how these meetings exemplified the expansive learning process as a site of

direct discussion of contradiction between systems. Overall the expansive cycle is observed as the participants move through the stages of questioning, modeling, and so forth until a potentially sustainable system is in place. Several solutions to the lack of communication between systems are discussed, implemented, and then questioned because of the new contradictions they introduce, such as too much extra paperwork likely to get lost or ill used. Engeström (2001) categories these potential solutions as sideways movements towards concept formulation among the participants, as opposed to the vertical direction suggested by Vygotsky (1987). The vertical movement is discredited given the unnatural interaction it assumes between incongruent concepts, scientific and everyday concepts. The vertical movement leaves out the interplay of new ideas being formulated, applied, and analysed such that the end result is much different than originally assumed. Overall, this analysis underscores the claim that contradiction is inherent in any system and is indeed the engine of change, and furthermore that the individuals involved are not simply reacting to stimulus, rather their agency keeps the process moving.

In regard to this study using cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1996; Leont'ev, 1978, 1981) as a theoretical framework allows me to focus on the act of the subjects towards the object while incorporating how an action is mediated by the context (Figure 3.4). Throughout my analysis here I theorize the cogenerative dialogue (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000; Roth & Tobin, 2002, 2004b) itself as an activity (Figure 3.4). The subjects of this activity are the participants including students, teachers, researchers, supervisors, etc., who exist in the system dialectically related to the intended object. In this case the intended outcome may be an actionable plan for the classroom, to which all

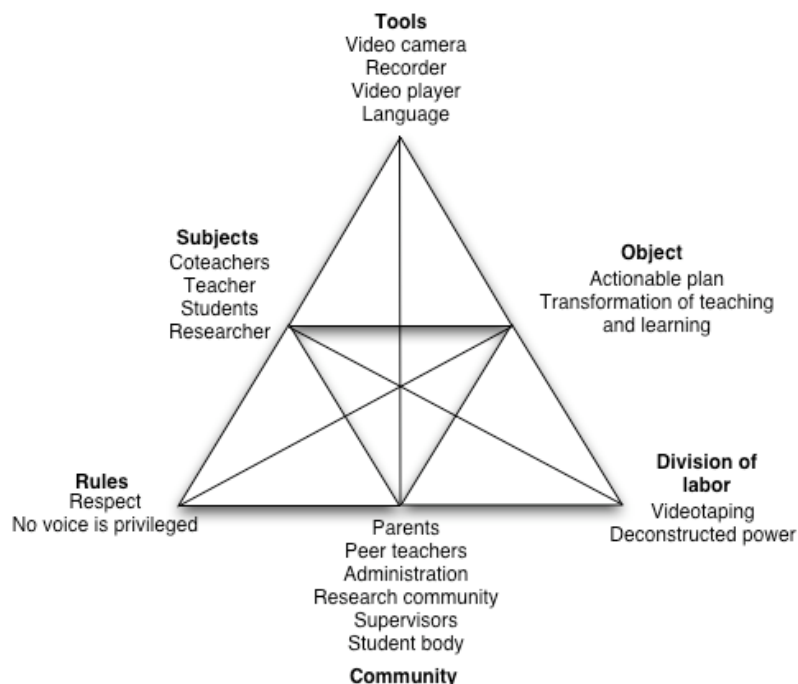


Figure 3.4 Cogenerative dialogue as an activity system

the participants have agreed and according to which they all will act following the meeting. Of course this object may not be guaranteed or even recognizable until the activity is completed such that the actual outcome of the activity (not shown) is unknown (Ardenghi, Roth, & Pozzer-Ardenghi, 2005). Within the activity of the cogenerative dialogue there are layers of processes working simultaneously.

The cogenerative dialogue by nature is a social process dependent on the cooperation of the participants who themselves engage in particular activities to meet this end. For example, the motive of the activity is to formulate an actionable plan, but to concretize this motive in a real result a teacher needs to explain the rules of the cogenerative dialogue to the students. Successful comprehension of the rules of the cogenerative dialogue is itself an outcome of a specific activity the teacher and students engage in.

Traditionally the individual act would be separated from the activity by its singular nature and different intent, but with use of CHAT this distinction cannot be simplified to this extent. In the example of explaining the rules of the cogenerative dialogue to the students there are countless performances by the teacher in the form of utterances, but do these utterances qualify as individual acts? If I reduce this example to an even more specific case of the teacher articulating a rule to be heard and followed by the students, it is clear that the utterance could not exist without the activity in which it is part. For example the use of words and language means that tools are being used, therefore I cannot analyse just what words are spoken, I must take the activity itself as the unit to be analysed (Figure 3.4).

The Ethics of Responsibility

In a general sense I started to incorporate ethics into my work because concepts such as CHAT seemed incomplete in terms of the broader picture of humankind. It is clear from CHAT that people work together in activities, but what it is not clear is what has led to the connections I share, seemingly in an innate way, with my fellow humans. In particular the process in which consciousness develops as a foundation of CHAT touches on the very issues of which I discuss, but this is not taken far enough, therefore I looked to ethics to support the framework CHAT builds up.

In regard to the second theme that runs throughout this dissertation, responsibility arises in many instances, but specifically one such case is the teacher's responsibility to help the students understand their role in the classroom. For example, in plain terms the students and teacher together create the atmosphere of the class, and so both are

responsible for that atmosphere. Continuing from this though is the possibility that the students may not fully be aware of their responsibility in terms of what the class produces collectively, and so it is up to the teacher as the leader of the class to attempt to make this explicate. Avoiding this conversation leaves the student as responsible for the outcome of activity but lacking opportunity to fully participate in its construction. The cogenerative dialogue is unique in that it makes this relationship explicit and could even be thought of as a basic unit of society. The cogenerative dialogue mandates by its very design, commitment to the collective, responsibility for one's own acts, and the power to act. The activity system constitutes a framework that mediates how participants orient themselves in a setting and their levels of conscious involvement and feeling of responsibility. Students are not traditionally treated as equal participants in the classroom activity system—they are treated more like the objects of teacher's teaching actions—and therefore are denied access to opportunities to take responsibility for the outcomes of the system. In a cogenerative dialogue there is the intent to resolve these issues or at least to bring them to the forefront. Ethically it is questionable for the researchers to ignore their responsibility to inform the student of his or her implied role and also to not require the students' roles to change.

Using ethics as a theoretical framework relates to my intentions as a researcher by addressing the very process of our coming to understand ourselves as a being. Being in this sense means being different from others but relying on interactions with other people. This topic is given considerable background in the following section, but here it is important to understand that we are not born as conscious of society, of the people, or who we are, this is all learned as we see people and are touched by them. This relates

then to all of our interactions and how we function as beings in the world, or specific to my work, the classroom. Students do not participate in class in isolation from each other with only their internal mechanisms to rely on, rather from their very beginnings as an infant throughout their life their identity and thoughts are dependant on others around them. Using responsibility as a framework allows me to discuss the individual but always in reference to the community at large. An individual never holds responsibility alone; rather it is always distributed to everyone involved in the activity despite even his or her objections. Therefore, as a researcher I cannot claim to use an ethical framework without including each person in the process, otherwise the outcome produced exists by their involvement, but without their consent or understanding.

Introduction

On the surface there are the many daily issues that surround teaching and responsibility, such as the safety of the students, but what I am interested here is more the responsibility we all have to each other as human *beings* facing other human beings. Responsibility and ethics here situated as the one in the same, questioning what we are responsible for in the world is the same as questioning our ethical nature. Furthermore the differentiation between morals and ethics is vital, morals question the cultural obligation we have in regard to our own actions, whereas ethics focuses on the study of the human condition in general. To properly introduce and outline *responsibility* as a conceptual framework the first questions that must be addressed are what is our relation to other people in the world, and what is my responsibility to them as individual beings?

The Other

The world in which each person is born into is filled with and constructed by other people, this is undeniable, and allows consciousness to develop. This discussion of ethics is grounded in the responsibility we have to and for the *other* (Levinas, 1998). Because human beings make society collectively, and because society mediates each action, every single individual is part of the condition of every other human being (Nancy, 2000). This concept is best understood in regard to the development of a child. An infant is not born aware of its own being or place in the world, these are not inherent human traits rather they are learned by interaction with others. From birth there is a constant supply of interaction with people who are functioning in society as conscious beings, aware of themselves as similar yet different than the other people they live with. Infants are first exposed to the other by touch, touch by another on the skin of the infant allows for differentiation between the self and someone else, and also the relation of the self to be the other to another person. In other words, one cannot be touched without touching the other as well. This is not a conscious act, one does not choose to allow touch, but rather it is an opening up of self to be touched by another. This exposure, as represented as a face by Levinas (1998) is at the heart of responsibility, it is a bond between the self and the other that cannot be broken.

In regard to the infant, it is clear that without contact, without consciousness already present it could not come into existence, therefore it is dependant on those that have existed prior to the birth of the infant. The infant is born into a world that has been developed prior to their memory or opportunity to choose or decide anything about who they are. An infant does not choose to be born or live in the skin with which to interact

physically with the world, rather they are dependent on the world to exist such that they can later question the process. The responsibility an infant has existed then prior to their birth and in fact prior to time that can be understood, it is infinite and continuous even after death. The world that continues after our deaths has been changed and influenced by each person's existence and sets the stage for others to come into being thereafter. Those that live now are responsible to those that live later as what they do now does not happen in isolation but contributes to the continuously changing world. In the given example of the infant it is clear that even before birth the child has influenced the actions for the parents as they have changed eating habits, house layout, sleeping schedule, topics of discussion, etc. The infant did not choose to instigate these changes yet by existing they have been made, just as after birth changes will continue to be made, on its behalf without consent of the infant,

This concept is also relevant given the concept of an ethic of caring that evolves from a natural caring (Noddings, 1984). Even before birth the baby is cared for as the mother and father discuss the baby, plan, and become emotionally connected to a person that in turn will reciprocate the caring they project. Again, the baby does not choose to have this care from his/her parents but this connection exists and so as the baby is born and cared for he/she is obligated to approach each other person presented with a caring attitude. If a person is capable of caring in response to caring then it must be accepted as they encounter each other. The direct relation with the other is essential, as the baby, or any person, encounters another they seek the care they project in return, and this is to be assumed (Noddings, 1984). The relation with the other can be thought of ideally or also in terms of everyday activities, such as in conversation.

The Speech Act

Related to the concept of responsibility for being is the responsibility I share with others for my verbal interactions. Similar to the exposing of the face to each other as a representation of one's being the speech act serves to bring the relationship between the self and the other to the forefront. The speech act (Austin, 1962) describes the basic unit of language interaction between beings. Each speech act is made up of three parts: the utterance, the intent, and the completion of the speech act by the recipient. The person initiating the speech act makes two inherent assumptions, first that what is said will be heard, and second that what is heard will be understood. The initiator opens him/herself up for whatever response is given by the other, this response must be taken by the initiator for what it is. By beginning the interaction there is inherently responsibility taken for the outcome of the interaction. The responder to the utterance also has a responsibility for the completion of the speech act as they have accepted their part in the process by simple proximity. A response can come in any form, ignorance, a verbal response, a gestured response, etc., yet all are related to the speech act itself. Without the responder being present there would be no opportunity to even attempt a speech act therefore responsibility is mutual (Bakhtin, 1993). This concept applies as an interaction between parent and child is imagined in which the parent waits for a response from the child only to have to repeat the question because the child needs more explanation. Without a child present, or without a nonverbal response, from the child there would be no speech act, or reason for the parent to change behaviour.

Conclusion

Ultimately as an educational researcher it is my job to apply these theories such that students, teachers, families, etc. can benefit from a higher quality of education. Additionally, it is my job as an academic to expand these theories such that they accurately reflect the social world that schooling exists within. With both of these tasks in mind I approach cultural-historical activity theory and the ethics of responsibility as tools for me to continually critique and apply to new contexts or in different ways. In light of the foundations of interaction, communication, and change it is only right to perceive what exists now as only one possible configuration of theory and continually allow for different interpretations. I personally see much potential between the two theories for mutual development and reinforcement, particularly in regard to education. What I have attempted to present here are the basic principles and relationships that each theory is grounded in, describe how this applies to my own work, and reflect the room each of them has to grow.

Chapter 4

Who Gets to Ask the Questions: The Ethics in/of Cogenerative Dialogue Praxis

Chapter 4 – Thematic Introduction

Context of This Chapter's Creation

When I first began my work at the University of Victoria like many doctoral students I felt like I was at the very beginning of a long vacation, I knew how long it was supposed to be but it was also very possible that at the end I would need more time to finish what I was doing. I don't want to suggest that I anticipated ease and relaxation as I started my work but rather that like many vacations you have a vague idea of what to expect, people tell you about their experiences, and you figure you will see a lot you haven't seen before. In my case I started going to Blueberry Vale elementary school and doing a lot of reading and thinking, and from that I ended up with a lot of questions. At this point I had been introduced to some of the ethical concerns relevant to education and education research and I had observed some of what was going on at Blueberry Vale. In that light I started working on this chapter to simply get some of my thoughts around the questions I was asking myself. Although the data discussed here are collected from my previous work, as my study continued, I would regularly come back to this work as it had touched on many of the issues I was encountering on a daily basis.

Relation With the Overall Themes

Whenever something is tried in a new arena there are bound to be questions and concerns about how everyone will be affected. In this chapter I present my first analysis of some of the ethical concerns with regard to cogenerative dialogues being used as research praxis. These ethical concerns represent generally the idea of

responsibility and how people everywhere have a responsibility to each other, and more specifically, how the researcher has a responsibility to the other participants in the study. The second of my overarching themes is concerned with how people make sense of the world and with this chapter that is where I begin. I present the cogenerative dialogue as one method of facilitating this exploration of the *Other*; I then question the effect this praxis has on the participants.

Who Gets to Ask the Questions: The Ethics in/of Cogenerative Dialogue Praxis

Abstract

I present cogenerative dialogue as an authentic research tool which, when conducted properly, can address some of the ethical issues inherent in classroom research. To begin with, there is the question of the participation of the researcher in the cogenerative dialogue. Next, I present cogenerative dialogue as an ideal tool to instigate interaction and participation among the participants in classroom research: students, teachers, and researcher. And finally I present cogenerative dialogue as tool to facilitate the discussion of the ethical issues that are part of the research setting (e.g., class).

The theory and praxis of cogenerative dialogue as research and praxis-improvement activity has been presented repeatedly (e.g., Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000; Roth, & Tobin, 2004). Cogenerative dialogues arose as the dialectical partner of coteaching in the studies Wolff-Michael Roth and Ken Tobin conducted among new teachers in urban schools in the United States. I learned the praxis of cogenerative dialoguing as part of my teacher education, which implemented the coteaching model under Ken Tobin's supervision. The cogenerative dialogue gradually transformed into a necessary dialectic pair with coteaching allowing for a meeting of theory and practice (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmermann, 2002). As addressed below, cogenerative dialogues develop new understanding of praxis (i.e., praxeology), which reflexively mediates the praxis of the participants. In other words there is a locally formed definition of teaching and learning (praxeology) that further influences the ongoing everyday activity of the participants, the praxis. As a meeting of teachers, students, researchers, and administrators, cogenerative dialogue praxis brings together all stakeholders in some system for the purpose of collaborating, but how does this collaboration actually play out? What ethical obligations does the researcher have with respect to the students and the teachers involved? What ethical concerns does the cogenerative dialogue minimize in terms of educational research? What ethical obligations exist as part of the class system that can be addressed by the cogenerative dialogue? What ethical dilemmas does the cogenerative dialogue itself present for the participants?

To couch my discussion of the ethical issues arising from cogenerative dialoguing in teaching and research praxis, I discuss a general framework for understanding human activity systems. I then integrate ethics into this general framework based on the function

of action to mediate between embodied knowing in action and sociocultural and cultural historical systems of meaning. I complete this introduction with a discussion of responsibility and how it can be theorized in a dialectical theory of action. Intertwined throughout this analysis I will use my first-hand experience as a teacher conducting cogenerative dialogues, which will appear as block text following my name.

Ethics, Responsibility of Action

Cogenerative praxis dialogue relies on the interactions of individuals to achieve a sense of collective responsibility. In this chapter I will rely on the basic unit of interaction as the speech act (Austin, 1962) and the ethical considerations it implies. As will be explained later the cogenerative dialogue is a discussion between the individuals that collectively form a class. If I view these discussions as a series of speech acts I see the inherent responsibility the completion of the act requires. Each speech act is made up of three parts: the utterance, the intent, and the completion of the speech act by the recipient. The person initiating the speech act assumes a response from the other that will lead to successful completion of the act and thus both are responsible for its completion (Bakhtin, 1993). This is in line with the responsibility that we all have as “beings” in a world full of other “beings”, or our responsibility to the *Other* (Levinas, 1998). Our own being in the world already includes other beings in the world—self and other, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, self and world all emerge at the same moment: being inherently is being singular plural (Nancy, 2000). The concept of otherness is vital to the success of the cogenerative dialogue; it implies an understanding of the similarities between the student and the teacher, for example, while still aware that the two are different people.

This kind of understanding evolves over time with mediation by the people in a person's life. For example, if a high school student experiences an exchange of ideas between another student and teacher, this will mediate his own understanding of himself.

Solidarity, Collective Responsibility

It is common for teachers to expect every student in the class to participate in a given lesson in a consistent manner. In other words many teachers want uniformity in terms of goals and actions to achieve those goals. Besides being impossible given the diversity of individuals in some class—in fact, impossible because each individual is a singular plural and because of the differences embodied in the repetition of singulars (Deleuze, 1968/1994)—the traditional practises for attaining uniformity are not authentic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). They are not authentic because there is a lack of educative and ontological learning taking place. Every student in a class may complete an assignment, but this does not imply a commitment to a goal designated by the teacher, the question here is really one of solidarity (Rorty, 1989). Solidarity can be thought “as the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of ‘us.’” (Rorty, 1989, p.192). Solidarity is not something that can be quantified but is rather evident from the behavioural change of the participants, how do they identify the range of “us.” Because of the irremediable and irreducible self|other dialectic, solidarity in fact is the acknowledgment and positive assertion of responsibility each person has for the other, and all others have toward the person.

Ian: As a teacher I truly wanted to feel like the whole class was working together towards a goal and that I could somehow control that. When I look back at that now I realize how unreasonable that expectation really was. I was trying to make students become friends just by seating them near each other or putting them in the same group, when this was really artificial. What I needed to do was look past the differences in the class and concentrate on the similarities. But of course I assumed I, as the teacher, would need to facilitate a change in the student's own concept of who was part of their group.

I present the cogenerative dialogue as a praxis that addresses the differences of and focuses attention on the similarities among its participants in an effort to promote solidarity. “Feelings of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike me as salient, and that such salience is a function of a historically contingent final vocabulary” (Rorty, 1989, p.192). It is true that, depending on the community, there could be an inherently strong sense of solidarity in the classroom, but how can the teacher identify this? As will become evident, cogenerative dialogue is a praxis specifically designed for promoting a sense of communal responsibility.

What is a Cogenerative Dialogue?

To address these ethical concerns I begin with introduction to what a cogenerative dialogue would look like in practice and how it arose out of Wolff-Michael Roth and Kenneth Tobin's work.

Cogenerative Dialogue: What it Looks Like

A cogenerative dialogue is an activity system made up of coteachers, teachers, advisors, students, researchers, and others who together discuss teaching and learning in the classroom—frequently after having all been participants in teaching and learning. The

intended outcome of the system is a feasible action plan to transform the teaching and learning in that particular field (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000; Tobin, Zurbano, Ford, & Carambo, 2003). Teachers generate continual transformation of teaching and learning normally (Ball & Cohen, 1999) but the cogenerative dialogue brings this process to the forefront with the stated intention of improvement because it provides speaking opportunities to participants in educational processes that traditionally have had little voice.

In school settings, cogenerative dialogues often takes place at the end of the school day or at lunch and involve teachers, researchers, students, and anyone else with interest or need to make sense of the relevant situation. The number of participating students depends on multiple factors: the teachers' comfort level with the dialogue, the number of students in the class, the stage of development of the cogenerative dialogue, and the researchers' role in the class, etc. All participants sit in a circle at the same physical level if possible. It is important for the teacher to change their proximal relation to the students to demonstrate their own commitment to removing spatial configurations that tend to reproduce power (e.g., teacher sitting behind his desk, meeting in the principal's office). A teacher or researcher hovering over the students or videotaping from afar implies a distance and voyeurism that is counterproductive given the intention of the dialogue to make sense collectively and democratically, with equal importance given to each voice.

At first it may or may not be difficult to surrender the roles the participants fill during regular lessons, and so the importance of the cogenerative dialogue occurring outside and removed from the normal class is apparent in regard to these issues. Normally, a researcher or teacher introduces the idea of cogenerative dialogue to students and what

expectations might be, at least in the early-first phase. It is vital, however, to include everyone's voice equally as possible in the discussion especially in the early stages of developing this research and teaching praxis, but this can be difficult to achieve at first. Roth and Tobin (2002) created a heuristic to help mediate this process as a checklist of rules for the cogenerative dialogue.

Ian: When I first began using cogenerative dialogues I saw it as a great opportunity to get to know the students better and simply be able to relate to them. As I continued to use them, I made them a regular part of my teaching. I began to see many advantages I had previously missed. It was hard for me to really see the long-term effects the dialogues might have on my class, the students, and me as a person. One thing in particular that became important to my praxis is the format of the cogenerative dialogue. In order to separate the dialogue from the regular classroom environment I felt the need for a formalized format that the participants design and follow. For example, I felt that the reading or reciting of the rules or heuristic at the beginning of the dialogue reminds the students and teacher of their obligations and expectations for their actions. It was not always easy to do this of course, but to break down the barriers between participants it is vital.

A key component in the implementation of the cogenerative dialogue is the commitment to long terms goals. For the subtle and authentic outcomes to come to fruition, recurrent dialogues over the long-term teaching experience are required. As stated previously there may be rules and expectations associated with the cogenerative dialogue that may have to be reinforced over the course of the study. It cannot be expected that the teacher will feel comfortable immediately "giving up control" of his or her class for the sake of a conversation. It is a way of transitioning from a situation in which students have little voice into one where they do have a voice all the while allowing the teacher to be able to assume his or her institutional responsibility to orderly classrooms. In order to break down the perceived and enacted power differential over time, students need to experience the cogenerative dialogue and then observe positive

outcomes repeatedly. A teacher or researcher can say he or she wants honest feedback but if the students do not see any evidence that their criticism is being taken seriously, the cycle is broken. If the teacher can allow his or her own praxis to change overtly as a result of the cogenerative dialogue this will provide evidence for the students. A commitment to change is necessary for all participants and without this the cogenerative dialogue will be reduced to simply a complaint session.

Cogenerative Dialogue as an Activity System

In line with the work of Bakhtin and Levinas I concentrate my discussion of the cogenerative dialogue on what philosophers term act (completed end result of some doing) or action (process of doing). Using cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1993; Leont'ev, 1978, 1981) as a theoretical framework allows me to focus on the act of the subjects towards the object while incorporating how an action is mediated by the

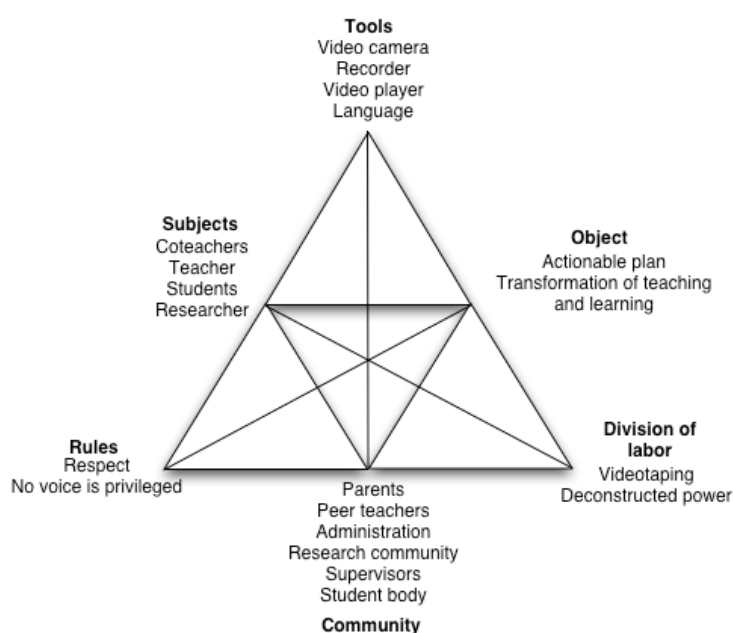


Figure 4.1 Cogenerative dialogue as an activity system

context (Figure 4.1). In my particular case I theorize cogenerative dialogue itself as an activity. The subjects of this activity are the participants including students, teachers, researchers, supervisors, etc., who exist in the system dialectically related to the intended object. In this case the intended outcome may be an actionable plan for the classroom to which all the participants have agreed and according to which they all will act following the cogenerative dialogue meeting. Of course this object may not be guaranteed or even recognizable until the activity is completed such that the actual outcome of the activity (not shown) is unknown (Ardenghi, Roth, & Pozzer-Ardenghi, 2005). Within the activity of the cogenerative dialogue there are layers of processes working simultaneously.

The cogenerative dialogue by nature is a social process dependent on the cooperation of the participants who themselves engage in particular activities to meet this end. For example, the motive of the activity is to formulate an actionable plan but to concretize this motive in a real result a teacher needs to explain the rules of the cogenerative dialogue to the students. Successful comprehension of the rules of the cogenerative dialogue is itself an outcome of a specific activity the teacher and students engage in. Continuing with this example I can focus on the individual act within the activity. Traditionally the individual act would be separated from the activity by its singular nature and different intent, but in the case of social interaction this distinction cannot be simplified to this extent. In the example of explaining the rules of the cogenerative dialogue to the students there are countless performances by the teacher in the form of utterances, but do these utterances qualify as individual acts? If I reduce my example to an even more specific case of the teacher articulating a rule to be heard and followed by the students, I could make a claim that this is in itself an act, but what are its ethical

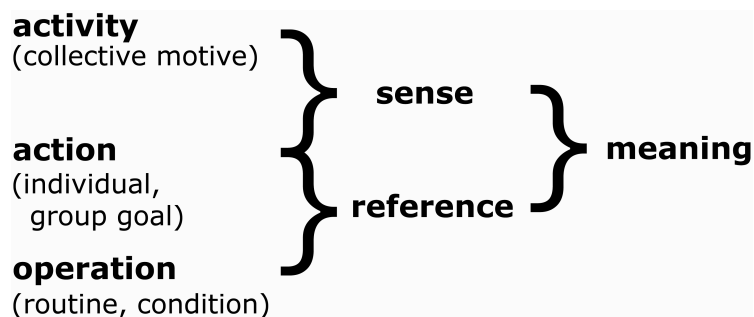


Figure 4.2 Relation between activity-action-operation

implications? Here I analyse the ethics of the cogenerative dialogue and in so doing I appreciate the truly social nature of all interactions that take place as part of the activity. The question then becomes, is it logical to analyse acts of an individual whose acts are directly dependent on others? In order for an utterance to be a motivated act the other must allow it and therefore is as responsible for the outcome as the speaker (Bakhtin, 1993).

Activity theory provides me with a framework for understanding the relation among activity-actions-operations and how meaning is actually generated. Operations are unconsciously performed as part of a given situation or condition and presuppose the action. The action is consciously performed with intent towards some goal that forms the appropriate operation. The action presupposes the activity, which is motivated by the object and gives sense to the actions. The activity is related to the actions by sense, in the case of explaining the rules the action of speaking is given sense by its relation to the activity (explaining the rules) (Figure 4.2). The action of speaking the rules references the operations, which could be thought of as forming the mouth to create certain sounds. The relation between the sense and the reference can then form together meaning of that activity. Meaning therefore always predates speaking, because it is coextensive with

existing relevance relations and familiarity in and with the current situation. For the example of explaining the rules, the action of speaking makes sense given the activity and in turn references the operations as part of the action, together this sense and reference give the activity of explaining the rules meaning.

Praxeology of Teaching

Cogenerative dialoguing is a praxis intended to produce locally relevant understandings and recommendations for future actions. In terms of activity theory these outcomes are attained through mediated actions by the tools, rules, community, and division of labor associated with the system. The outcomes are locally relevant in that they address contradictions, for example, between the ways in which teachers and students make sense of some situation. Contradictions may lead to conflict. To avoid or mitigate conflict and to allow teachers and students to return to teaching and learning, the sources of the contradictions need to be understood. The teacher, students, and researcher form a local understanding—which I term praxeology, knowledge or theory of praxis—for the classroom based on their own experiences. Different from externally devised theories, always local praxeology is based on the participation of the stakeholders. Participants in cogenerative dialogues need to be stakeholders in the praxis discussed because they have the prerequisite practical knowledge of the praxis to be improved (Bourdieu, 1980; MAO, 1967).

Cogenerative dialogue allows new praxeology to emerge by addressing the contradictions inherent in the praxis|praxeology dialectic (e.g., Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000). Students and teachers discuss their praxis, their experience, of a shared event

during the dialogue allowing for a meeting of theory and practice. The teachers, researchers, and students are all stakeholders in the classroom and the cogenerative dialogue allows for a “democratic construction of (open) theory, [which] provide[s] the context in which significant learning occurred” (Roth et al., 2002, p.254). Praxis, the ongoing everyday activity of the participant, is a temporal experience, which lies in contradiction to praxeology. Contradictions exist because a uniform praxis is impossible given the variety of understandings and experiences among the participants (Bourdieu, 1980). These contradictions coupled with the intent to change are in fact the force behind the transformation of the knowledge about teaching and learning, or praxeology, that is the goal of the cogenerative dialogue. In other words the cogenerative dialogue supports the “local knowledge about teaching and learning created by participants (teachers, students, new teachers, researchers, supervisors, and evaluators) in the process of talking about their shared experience” (Roth & Tobin, 2002, p.317). Contradictions between praxeology and praxis are brought to the forefront to be understood and acted upon. The goal however is not to free the system from contradictions, as this would imply sameness between praxis and praxeology, but rather embrace them as the seeds of change. The cogenerative dialogue allows for the discussion of the event and the praxis of the participants leading to new praxeology. This discussion is not simply to understand but an explicated effort to increase the action potential for the participants towards learning. Teachers and researchers who use the cogenerative dialogue to identify the contradictions existing between their own praxis and that of the students form a more authentic praxeology (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000).

Respect and Whole Class Discussion

The following is an excerpt from a cogenerative dialogue, which my coteaching partner (Jack), three students (Sam, Jasmine, and Brett), and I at which time the topics of respect and presentations were discussed. This cogenerative dialogue took place while Jack and I were student teachers at City High School in Philadelphia, coteaching an engineering/robotics class. This high school is located in a high poverty area of the city and at the time of this dialogue the school was facing repercussions for failure to meet mandated levels on standardized tests.

This excerpt is not intended to provide indisputable evidence that the students and coteachers understand their ethical responsibilities but rather it shows a moment of a process towards that goal and is a quality example of what an initial cogenerative dialogue may sound like. This cogenerative dialogue allowed the topic of respect to come up naturally and for the students and teachers to voice their own understandings in an open forum. Because the topic of discussion is respect I felt it was important to see the initiation of the question and the conclusion of the conversation. Throughout the discussion there are a number of features that jump out that are worth comparing from start to finish, such as contradictions and references to previous comments. Overall I wanted to incorporate the reader into the cogenerative dialogue as completely as possible.

Excerpt 4.1

- | | | |
|----|---------|---|
| 01 | Ian | When I have whole class discussions do you feel like you get something out of them or do you feel] ⁴ |
| 02 | Jasmine | [It's not really a whole class discussion because only a couple people talk and that is the class. |
| 03 | Brett | Me personally, I don't get much out of it because I am talking...I |

⁴ Transcript convention: A “[” at the end of a utterance and a “[“ beginning the next utterance reflects that the first person was cut off by the next speaker.

already know all about it.

- 04 Jack How do you think I could make a situation where people feel more comfortable to speak up?

In excerpt 4.1 I began the discussion with a question about whole class discussions (turn 01). Jasmine then changes course slightly by shifting the question to address a problem with the whole class discussions (turn 02). Here Jasmine is able to redirect the discussion in a non-confrontational and appropriate manner. Although I am the teacher here I do not react by suppressing the redirection but rather simply stay out of it. Brett continues with my original question, adding that he knows “all about it” (turn 03). Finally, Jack goes back to what Jasmine brought up (turn 02) by asking how they might encourage students to speak up. Jack as a teacher here relates the discussion back to accessing the students for actionable solutions to be used in class. At first it is very likely that the teacher will both need to remind the students of the need to agree on realistic plans and, in addition, remind himself to discuss these plans rather than simply receive them.

- 05 Brett Just call on them.
- 06 Sam Instead of just asking a question identical to everybody you should just pick on the people that don't raise their hands, who just sit there.
- 07 Ian I looked at it as an opportunity for people to just give their ideas instead of having to go through one of us saying you, then you, you like this ((gesturing with his hands toward students))⁵.
- 08 Jasmine You all could just give each group a different part of it and then we have to lead the discussion on that, so everybody would have to talk.

⁵ Transcript convention: Words surrounded by double parenthesis reflect a physical action taken

Continuing the discussion, Brett offers a solution (turn 05), as does Sam (turn 06), but I don't respond directly to Brett or Sam's, rather I interject with my own opinion about the whole class discussions (turn 07). In this exchange it is almost as if I am defending my own actions to the students, something that would rarely happen in the classroom setting. Jasmine then inputs a suggestion for how to change things (turn 08). I again change the subject (turn 09) and begin a new line of questioning. Overall I see multiple opportunities for me to diverge from the typical teacher reaction and engage in conversation with the students, so as a teacher how could I have learned to use these opportunities?

- 09 Ian So you think that when the other students are up there, the other students are paying attention to them when they are talking?
- 10 Jasmine No, I don't. I don't think so because when people are up there they get disrespected by other students. Some students get more respect from other students.
- 11 Ian Okay. I feel in my experience the respect thing is a pretty big deal in terms of how everyone interacts with each other. Was that clear that I wanted that to be an issue for everyone or is it still going on?
- 12 Jasmine Respect?
- 13 Ian Do you think the discussions about respect have made some kids more aware of it?
- 14 Jasmine Yeah, because then they know they are disrespectful and respect is important.
- 15 Sam I actually don't think it has changed it. I haven't changed.
- 16 Jasmine I believe that...I don't think so, I believe that someone who is disrespectful doesn't care enough to think about it. Just because you are having a conversation about respect, it doesn't mean it touches somebody because they don't know enough.

As I introduce a new topic, that of paying attention (turn 09), the conversation temporally shifts from the whole group to just Jasmine and I. Jasmine's response brings

the idea of respect to the forefront, (turn10) which I then work into my question (turn 11). Jasmine states that some people are more aware of respect as a result of the discussions (turn 14). But later (turn 16) Jasmine then seems to change her mind, and says that some people are not self reflective enough. Sam (turn 15) also thinks that people have not changed as a result of the discussions.

- 17 Ian How do you think that applies to this class?
- 18 Jasmine There are different levels of respect. Like I may not think that I am disrespecting people but you might think that I am and I mean we are so used to being around this group of people that there is a certain way that we interact. Ya' know?
- 19 Brett Yeah, like how I talk to Jim or Greg you know, I may not think that... well it's bad, but I might not think that it is disrespectful so your little discussions have shown me that I shouldn't do that like talk when the teacher is, I shouldn't do it period.
- 20 Ian I understand that when you are with your friends you might act a certain way that would be appropriate but the point is that in here, or in certain situations it isn't.
- 21 Sam I was gonna say, I mean some people just don't know right from wrong.
- 22 Jasmine I don't think that's the case in here though.
- 23 Brett Some people just don't give a fucking a squat.

After Jasmine and Sam have seemingly agreed that there has been no change in terms of respect as a result of the class discussions, I attempt to concentrate the discussion on their class in particular (turn 17). Jasmine began talking in general about people's concept of respect (turn 16) and continues to do so (turn 18) even after I attempt to refocus the discussion.

Brett discusses (turn 19) an example of how the whole class discussions have helped him reevaluate his own actions, but I misinterpret this. I make a comment about acting different in different situations (turn 20), therefore missing the point of Brett's comment.

In addition Brett's comment seems contradictory to his earlier comment (turn 03) that he has not learned anything from the whole class discussions. The last sequence of comments (turns 21–23) seem to contradict some of what was said earlier in the transcription as well. Jasmine (turn 22) states that she does feel people in this class know right from wrong as generalized by Sam (turn 21), but earlier (turn 10) she gave the example of people being disrespected while at the front of the class.

In this particular cogenerative dialogue Jack and I attempted to understand the ways the students treated each other. I began the discussion and then allowed the students to answer without repercussions. The students and the teachers are openly discussing their own praxis. Respect is the main topic of discussion but more important than the actual topic is the fact that the students are able to express their ideas. As stated above, contradictions can exist between the student or teacher's praxis and the praxeology of the class. Here I see a contradiction between the teachers' efforts to change the praxeology in regard to whole class discussions and the praxis of the students. I asked the students how they feel about the whole class discussions and the students respond that they get very little out of them. Jack and I have initiated the whole class discussions with the intention of including everyone but according to the students only a few participate. The participants in the cogenerative dialogue then discuss this contradiction, with many offering suggestion towards a new praxeology for the class. What is missing from excerpt 4.1 is the conclusion in which the participants agree to make changes in the future and accept responsibility for those changes, but how does this actually happen?

It is important to see this conversation as intended to develop over time, after repeated cogenerative dialogues the initiation of questions and topics would be more

evenly distributed. Here the students present their opinions of how respect is given and taken in the classroom directly to Jack and I in a manner impossible in the classroom setting. In this particular discussion most students agree that respect is important and an issue in the class. It is also clear that there is recognition of the different definitions of respect that exist. Jasmine in particular mentions how there are levels of respect that can depend on the group of people (turn 18). Jack and I had the opportunity to learn about the students' own definitions of respect and how their own practises could possibly be misinterpreted. This can be tied back to the idea of lifeworlds (Agre & Horswill, 1997; Schutz & Luckman, 1973) and the potential for the teacher to do violence towards the students. A teacher lacking insight into his or her students' own definitions of respect risks assuming similar perceptions of common events. Unstated assumptions and presuppositions about how a student will interpret the acts of a teacher or other students may lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

This cogenerative dialogue provides an excellent introduction to the ethical questions I discuss in this chapter. The concept of respect is discussed extensively in this cogenerative dialogue, but what is respect? Respect could be defined in various ways, as exhibited in the cogenerative dialogue, but what it describes are interactions, or more basically acts. Different expectations for speech acts or interactions can lead to misunderstandings and worse confrontation. Respect, as it is commonly used, is appropriate for my purposes because of its mutually dependent nature; one must give respect to get respect. Inherent in this concept is the possibility for contradiction, not just between participants but also between intention and outcome. A person intending to act

respectfully cannot expect a favorable outcome because of the unknown expectations of the other.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers as Participants

The role of the researcher in the cogenerative dialogue is complicated by the implied participation of the researcher as a coteacher. But, as explored in this chapter, there is an ethical obligation for the researcher to be involved in a dialogue of some type with the other participants and to be an active participant in the teaching. It is not enough and is in fact unethical to simply exist as a “fly on the wall” during the study, instead the researcher needs to become part of the community and experience it as closely as the other participants (Barton, in press; Lather, 1988). Critical ethnographic research implies a commitment to understanding how people view the world and to the change or consoling of others (Hodgson, 2000). A researcher participating in a cogenerative dialogue exemplifies this commitment by listening, discussing, and criticizing the teaching and learning of the classroom.

Ian: My role as a teacher was complicated by my additional role of researcher but I never felt ethically torn by the dual roles. As a teacher of the class I was able to reflect on my own practises with the help of the students, who had the privilege of observing other teachers’ practises daily. My reflective practises improved as a result of the process as well. As a teacher I also was able to build a quality relationship with the students that would not have been possible as a mere observer. This relationship was crucial to the success of the cogenerative dialogue as well, allowing me to easily reduce barriers to learning and communication.

Some may argue that the participation of the researcher in the class as a coteacher and as part of the cogenerative dialogue would somehow corrupt the data being collected, but

I would argue the opposite. Some scholars suggest that the research should be considered “ruined from the start” in that the truths and knowledge it depends on are “inventions of the present” (Lather, 1997). This takes me back to the idea of praxis; the researcher can understand the class by no other means than to participate in it. In reality the researcher simply being in the room implies their ethical responsibility for the outcomes of the class. No matter how removed they claim to be they cannot avoid interactions with the students, be it in the form of interview, or questionnaire, or even fieldnotes. The researcher may make decisions of how to be physically involved but these decisions can only be enacted through successful interaction with the participants in the study. A researcher may intend to only communicate with a particular student via a questionnaire but this interaction is laced with ethical considerations. A student may very well not understand the questionnaire and seek out the researcher, or the student may discuss the questionnaire with other students, or the student may refuse to do the questionnaire, all of which result in interactions unintended by the researcher. The researcher depends on students to act in the intended way and this dependence cannot be avoided. A standard research decision to distance oneself from the students cannot be obtained without the students agreeing to distance themselves from the researcher of their own accord. The question then arises as to how to minimize unsuccessful interactions and maximize direct communication. The cogenerative dialogue cannot guarantee success but it does make the interaction a topic of open discussion, allowing for clearer understandings. For example, if I were to compare the previous transcript from my class to a questionnaire about respect obvious advantages can be seen. I am able to clarify points of confusion, seek multiple perspectives at once,

observe interactions between peers, and allow for discussion as opposed to checking an ambiguous number.

Responsibility to Include Participants

Responsibility for actions within a given activity system is not limited to simply physical acts but rather lays in even thoughts (Bahktin, 1993). Given the proximity of the participants in a classroom, populated by students, teachers, and researchers, ethical considerations are inevitable. As a researcher in a classroom there are obvious ethical questions that arise from ethnographic methods such as videotaping and recording but in a more theoretical sense the researcher is obligated by his or her very presence to address all ethical concerns that arise. In any classroom, regardless of the involvement of a researcher, teachers and students are constantly negotiating responsibility for the outcomes of the activity system of which they are part.

We are free to act as a being, it may seem, but this freedom implies a pair in the form of responsibility. Responsibility is not given or taken but rather exists beyond being, “prior to every memory”, and without it being would be impossible (Levinas, 1998). Responsibility is continuous; it has existed before one’s awareness and will continue after death. As discussed above, humans as social beings are able to discover a sense of self only through the mediation of other humans, and so we are all responsible to each other for our own freedoms. The cogenerative dialogue is unique in that it makes this relationship explicit and could even be thought of as a basic unit of society. The cogenerative dialogue mandates by its very design commitment to the collective, responsibility for one’s own acts, and the freedom of all to act as they wish.

Ian: As a teacher/researcher it was impossible and unethical for me to control the classroom entirely, I appreciated the reality of the students and I sharing responsibility. Including them in my own research was the only way I could have imagined structuring the work. The cogenerative dialogue provided an excellent format to conduct the research while fairly including the students. I naturally thought of the class as a community and conducting discussions of issues that would directly affect everyone as a community was the ideal choice.

The activity system constitutes a framework that mediates how participants orient themselves in a setting and their levels of conscious involvement and feeling of responsibility. The responsibility of the students for the outcomes of a given activity system in the classroom is often overlooked by them and other participants. As explained earlier praxis occurs in settings that are meaningful because of existing familiarity and relevance relations. Sense exists because of the activity|action dialectic, which in this case are performed by students and teachers together, this is true regardless of its acknowledgement by the teacher or researcher. Students are not traditionally treated as equal participants in the classroom activity system and therefore are denied access to opportunities to take responsibility for the outcomes of the system. Thus, students probably are not realizing their own potential and in addition will be treated as lacking potential for equal participation. The ethical contradiction arises with this treatment by teachers and researchers because all participants involved in an action are responsible even without their consent or knowledge. The action, as part of the activity system, can be as simple as inaction or making sense of another's act. Every act (result of an action) is answerable; but an act always is the result of its performance, intention, and the effect it has as evidenced in the recipient's own performance. Responsibility for an act therefore lies with all participants regardless of role (Bakhtin, 1993). By not including students as active participants in the teaching and learning development of a class they are forced to

accept responsibility for the actions of the teacher or researcher. In addition this consent is implied and not openly stated by the student to the community. The students are in a position of responsibility without being provided access to the knowledge of their responsibility and the opportunity to act on their own behalf. In a cogenerative dialogue there is the intent to resolve these issues or at least to bring them to the forefront.

Ethically it is questionable for the researchers to ignore their responsibility to inform the student of his or her implied role and also to not require the students' role to change. This responsibility also lies with the teacher on a regular basis. A teacher assuming total responsibility for the actions in a class is unreasonable and unethical for similar reasons.

Collective Responsibility

Just as important as the topic of discussion during the cogenerative dialogue is the notion and praxis of collective responsibility (Roth & Tobin, 2002). Collective responsibility exists inevitably and therefore can be asserted only; even denying its existence asserts it at the same time (Roth, 2006a). The concept of collective responsibility is a holographic one: it cannot be split up such that each participant in a situation takes on and is responsible for one part of the task, thereby contributing to its cooperative accomplishment. Rather, every individual is responsible for the entire task all the while only taking on a part if it. Thus, for example, although one teacher may have taken the lead in teaching a lesson, all others are responsible for successfully completing it and maximizing learning. If other teachers see something that could be done better, they act to improve the situation rather than waiting until after the lesson to critique, complain, or otherwise refer to a missed opportunity.

A successful cogenerative dialogue needs to conclude with a specific plan that all participants feel responsible for. A sense of responsibility is not arrived at simply by discussion, but by agreed upon plans being enacted. The cogenerative dialogue is specifically designed to address this process and make it a topic of discussion. As students and teachers participate in cogenerative dialogues and attempt to change the teaching and learning in their classroom they learn to recognize and accept the implied responsibility of their actions. Teachers will make changes to the classroom they agreed to as part of the cogenerative dialogue and learn the advantages of including the students. In addition, they will learn that this inclusion is necessary for their own actions to be ethical. The students will see the teacher attempting to make changes that were agreed upon and begin to understand how their own actions influence the class directly and indirectly. An understanding of the similarities between them and their responsibility for each other adds to the sense of solidarity among all participants. For example, a teacher changing a homework policy because of a cogenerative dialogue agreement demonstrates to the students the control they possess. Moreover, the students have agreed to change certain behaviours as well, which in turn change the culture of the class. Students and teachers begin to see how the responsibility for their own actions depends not only on what they do but also the other person allowing it to happen. A teacher cannot change a homework policy alone, it depends on the students “going along with it” for the change to really happen. Giving the students the opportunity to discuss the change openly allows for potential problems to be presented, for the students to understand the reasons for the change, and for the change to be ethical.

There is of course the possibility that during a cogenerative dialogue teachers and students may fall into the traditional roles. In the previously discussed cogenerative dialogue the initial topic was concerned with whole class discussions, their effectiveness and student participation. Here I have an insight to the different praxis of the students and teachers as they describe whole class discussions. Jasmine comments that only a few students speak and Brett comments that he does not participate because he already knows the topic. Jasmine, Brett, Jack, and I describe the issues we see as if they are separate from our own classroom experience; this disconnection is exactly what the cogenerative dialogue aims to diminish. The teachers and students are discussing their own praxis and in doing so changing their praxeology. Jack specifically asks how to involve those students who do not participate, which addresses students learning habits in the classroom. There is an apparent contradiction between the intentions of the whole class discussions and students' experiences as implied by Jack's questions and the comments of the students. I state my intention to include everyone's ideas freely but have observed a lack of involvement from the students, Jasmine responds that there are other techniques that could yield better results, but I do not expand upon her comment. In this exchange, the students and the teachers are discussing a contradiction openly in the declared and undeclared hopes of achieving an actionable outcome. From an ethical perspective, there are still unresolved issues in regard to the responsibility for the actions. Jack and I ask how we can get students more involved in discussions, which is really a practice of questionable ethics. The responsibility for the group discussion lies with both the teachers and students—both parties have to assume it, if they are to achieve equitable influence on the articulation of actionable plans for future lessons. It is not clear that the students and

teachers in this case understand their own responsibility as well. This is not to say we should be blaming each other for a poor discussion but rather we should be accepting the responsibility for the necessary changes. The ignoring of a student comment and my attempt to continue my initial line of questioning demonstrates an aspect of cogenerative dialogues that needs to be avoided.

Unknown Outcomes for Students and Teachers

Cogenerative dialogue is a separate activity system from that of the normal daily class but its outcomes are meant to transfer to the classroom activity system (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000). The cogenerative dialogue is built on explicated collective responsibility and serves as a model for the classroom. Students, teachers, and researchers discuss the responsibility they all possess for the actions of the class and agree to make changes where necessary. By focusing on responsibility, all participants have only an overt choice to ignore their part. There is no guarantee of successful interactions in this activity because the meaning will only be known after the act has been completed (Roth, Lawless, & Masciotra, 2001), but there is an ethical goal. Hence, this uncertainty should be under discussion as part of the cogenerative dialogue. The researcher and teacher need to be clear that what is discussed are goals and that there is an authentic intent to make the discussed changes, and even if the goals are not achieved the activity was still worthwhile. In this discussion I would most likely be able to explain this in theoretical terms, but it is necessary that this discussion be an established part of the cogenerative dialogue to allow for negotiation and learning for all.

Unknown Outcomes for Researcher

Cogenerative dialogue serves as a means to engage all the participants in a conversation about their own actions. A researcher simply observing students and teachers may attempt to test certain hypotheses throughout the study by recording behaviours after specific events, but this action will not lead to a valid data. Researchers cannot say for certain what a particular individual is thinking at any moment and should not even speculate. “One therefore does not know whether the objectively observed behavioural data actually count as a test of the assumed connection operationalized by the experimenter or of a quite different, unrecognized hypothesis resides in the subject’s head” (Holzkamp, 1991, p.69). Instead of speculation, a researcher needs to work directly with the students and teacher to attempt to generalize about their actions. In terms of activity theory, the object of an activity is mediated by countless variables making a reduction to one or more simple factor impossible. In fact, interpretive, historical and hermeneutic reduction cannot ever capture the biographical experience of practice; and logical reduction, which has the historical reduction as a prerequisite captures praxis even less (Roth, 2006b). For example, in a classroom a student may or may not participate as the teacher intended. This participation, as defined by the researcher, is subject to variation depending on, but not limited to, the tools used in the activity including language, the other students’ in the class actions, the rules implied in that activity, and the division of labor for the task. It would be simplistic to assume a cause-effect relationship between one variation and the outcome while ignoring the rest. This leads to an ethical question of how to generalize about the intentions of a participant, this is an ethical question because of the misrepresentation and bias that lace typical generalizations

Cogenerative dialogue attempts to provide a forum for discussion that lets all participants hear the opinions of others involved in the activity. To truly understand the process of learning I must evaluate it, as ethnomethodologists suggest, as a distributed, on-going, social process and phenomenon in its own right (Garfinkel, 1967). Interactions during a cogenerative dialogue are ideal for ethical analysis of learning. Discussion of the class allows the researcher to listen and participate in a students' discussion of their learning and perception of the class and as such ethically accomplish his or her research goals.

The following is an excerpt from a cogenerative dialogue I performed with a group of students (Renee and Sharrita) from my algebra class. Here the students and I discuss learning in the algebra class. Renee explains how she views different topics in the class as either easy or hard and what it means to be "stupid."

Ian: This was an impromptu cogenerative dialogue after the algebra class Renee was part of. Renee was of particular interest to me because she was failing the course and rarely made good on her word when I agreed to meet after school or at lunch. In addition she was a student from a different part of the school and had few friends in the class. Renee was a challenge for me because she was consistently late to class or absent and had a very low opinion of herself. Just about every time I spoke with her she told me how bad she was at math and that she just couldn't learn. Because of her negative view of math I wanted to help her feel better about herself and put the class in a different perspective.

Excerpt 4.2

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 01 | Renee | When it comes to puttin' graphs together, I can do that. When it comes to stuff like this, little patterns and stuff like that, I can do that. Like the easy, the basic stuff. |
| 02 | Ian | This isn't] |
| 03 | Renee | [Stuff that I've been working on every year since math. |
| 04 | Ian | This is new stuff. |
| 05 | Renee | No, to me it's basic, it's easy. |
| 06 | Ian | So you're getting confused. When you actually can do something, you say to yourself this must be easy for everyone else, but it isn't. |

You should be patting yourself on the back saying “I’m getting it”.
Isn’t that right, Sharrita?]

07 Renee [It seem like it, cause]

08 Ian [Cause not everyone gets it.

Renee begins excerpt 4.2 with a description of things she feels confident doing with regard to math (turn 01). She describes these things as “easy,” “basic,” and stuff she’s been working on every year (turn 03), which queues me to discuss the use of these terms. I tell her that really what she is describing are topics that are new to the class (turn 04). Renee disagrees with me (turn 05), not that the topics are new but rather they must not be since they are easy for her. I then attempt to summarize a misunderstanding I feel Renee is having (turn 06) and draw on Sharrita to agree with me. Here I am assuming I understand Renee and her confusion and am attempting to explain the flaw to her. I have quickly assessed the situation but it is unclear whether Renee will accept my evaluation or if it is even firmly grounded. More importantly than my comments is the fact that a student learning is being discussed openly. By talking about Renee’s learning I have brought her actions to the forefront of the discussion for everyone involved to consider. A researcher simply observing this class would not have been able to understand how Renee views her own learning or how actions relates to these views. Speculation about Renee’s behaviour in class could have simply been limited to her apparent disinterest in the material and trouble with classmates, which only really scratches the surface of her issues with math and school.

09 Sharrita You see me smile when I get something. I’m like yeah ((raises her hand, smiles))

10 Renee That’s why I don’t do my homework. Because I can’t. And then everybody . . . I don’t know, can’t do it

- 11 Sharrita Mr. Stith, the reason I got your class is because I learn stuff in your class. That's the reason why I got your class. To tell you the truth.
- 12 Renee I don't necessarily call myself stupid. It's just that I don't get math and I don't want to sit around other people and they be like done. Because then I feel like in their head they lookin' at me like, oh my gosh.

Based on Renee's behaviour in class I, as the teacher of this class, could have assumed she did little work for any number of reasons. These assumptions would be unethical and only speculation. I here am granted access into Renee's lifeworld and as such can begin to understand why she may perform different actions in class. A lifeworld can be thought of as the world a person perceives irreducibly structured by the environment the person exists and the customs associated with the environment (Agre & Horswill, 1997; Luckmann & Schutz, 1973; Van Manen, 1990). In the classroom there is an overlap of lifeworlds all structured on various experiences. Students, as do any persons, exist in multiple lifeworlds; Renee's comment about her homework is particularly salient in light of mention of her friends' struggles. Renee implies she would reach out to her friends for help if she felt she could (turn 10). Again Renee is able to describe her own learning and issues that impede it. Interesting here too, in light of the cooperative method of the cogenerative dialogue, is Renee's mention of her friends (turn 10), which implies the connection of her learning with the learning of her peers. According to Renee, the people who sit around her finish quickly and that makes her feel stupid (turn 12), which could be a reason for her sitting away from the class, in the back. As part of the cogenerative dialogue this would have been an ideal time for Renee and I to discuss possible ways to improve her performance. For example Renee might have considered changing her normal seating location to sit near students she worked better

with. As a researcher, I could attempt to ethically explore Renee's learning in more depth and reevaluate my own observations of Renee in class. In addition, Renee's involvement in the cogenerative dialogue over the period of the research could lead to a more complete self understanding for Renee of her own learning, which is a vital outcome of the cogenerative dialogue.

Can Experiences Apply to Different Activity Systems?

Cogenerative dialogues, as a tool to improve teaching and learning benefit the students' action potential with regard to their own learning in other contexts. As discussed, cogenerative dialogues serve multiple purposes simultaneously. In particular, there is an ontological intention with regard to the students understanding of their own consciousness. As discussed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) in their formalization of an authenticity criterion for qualitative research, there is a necessity for authentic research to encourage participants to better understand their own decisions and what makes them who they are. By discussing and rationalizing their own actions, students learn the complex nature of the classroom and their role in it. Furthermore, the goal is for students to apply their understandings to new activity systems outside of the class being discussed. For example, students may find themselves in a different class evaluating their own actions. Along with this evaluation comes the potential for the students to attempt to change the new system. The students may feel empowered to act to change the inadequacies they see; in terms of the authenticity criteria, this is known as tactical authenticity. But, as addressed previously, the outcome of this attempted change is unknown until completion, until sense can be cognized.

Ethically, are those involved in the research responsible for the actions of the student as part of another activity system? The activity system in which the cogenerative dialogue was conducted is constructed such that the traditional division of labor, rules, and tools are vastly different from those associated with a traditional classroom activity system. During a cogenerative dialogue the students are no longer the subjects of potential disrespect from each other and adults; their role has been shifted from that of passive receiver of information to co-constructer of information. Along with this, ideas of power have been shifted allowing students to allow less power to be perceived by adults present. These changes do not apply to the majority of classrooms the students will be part of. Is it ethical then to encourage the students to change their view of the classroom only to have an opposing view enforced by other adults demanding power over them? A student may ask a teacher to discuss the behavioural rules of their class openly while the teacher may see this as a direct attempt to restrict the power they want. There is the potential for a student to demand reform so vehemently that it will be seen as corrupting the system a teacher may cling too.

Discussion

Facilitating Cogenerative Dialogues

Facilitating a cogenerative dialogue is a skill that develops over time. There is a temptation for teachers to attempt to impose power over the students during the cogenerative dialogue despite the fact that this is impossible. An example of this temptation is seen in Excerpt 4.1, when Jasmine suggests a strategy I could use in the class to encourage quiet students to participate in whole class discussions, “You all could

just give each group a different part of it and then we have to lead the discussion on that, so everybody would have to talk” (turn 8). Instead of continuing with Jasmine’s train of thought, I changed the direction of the conversation (turn 9). As explored earlier, this is an example of unethical treatment of the student, but of particular interest here is how my practises change as I learn. In excerpt 4.2, two years later than the first, the students and I discuss Renee’s learning in math class. Here, instead of just listening then moving on I continue with the direction begun by Renee and encourage her to continue the discussion. It is evident that my praxis has changed over time and with repeated cogenerative dialogues. Ethically, my evolution as a researcher facilitating cogenerative dialogues is vitally important. As discussed previously I was ethically obligated to be directly involved with the other stakeholders in the class, but successfully accomplishing this is a matter of researching one’s own practises. I have been able to grow as a researcher to the point that, as shown in Excerpt 4.2, I can discuss a student’s learning and seek to resolve issues with the student directly. Renee summarizes her strengths with regard to math, “When it comes to puttin’ graphs together, I can do that. When it comes to stuff like this, little patterns and stuff like that, I can do that. Like the easy, the basic stuff” (turn 1) in an effort to show her lack of skills with the material covered in the class so far. I am able to hear this directly from Renee and then expand on this concept with her, as opposed to what happened in Excerpt 4.1, when I do not effectively discuss the learning of the particular students involved with the cogenerative dialogue, instead I continually generalizes the discussion.

Authentic Access to Student Interaction

Unlike research methods that mandate a removed observation by the researcher, the cogenerative dialogue allows the researcher to participate in interactions between students. Ethically, this situation is advantageous in that the researcher becomes responsible for successful actions with the students. Unlike an interview or other removed methods the cogenerative dialogue allows a discussion to naturally occur without a strict format. Participants in an interview fill the roles of the interviewer and interviewee and as such avoid some of the issues that may arise during a normal interaction. These issues could seem to hinder the collection of data but during the cogenerative dialogue these issues are the topic of discussion and lead to more authentic conversation. Differences in speech patterns or language and therefore expectations are not only observed but experienced first hand and must be dealt with. As discussed previously, to accurately understand the students' intentions there must be an opportunity to discuss these intentions and how misunderstanding can occur.

Explicit Discussion of Ethics in Classroom

The cogenerative dialogue can be thought of as a tool that brings the underlying ethical issues inherent in education and education research to the meso-level to be discussed. As previously discussed, the cogenerative dialogue can be formalized as an activity system, but more specifically it is an activity constructed of countless simultaneous activities. Using the relationship between activity-action-operation as a starting point I can see how the cogenerative dialogue ethically leads to meaning. In

addition, I draw a parallel between the formation of meaning for a given activity and the formation of a collective plan for a cogenerative dialogue.

Within a given activity with multiple subjects one person's actions only have sense in relation to the activity, which is a community system. Another way to express this is to say that one person's actions require the participation of the other subjects in the activity. This relationship is crucial to my understanding of people's interactions and is, as discussed previously, in line with the ethical responsibility we all have to each other, but how do ethics mediate these interactions? I would claim here that the cogenerative dialogue is an ideal model for how an activity system can ethically function because of the collective responsibility it requires. Unlike activities within which these interior activities are ignored, the cogenerative dialogue requires these to be discussed and analysed collectively. The cogenerative dialogue intentionally focuses on points of contradictions within these activities, allowing them to be collectively reduced, while reflecting on the method. The method of reduction is of the utmost importance if I am to present the cogenerative dialogue as an ethical activity. Beginning with the example previously used, that of discussing the rules of the cogenerative dialogue, I would stress that this simple activity typifies the cogenerative dialogue process; a discussion with a collective goal agreed upon in the end. This example is important in that if the participants do not take their responsibility towards the rules seriously, the cogenerative dialogue will not function properly. This understanding and commitment is vital and intentionally explicated, and as such is really an understanding of ethics. Ethically, we are responsible to each other for our own freedom, just as with the cogenerative dialogue we are responsible to each other for its effectiveness. Participants are constrained to discuss

this responsibility openly and reflect on their own actions in light of their responsibility. Again, here it is important to view the cogenerative dialogue to evolve over time such that responsibility to the other can be addressed repeatedly.

Conclusion

Ethical participant research is dependent on authentic interactions between the stakeholders, and the cogenerative dialogue is a valuable tool towards this end. The cogenerative dialogue allows the researcher to become an active participant in the discussion of events concerned with the class, which he/she is obligated to do. Inherent in the dialogue is the inclusion of the students and teachers, as active participants in the discussion of the class and as researchers. Cogenerative dialogue praxis does lead to some ethical concerns as well, but this does not overshadow the advantages it has over other research tools. The cogenerative dialogue gives the researcher the opportunity to make many of his or her ethical concerns explicated and resolvable by all the stakeholders while authentically conducting the data collection. In addition to explicating ethical concerns, the cogenerative dialogue is itself ethically sound because of its equity-based format and focus on collective responsibility.

Chapter 5

Teaching as Mediation: The Cogenerative Dialogue and Ethical Understandings

Chapter 5 – Thematic Introduction

Context of This Chapter's Creation

This chapter in many ways picks up where chapter 4 left off in terms of trying to answer some of the questions I was naturally posing to myself as I interacted with teachers and students at Blueberry Vale elementary school. At this point I started to wonder more about the role of the teacher, particularly in light of the concept of responsibility. I began to also wonder about how teachers were viewed by researchers and administrators on a daily basis. It then occurred to me that a teacher's role is extremely complicated given the context in which they work and all the activities they are involved in. In light of my own experiences as a teacher I thought about how I had to deal with pressure from the school district, from peers, and from the students and put it all together to make something useful and effective in the class. This chapter describes the complex activity that is the classroom and how all those who participate in it must mediate it. More specifically I focus on the experience of the teacher in this system as someone with much to lose depending on the outcomes of the activity and the one in the front line position to help students mediate their complex reality. This analysis of the classroom then leads me to suggest the use of cogenerative dialogue praxis to facilitate this mediation by the teacher. In my own experience as a teacher who used cogenerative dialogues it was my first reaction to consider this praxis as a mediation tool. This initial stance was strengthened as I considered both the ethical and activity based implications.

Relation With the Overall Themes

This chapter begins with a discussion and analysis directly related to my second overall theme, understanding the roles of people in social processes. I begin first by describing the complex nature of the classroom and how the teacher works within this system. To do this I look back at my own work as a teacher and the complexities of working in urban schools. What immediately came to mind as I thought back was the constant feeling of pressure from the conflicting systems I was a part of. For example the tension of trying to serve the students on a daily basis and at the same time conform to the norms mandated by the school district. As I worked with Maggie at Blueberry Vale I saw many of the same conflicts, just in a different context and with variation between specifics. This chapter deals with this questioning of the roles teachers play and how they deal with these various pressures. Specifically I do this in terms of CHAT and ethics, as these theoretical foundations add substantially to the overall picture.

In regard to my first theme, this chapter is related by the argument I develop for the use of cogenerative dialogue praxis to help teachers mediate the systems they live within. To construct this argument I explore more of the ethical considerations of cogenerative dialogue praxis in the classroom that I began in chapter 4. Furthermore I contextualize cogenerative dialogue praxis as an additional activity system with the intended object being the modeling of a successful plan to mediate the other systems. Overall, cogenerative dialogue praxis with this object is a new frontier for the praxis and so I explore the potential complications and benefits of this possibility.

Teaching as Mediation: The Cogenerative Dialogue and Ethical Understandings

Abstract

The mediation by teachers of the many activity systems that constitute any given class has traditionally been a traditionally ignored aspect of teaching. With this chapter I argue that the teacher's responsibility for this mediation exists and must be incorporated into teacher praxis. In addition I argue for *cogenerative dialogue* praxis as one viable solution for teachers to mediate in an ethically responsive manner. I construct these arguments because teachers must be better prepared to understand their complex role in the classroom along with their ethical responsibility to the students for the effective negotiation of the systems they navigate each day.

Like any dynamic social system, a (science) classroom consists of actors, students and teachers, who use the outcomes of each other's actions as resources in their own subsequent actions and thereby produce and reproduce the classroom environment (Roth & Tobin, 2004a). It is common—both as mundane and scholarly practice—to think of teacher and student practises as contingent and contextualized within the classroom; but does this not ignore the world outside? Exchanges between students and teacher or among students are complicated by the multiple activity systems we all live within. Furthermore these interactions are laced with ethical questions that traditionally go ignored because of lack of time and contexts for their discussion. In other words, the roles of the participants are complicated and blurred by the multiple systems of activity of which they are part—for example, students not only go to school but also, while doing so, do things that produce and reproduce the social capital (Bourdieu, 1987) that has currency in their peer culture.

The purpose of this chapter is to make the argument that the complex nature of the classroom must be explicit to those present in a classroom and that the teacher has a central role in this, as the mediator. To accentuate this mediational role, I present and argue for the use of the *cogenerative dialogue*—a process of collective democratic sense making—as ethical praxis and a viable tool for teachers (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000).

My argument is based on data taken from cogenerative dialogues my coteaching⁶ partner Jack and I conducted while teaching science in an inner-city high school of a metropolis of the eastern US. To analyse the classroom and the ethical implications associated within I use cogenerative dialogues both as educational praxis and as research

⁶ In coteaching, two or more teachers work at one another's elbow for the purpose of (a) enhancing student learning over single-teacher instruction and (b) to learn to teach or develop teaching practises (Roth & Tobin, 2002).

method (Tobin & Roth, 2006). In this form of praxis, teacher(s), students, and other stakeholders (if applicable, as this is the case in *coteaching*) who have participated together in some lesson articulate their experiences for the purpose of (a) understanding what has happened and (b) developing plans for bringing about changes to optimize teaching and learning in subsequent lessons. The cogenerative dialogue is unique in that it allows, over and beyond curricular issues, the discussion of ethical issues for the purpose of collectively evolving and fostering changes in the classroom in an ethically appropriate manner. Students and teachers participate in cogenerative dialogue as (institutionally, psychologically) different but equal participants for the purpose of making sense of their own practises; some teachers have even taught students sociological theory to provide them with resources for doing so (LaVan & Beers, 2005a). In addition, cogenerative dialoguing allows the teacher and students to struggle together with these issues to collectively plan appropriate responses. Because teachers and students are differently located in the institution, there are ethical concerns with the cogenerative dialogue itself. These issues are evident particularly in situations of inner-city schools where students come from the most disadvantaged strata in society (Delpit, 1995).

The text is divided into two main components, each constructing a distinct but related part of my argument. First, I build my case for the teacher as mediator; to do this I use the data and other examples to support my claim for the existence of multiple activity systems in the classroom, this leads me to question the many ethical and participatory issues that arose through the discussion and so build my case for the teacher as mediator. To provide my discussion of the overlapping activity systems in the classroom with

context, I shall use a general framework for understanding human activity systems, cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Leont'ev, 1978). I then integrate ethics into this general framework based on the function of action to mediate between embodied knowing in action and socio-cultural and cultural-historical systems of meaning. The second part of my argument concerns the notion of cogenerative dialogue as ethical mediation praxis; this claim is again built on a foundation of responsibility and participation grounded in a philosophy of the act consistent with cultural-historical activity theory (Bakhtin, 1993). Interwoven throughout this analysis, I use my first-hand experiences as a teacher researcher conducting cogenerative dialogues.

Theoretical Background

Ethical Foundations

In this chapter I am interested in the role of the teacher in the classroom and so the responsibility inherent in that role. On the surface there are the many daily issues that surround teaching and responsibility, such as the safety of the students, but what I am interested here is more the responsibility we all have to each other as human *beings* facing other human beings. My discussion of ethics is grounded in the responsibility we have to and for the *Other* (Levinas, 1998). Because human beings make society collectively, and because society mediates each action, every single individual is part of the condition of every other human being (Nancy, 2000). As part of the condition of and for the being of another, each human being therefore is responsible not only for the other's *being*, but also because the other is a condition for the self, a human being is responsible for his or herself. This is not to say the teacher is somehow solely responsible

for the students and their *being* but rather that we all, as people, have responsibility to each other, without which we would not know ourselves. Similarly, teachers are teachers only when students participate in particular ways in lessons that allow the enacted curriculum to emerge such that “teachers” are reproduced as teachers and “students” are reproduced as students.

In any classroom, I find evidence for the mutual responsibility of students and teachers in the simplest of cases, where, for example, a student is talking to a teacher. Both, as they interact, expose themselves—emblematically captured in the exposure of their faces to the other—and in so doing change each other’s world; that is the origin of responsibility (Levinas, 1998). Responsibility is continuous, it exists prior to all *being* and beyond time, for without it *being* would be impossible. This, too, is easily understood when I think about the relation between a newly born child and her parents. As they interact with the child over time, the latter change their patterned actions (practises), and in so doing, realize culture in a different way. Thus, even though the newborn child has only an emerging consciousness, she already mediates the changes in the behaviour of the parents and therefore is responsible prior to being conscious of herself as an independent being. Through our interactions we are forced to change, forced to respond to someone who is not us but rather is another, different *Self*. Interaction—seeing, speaking, and especially touching—imply reciprocity, a give and take, between two people without which there would be no interaction. There is always dependence on the other—teachers and students have to collude and collaborate to reproduce their roles—and the responsibility deriving from being part of the condition for the other extends to the classroom setting with teachers and students existing together in the same place.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

In this chapter, I use cultural-historical activity theory, which has shown to be an ideal tool for analyzing and theorizing educational settings (special issue of *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 11[1]). Because the minimum unit of analysis of cultural-historical activity theory is the activity as a whole (Engeström, 1993; Leont'ev, 1981), it constitutes an ideal framework for analyzing the experiences of the participants in the classroom without reducing them to any set of psychological or sociological factors. In the context of this theory, *activity* is not some school task, which teachers often denote by the term activity, but societal motivated activity such as farming, fishing, and, rather late in cultural-historical development, schooling. Cultural-historical activity theory allows me to frame the participants in a given activity as subjects with a particular object of intention.

In cultural-historical activity theory, any action is understood as a transitive relation between subject and its object of activity, which is mediated by the available tools, division of labor, community, and the rules all of which are constitutive of the particular activity (Figure 5.1) (Engeström, 2001).⁷ That is, events cannot be reduced to any of these six structural aspects of an activity system because they all are codependent--; and as a whole, these structural aspects stand in a dialectical relationship with the agency that makes salient and draws on these structures (Sewell, 1992). In the case of teaching in general, the teacher and the students are subjects whose actions on the object are mediated, for example, by the division of labor that assigns them different roles. In this

⁷ A transitive relation grammatically is expressed in a simple sentence such as “the pitcher throws the baseball.” The player and the ball are the structural aspects of the action *throwing*; but outside the game of baseball, the individual throwing may not be a pitcher at all. The “baseball” may in fact be a form of a projectile when a boy uses it to kill a bird; or it may be a trophy when, bearing the signature of a famous player, is featured in a glass cabinet or a museum (hall of fame).

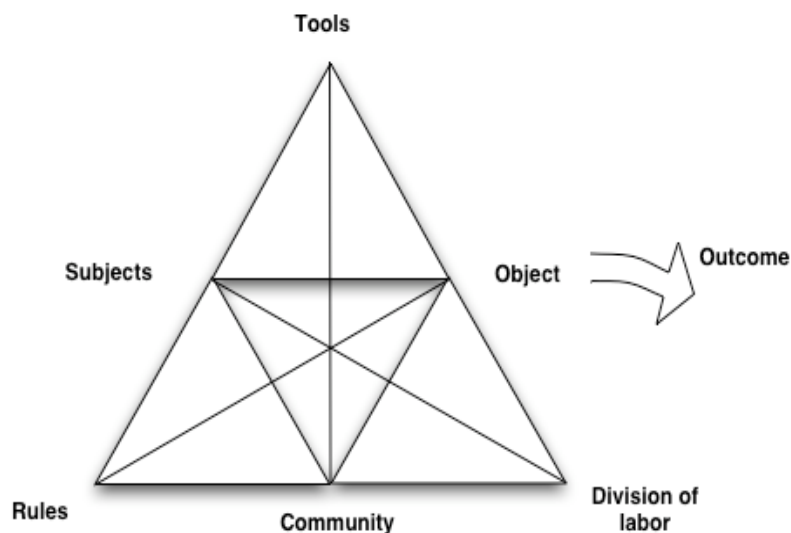


Figure 5.1 The basic cultural-history activity triangle

particular case of a cogenerative dialogue I see the interactions of the students as mediated by the tools associated with the system. Activity theory is of particular use to my discussion because of its focus on agency and structure makes possible the consideration of ethics and responsibility in a broader cultural-historical theory of agency (Roth, 2006).

The Teacher's Role as Mediator

I did my student teaching at City High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. City High School is located in a high poverty area of the city and at the time of my experience the school was facing repercussions for failure to meet the state-mandated levels on standardized achievement tests. This school provides the setting for me to articulate my argument for the two coordinated claims I make with this paper: the classroom is composed of countless overlapping activity systems that must be negotiated with the teacher as mediator; and the cogenerative dialogue is an ethical and practical means for this mediation. Specifically I draw on two exemplifying excerpts from a cogenerative

dialogue, which includes my coteaching partner (Jack), three students (Sam, Jasmine, and Brett), and I as data. This cogenerative dialogue took place while Jack and I cotaught an engineering/robotics/physics class and regularly implemented cogenerative dialogues as part of our training.

Here, I frame the student and teacher as part of the whole school and as such participants in various associated systems. City High School, even at a cursory level of analysis, is composed of various systems that needed to be negotiated each day. For example, because of the poor performance levels on legislated standardized high-stakes tests, the school was in a constant state of test preparation. This itself can be thought of as an activity system separate from but overlapping with another system focused on the political issues between staff and administration, or the systems surrounding the implementation of standardized curriculum. These systems exist at the whole-school level and so are evident at the classroom and interpersonal level, because, schooling at CHS is concretely realized in and through classroom-level events. At City High School constant conflict existed between the implementation of standardized materials and the political unrest in the school, for example, with regard to the division of labor. Between staff and administration there was not agreement as to how information should be disseminated and tasks assigned; and instead of using these contradictions as the seeds of change they lingered as ever-present reminders of disorganization. City High School provides me with but one example of a school composed of multiple activity systems, though it is clear from just this one school that I cannot ignore the variety of systems that influence the daily interactions of the participants.

The Student

The daily life of the student is made up of various contradictory and overlapping activity systems that must be negotiated regardless of complete understanding: but how is this evident? Students come to school accustomed to the daily activities associated with their social life and so can encounter conflict with regard to the means of production or the object/motive associated with the activity. For example, the object/motive for coming to school of a particular student could be a date with another student, while this object/motive likely is in conflict with the object/motive that the teacher or another student intends to realize on a given day. Multiple activity systems are also evident, given the use of tools in the classroom. Thus, the language students normally use in their home culture may conflict with the language the school wants to impose (e.g., when students in science classrooms use the terms “dick” and “balls” when referring to penis and testicles, respectively [Tobin, 2006]). These two language variants embody different forms of activity and different forms of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). A student’s reliance on particular words to mediate a discussion could potentially face conflict with regard to how a teacher or administrator may use the same words.

Words also denote practises. An important term and praxis in the African-American culture of Philadelphia is *respect* (Anderson, 1999). *Respect* is a form of capital that one can earn but also lose. It is a resource that can be accessed in various ways as is evident in the following excerpt from a cogenerative dialogue session. The episode provides evidence that far from being an unequivocal term, individual students have their own ideas of what respectful praxis is and the inherent contradictions in those definitions precisely connote the ethical complications I am interested in here. The equivocal nature

of the praxis and concept *respect* demonstrates the complex nature of the classroom as a meeting place of various activity systems, all with their own, activity-constituting rules and definitions.

Excerpt 5.1

- 01 Ian So you think that when the other students are up there, the other students are paying attention to them when they are talking?
- 02 Jasmine No, I don't. I don't think so because when people are up there they get disrespected by other students. Some students get more respect from other students.
- 03 Ian Okay. I feel in my experience the respect thing is a pretty big deal in terms of how everyone interacts with each other. Was that clear that I wanted that to be an issue for everyone or is it still going on?
- 04 Jasmine Respect?
- 05 Ian Do you think the discussions about respect have made some kids more aware of it?
- 06 Jasmine Yeah, because then they know they are disrespectful and respect is important.
- 07 Sam I actually don't think it has changed it. I haven't changed.
- 08 Jasmine I believe that...I don't think so, I believe that someone who is disrespectful doesn't care enough to think about it. Just because you are having a conversation about respect, it doesn't mean it touches somebody because they don't know enough.

As I introduce a new topic, that of paying attention (turn 01), the conversation is framed around the praxis of the students. Jasmine's response brings the idea of respect to the forefront, (turn 02) which I then work into my question (turn 03). Jasmine states that some people are more aware of respect as a result of the discussions (turn 06). But later (turn 08) Jasmine then seems to change her mind, and says that some people are not self reflective enough. Sam (turn 07) also thinks that people have not changed as a result of the discussions.

- 09 Ian How do you think that applies to this class?

- 10 Jasmine There are different levels of respect. Like I may not think that I am disrespecting people but you might think that I am and I mean we are so used to being around this group of people that there is a certain way that we interact. Ya' know?
- 11 Brett Yeah, like how I talk to Jim or Greg you know, I may not think that... Ill it's bad, but I might not think that it is disrespectful so your little discussions have shown me that I shouldn't do that like talk when the teacher is, I shouldn't do it period.
- 12 Ian I understand that when you are with your friends you might act a certain way that would be appropriate but the point is that in here, or in certain situations it isn't.
- 13 Sam I was gonna say, I mean some people just don't know right from wrong.
- 14 Jasmine I don't think that's the case in here though.
- 15 Brett Some people just don't give a fucking a squat.

After Jasmine and Sam have seemingly agreed that there has been no change in terms of respect as a result of the class discussions, I attempt to concentrate the discussion on their class in particular (turn 09). Jasmine began talking in general about people's concept of respect (turn 08) and continues to do so (turn 10) even after my attempt to refocus the discussion.

The majority of this cogenerative dialogue is concerned with the concept of respect, but what is respect and how does a person act respectfully? Respect is a word often tossed about in the students' culture as if its meaning were universal and static, but what I see from this cogenerative dialogue is that respectful praxis is a complicated and contradictory term. It is complicated by its cultural-historical nature and how meaning is collectively produced in a given activity. In this particular case Jack and I discuss the students' viewpoints and how respect is defined and used in our daily lives. The discussion begins with an evaluation of the teachers' efforts but then transforms to a discussion of what *respect* means in general. Jasmine and Brett (lines 10 and 11) very

clearly state that there are different expectations for respectful praxis depending on the situation and the person they are interacting with. That is consistent with other cultural-historical studies, right action cannot be described in general but contingently emerges from the particulars, including the different aspects of temporality that are resources for *the logic of practice*, that is, when an action or reaction is appropriate or inappropriate (Bourdieu, 1990).

Here I see the complex life of the student, and in particular these students as urban African-Americans, whose typical forms of interaction may differ drastically from those expected in school, which are typical of White middle class culture (Eckert, 1989). Brett and I, for example, may have very different ideas of what *respect* means and how our praxis will reflect that definition, but have no choice but to interact with each other every day in the classroom.⁸ What I see here is a contradiction: not that the two definitions contradict each other, but rather in the lived praxis of the participants. This particular conversation is no different: for me to successfully interact with Brett there must be agreement between us as to what constitutes the appropriate response, which could rely in part on what we would each define as respectful. Given a particular activity Brett and I both act—mediated by the tools and rules that are part of that system—but how can we do this if the rules or tools we draw upon as structural resources are not the same? I can therefore think of this situation as two activity systems working at the same time with the same physical human bodies and object, but with different, conflicting, mediating components giving rise to different meanings.

⁸ From a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, there are as many different forms of sense as there are unique individuals because each individual has a unique position, which gives rise to a unique point of view (Nancy, 2003).

At issue here is how does this affect the outcomes of the two systems Brett and I are working within and how the group ethically attempts to address the contradictions.

Further complicating the situation are the various other activities that occur along with the activity of interest.

Ian: Respect was a common thread throughout my teaching experience and in particular with this class. At times I felt that the students and I were at odds in how we defined respectful and what we expected of each other. Often I would find myself shocked by some behaviour individual students described as 'okay' and respectful compared to what I would expect. In the moment is always hard to remember we differ in age, background, and roles in the class and resist the temptation to insist change.

Contradictory mediating factors is one indicator of the multiple systems present in the class, which can lead to conflict, but on a more general level, contradiction exists in the ignorance of the student as a subject by teachers and administrators, which is of ethical as well as educational concern. In other words there may be a tendency towards dismissal of the student as another constitutive subject in the current classroom activity system; this dismissal fails to recognize that unless students collude, the enacted curriculum never stands a chance of looking like the planned curriculum. Ethically, this treatment of the student is troublesome because of the underlying characteristics of the subject in cultural historical activity theory. A student as anything less than a different but equal subject in the activity implies a passive, undetermined, and irresponsible role, opposed to the teacher and administrator. As expanded below, the outcome of an activity cannot be known until it is realized and all participants regardless of their acceptance of it share responsibility for that outcome. In the case of the class, students and teacher are all responsible for the outcomes regardless of whether the teacher encouraged the students' direct involvement in the activity or ignored this obligation.

From a more educational perspective the student as an objectified subject of the learning activity system is reminiscent of the “banking” and positivist education models I strive to move away from (Kincheloe, 2003). Students are not empty vessels to be filled by an agential teacher but rather inevitably and rightfully participants in their learning (Freire, 1970). In terms of new understandings being developed by the participants, the potential ignorance of the students’ role in the activity system implies a lack of consequence for their own praxis and independence for the completion of the teachers’ actions.

Referring back to Jack and my previous attempts at changing the students’ concept of respect it is clear that we were not enacting practical wisdom (turn 5). In reality each participant, including students, is constitutive of, and therefore responsible for, the outcome of anything that happens in a class, including discussions and cogenerative dialogues. Students who are ignored most likely will not even be aware of their responsibility for what happens in the class; and this, too, is unethical.

It is vital therefore that the students become active subjects in the various activities associated with the class. Using the discussion of *respect* in excerpt 5.1 as an example, they still were responsible for the apparent ineffectiveness of the discussions despite their initial lack of input. The main question here is of an implied consent the students give without being fully aware of their role. Every act (result of an action) is answerable; but an act always is the result of its performance, intention, and the effect it has as evidenced in the recipient’s own performance. Responsibility for an *act* lies with all participants regardless of role (Bakhtin, 1993). By not including students as active participants in the

teaching and learning development of a class they are forced to accept responsibility for the actions of the teacher.

Through my analysis of both the whole-school setting and from the perspective of the student it is evident that the classroom is in fact composed of various overlapping and contradictory activity systems. These systems are observable in the interactions of all participants in a school at the most basic levels or in overarching concepts. It is also evident that these systems are negotiated and that each participant has a stake in this process. Using my ethical foundation of responsibility I acknowledge these differences and work to resolve them. These issues are developed further in the next section as I move to my discussion of the teacher and the complex nature of their work and argue for the recognition of their role as a mediator.

The Teacher

To this point I have addressed the overlapping nature of different systems of activity in the classroom and the evidence of the conflicts that can arise from these systems. But I have yet to show how participants actually negotiate these systems. In this section I first revisit the issue of conflict negotiation and the role the teacher has in this process. More so than any other participant in the classroom, it falls upon the teacher in his/her institutional role to take the lead in the negotiation and mediation of the conflicts and contradictions discussed so far.

To articulate my argument here for the teacher as necessary mediator of the multiple activity systems that constitute the classroom, I first begin with a general perspective of the classroom. Looking back at the experiences of the teacher and students in the context

of the school, I see the importance of the teacher as a mediator of contradictions. The school is a meeting place of multiple activity systems and each person involved must manage the contradictions arising from the different demands these systems make on their constitutive subjects. I think of the management of the various activity systems as itself an activity—e.g., as *knotworking* (Engeström, Engeström, & Vähäaho, 1999)—I see how the teacher and students must all be acknowledged as subjects with *contradiction management* as the intended outcome of the activity. As part of this system there is, of course, a division of labor; the teacher's role as leader is a structural resource that participants may draw upon to reproduce this role. Thus, teachers may act accordingly by facilitating the management of the contradictions inherent in the multiple cultural fields of the class and school. Contradictions, here, are thought of as the seeds of change, change that needs to be initiated, and here I see the need for the teacher to take the lead, both by their own means and by creating an atmosphere that encourages student participation. Teachers, as leaders, initiate change and, by taking this role seriously, provide a foundation of effective teaching. Most teachers aspire to provide a classroom conducive to learning and often this involves changes in praxis of both teacher and students. Change occurs as the participants manage contradictions, but this change is indeterminate given the variety of existing influences that mediate the process. For positive change to occur and for contradictions to be manageable, the teacher has to understand his/her role as leader and make this management a positive activity.

Mediation of the overlapping system is inevitable and unavoidable as the teacher makes decisions of what to include from the students' lives in class and in so doing setting the stage for conflict or synchronicity. The teacher thereby becomes a *knotworker*

linking and building bridges between activity systems. Even a teacher fielding questions from the students about standardized curriculum, for example, implies a validation of some tools and the exclusion of others. This is not to say that forms of intentional violences are being committed across the board, but rather that as the teacher, decisions must be made and as such they affect multiple activity systems. The act of making these decisions about what to do in class, what topics to give time to, when to cover certain things, is itself mediation and negotiation. This aspect of teaching if recognized and made a topic of discussion with the students may have great influence. With this reasoning in mind I now use my understanding of responsibility to make a similar argument.

If I look back to the discussion of *respect* in excerpt 5.1, I note how the ethics of responsibility is a part of the actual enactment of respectful praxis and how the teacher has a constitutive role in this praxis. Responsibility, as I understand it, has a dual dimension in that (a) it precedes our being and (b) it may or may not be acknowledged as such. Thus, analytically I know that all participants in a classroom are responsible to each other for the mediation and negotiation of the conflicts that arise; but to be transformative, they have to understand and acknowledge the mutually constitutive nature of their being and the responsibility that emerges with it. That is, once students recognize that they too are constitutive of the enacted curriculum, they are ready to enact individual responsibility. But why then might the teacher have to take a leadership role in this regard? It is clear that the teacher, just as everyone else is responsible, but what differs is the institutional role of the teacher in the school setting. This institutional role includes that of a mediator (knotworker) between activity systems.

With my argument for teachers as mediator in place the question then becomes how can teachers mediate these contradictions in an ethical fashion? I describe the teacher as a leader in the implementation of change in the classroom along with ethical claims of responsibility on the part of the teacher, but can a teacher really initiate change and mediation while staying true to the reality of social activities and the responsibility we all have to each other? With these questions in mind, I present one possible mediation tool in the form of cogenerative dialogue praxis in the next section.

Cogenerative Dialogue as Ethical Mediation

In this section I argue for cogenerative dialogue as ethical mediation praxis. To construct my argument I first give a full description of what a cogenerative dialogue is and how it functions as an activity system. This description will key in on the many aspects of the cogenerative dialogue that support my claim. Specifically I will focus on the same issue presented previously in regard to mediation of overlapping activity systems and the ethical issue there within. To provide my argument with a contextual foundation I examine another excerpt from the cogenerative dialogue the new teachers, Jack and I, and the students. I focus again on how the cogenerative dialogue makes contradiction the topic of discussion. I conclude my argument with a focus on the ethical issues related to the student as a subject and their unique experience in the classroom activity related to the use of the cogenerative dialogue.

The Cogenerative Dialogue as Activity System

Cogenerative dialogue, like any praxis, cannot be totally described merely in words or pictures but rather must be experienced in real time, but for the purposes of this argument I use cultural-historical activity theory as a frame for my description. The cogenerative dialogue is a meeting that takes place outside of the normal classroom activity, but is still very much a part of the general school activity system, and countless other social systems the students and teachers exist within. As depicted in Figure 5.2, the subjects of the cogenerative dialogue are the general participants in any class: teachers, students, and other individuals that may be involved such as researchers (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000). These subjects work together towards some collective motive, which is objectified (i.e., is object of activity) as the actionable plan for the transformation of teaching and learning. That is to say that the participants work together, discuss, and form a plan that

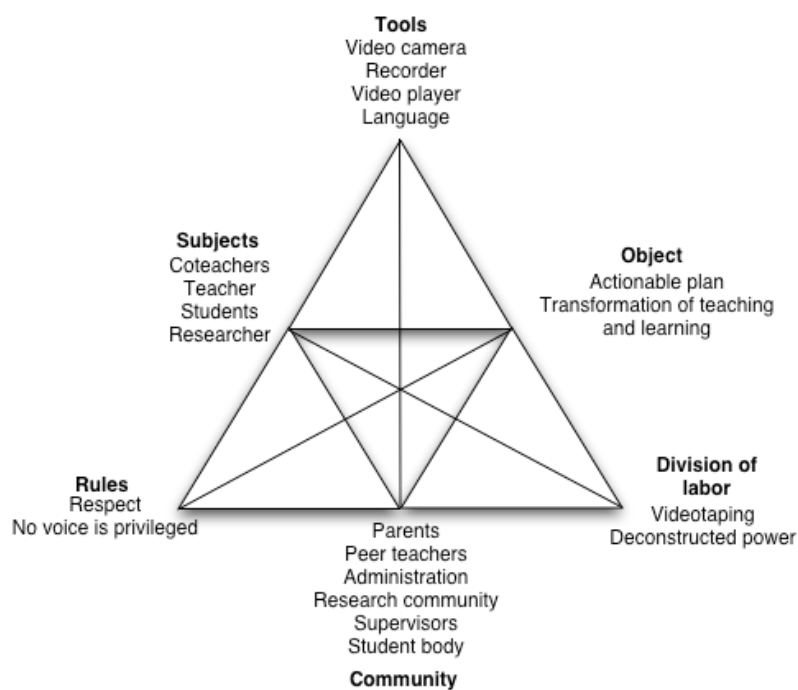


Figure 5.2 Cogenerative dialogue as an activity system

they will enact during the regular class period with the intention of improving learning (Tobin, Zurbano, Ford, & Carambo, 2003).

Of course the formation of this plan is complicated, as any social system is, by the mediation of interactions by the rules, the division of labor, the community, and the resources associated with the system. For example, in the case of the cogenerative dialogue, there are rules as to how the participants should interact, such as that no voice is privileged and that general complaining is not allowed, and so the participants interactions are mediated by these norms (Roth & Tobin, 2002). In line with this is the intended commitment to equality and communal responsibility, both topics of importance with regard to the argument presented here. Acknowledging all the attendant differences—institutional position, culture, age, gender—that are available as resources and constraints to action in a cogenerative dialogue, equality is vital to the cogenerative dialogue and every effort is made to reduce the differences normally associated with the division between teachers and students. This is of course not say that difference itself will or can be eliminated but rather that they are intentionally discussed and negotiated. Along with this comes the idea of responsibility and how the cogenerative dialogue encourages and requires a commitment from each participant. As with any activity the responsibility for the outcome is embodied in each participant and so, in this case, each participant is and must take responsibility for the actionable plan. As the discussions continue through the year and the class activity begins to change responsibility is encouraged and continually reinforced. With this general description of the cogenerative dialogue in place I will now move on to a finer look at it as ethical mediation praxis.

Cogenerative Dialogues Encourage Discussion of the Multiple Systems That Constitute the Class and the Conflict There Within

Cogenerative dialogues have shown to have great potential for dealing with the most difficult issues emerging in schools, even the most difficult reform schools in metropolitan areas such as New York (Emdin & Lehner, 2006). In the following excerpt, from the same class as excerpt 5.1, one observes an open discussion of events in the classroom and the attempt at resolving some of the issues involved with group-work as an activity. The discussion now is concerned with some of the actual praxis of the teachers, my coteaching partner Jack and I, and students in reference to group work. Excerpt 5.2 allows me to see a cogenerative dialogue in action and explore the ethical issue that operates within. I begin with a general account of the discussion and then move on to the specific points of my argument.

Excerpt 5.2

- | | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 01 | Ian | So, in terms of the group work, do you think it is good that we change up the groups? |
| 02 | Janet | Yeah because that way you learn from everybody. |
| 03 | Hakim | We should change – maybe not for every lab but for each type of experiment. |
| 04 | Richard | Yeah, because when we get to work together for a while you get to know the people in your group. You start to know their weakness and they know your weaknesses. |
| 05 | Ebony | I think you all [you teachers] are doing a pretty good job working in the lab. |

I begin the cogenerative dialogue with a question about Jack's and my praxis, specifically our praxis of periodically changing the groups the students work with (line 01). I phrase the question at first generally but then focus on my own praxis. Janet, Hakim, and Richard then respond that they like the periodic change in groups and cite

some reasons for their opinions (lines 02–04). Hakim offers a suggestion along with his opinion, that the group change may not be necessary for each lab but rather maybe for each type of experiment (line 03). Ebony takes a slightly more direct role with apparent cues from the other responses, and compliments the teachers on a job well done

- 06 Ian So what you are saying is some of you think you like the way the groups are, but that we should change them up but not very often. What do you think Ray?
- 07 Ray I don't think that we should have the same groups because. . . . I am just saying this because in my experience, the group that I had . . . they didn't do really nothing. They was just mainly me doing all the work for the hands-on stuff. Not the lab reports or nothing but the hands-on stuff.
- 08 Ian So what you are saying . . . that it is good sometimes to change up because, because sometimes then the people in your group aren't doing enough class work.
- 09 Ray Because you always want to be in a group where you don't gotta do mostly everything.
- 10 Ian So you guys think in general your groups are working pretty good.
- 11 All mm hmmm
- 12 Ian I mean we tried to put you guys in groups that we thought would work well together. How do you guys feel about. . . . What do you guys think of the group work rubric? Does it help to have the expectations laid out for you?

I rephrase what Janet, Hakim, and Richard said and then ask specifically for Ray's opinion (line 06). Ray seems to agree with what the other students have said and also gives his reasons for his opinion (line 07). I then engage with Ray and rephrase what was said again (line 08). The discussion of the changing of groups continues until line 10 where I then introduce a new topic, that of the group work in general which only incites a confirmation from the students (line 11). I go on to give some reasons for my own praxis and then introduce a new topic of the group work rubric (line 12).

- 13 Hakim It does help to know what you are supposed to do.
- 14 Richard I don't look at it.
- 15 Rachel I think it is good because some people might just be sittin' around not doin' nothing so therefore, if we've got a rubric we just assign each person a different job to get things done.
- 16 Ebony And I like how you guys have us grade each other and stuff and you take it into consideration it may not count a whole lot, but that is how we feel about how much work they was doing.
- 17 Ian Right, we took what you guys said about each other and we didn't just give that grade to them, but we took what we remembered about what happened and took your interpretations as a foundation for their grade.

In response to my question about the rubric Hakim answers that it helps to have the rubric (line 13), while Richard does not look at it (line 14). I ask two questions (line 12) and so Rachel chooses to evaluate the rubric as a tool for her to use (line 15). Ebony adds on to Rachel's comment and again gives general feedback about Jack and my teaching praxis as in line 05. Excerpt 5.2 concludes with me again giving some reasons for my own teaching praxis (line 17).

Using both excerpts 5.1 and 5.2 I see two typical examples of how the cogenerative dialogue encourages discussion of multiple activity systems. First, in excerpt 5.2 I see a discussion of group-work (turn 01 – 11), which is one of the many activities that exist in any given class. In this particular case Jack, the students, and I talk about issues such as how often to change the groups and why. Just as in excerpt 5.1, the group was able to discuss respect and the various definitions of respectful respect-producing praxis now the group discusses how the particular activity of group work is part of their class. For example Ray describes his experience with his group and gives reasons for some of the conflicts he faced (turn 07). Vital to Ray's comment is the form it takes, it is not a direct

complaint about the other students rather it is a chance for Ray to describe an activity and gives an opinion about conflict he faced. Richard also describes the group-work activity, specifically the strengths of his teammates and how he learned about them (turn 03). This demonstrates how the activity changes over time as mediation by resources, in this case, influences the interactions of the participants.

These episodes exemplify how cogenerative dialogues are an effective way for teachers and students to discuss the various systems in the classroom. Excerpt 5.2 is different than excerpt 5.1 in that it does not explicitly involve an activity that originates outside the classroom but, regardless, group work is a particular activity within the class structure and it is openly discussed. For the teachers here it is vital to have a sound way of discussing the systems that make up the class; and here is a good example of how these teachers implement this. Because of the open format of the cogenerative dialogue, coupled with the reduced distance between participants it is evident that the different systems are made topics of discussion; but why is this direct discussion necessary? Why is it not enough for teachers to simply read about the activity systems associated with teen culture or group-work? Or why is it not enough for students to simply talk with their parents about the lives of adults? In the next section I discuss issues underlying these questions and reinforce my claim that direct discussion is a necessary component to understand the complex systems we all live in. I conclude my argument with an analysis of the cogenerative dialogue and how it ethically leads to mediation of conflict and contradiction.

Direct Discussion of the Student's Life and the Cogenerative Dialogue

In excerpt 5.2 the students voice their opinions about group work in the class and a discussion ensues about what works best (in this case, lines 02 – 04, 07, and 09). Janet, Hakim, and Richard all express their agreement that the groups should be changed regularly in the class, and each person gives their own reasons why this is best (lines 02 – 04). This is a rare opportunity for the students to discuss their course openly, but here I focus on the students' competencies to explain the systems of which they are constitutive parts. Each one of these students experienced the class and as such is the only one who can describe it to anyone else.

So if I look at what Janet, Hakim, and Richard have said I see their speech as a unique opportunity to hear about how they experience the group work activity system. Of course I am part of this system as the teacher, but their experiences vary for reasons discussed earlier, such as use of tools. This is precisely why cogenerative dialogue praxis is ideal in this regard: it allows the necessary explanation of what is experienced by the participants in an ethically sound manner. In order for the teacher to truly mediate the conflicts that arise between systems they must be able to talk with the students directly, for only they experience their own lives. This is in line with my understanding of responsibility and my dependence on the other; I recognize the other as different than myself, and so I rely on the other to know myself (Levinas, 1998).

If each student's experience is unique then, from an ethical perspective, the inherently human capacity to control one's life condition, as much as being subject to it, needs to be recognized. In other words, the nature of each participant as an active subject is acknowledged, and this acknowledgement as achieved in praxis is exactly what the

cogenerative dialogue strives for. Cogenerative dialogues make students' roles as constitutive subjects of the activity systems and their inevitable responsibilities toward the collective explicit. Without inclusion of all participants as subjects the collective responsibility still exists, but this may not be taken advantage of or even recognized. For example, a teacher and student talking about the student's behaviour may result in responsibility falling on the student for some decision that was agreed upon unequally. This may be true because the division of labor and rules of the classroom may extend such that open discussion between teacher and student is not truly possible. Cogenerative dialogue on the other hand aims to negotiate those rules and divisions, building on and enacting collective responsibility and equal participation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I theorize the role of teachers as mediating agents (knotworkers) between multiple activity systems. In my own experience, the praxis of cogenerative dialogue has shown to be a valuable tool and setting for bringing about this mediation. Because cogenerative dialogue praxis recognizes the constitutive nature of each participant in the activity systems at hand—enacted curriculum, cogenerative dialoguing—it constitutes an ethical praxis for resolving the contradictions that arise from countless, overlapping systems. Because of their institutionally different position, teachers are particularly obligated to enact roles as leaders and ethically responsibility to the students. The contradiction inherent in this framing is that students have to contribute in their own way to allow teachers to reproduce this leadership. But in so doing, teachers open up possibilities for students to become more active subjects in the constitution of the

planned and enacted curricula. In my experience, teachers who mediate the various systems that constitute their class are infinitely more prepared to understand their students and avoid potential violences. In addition, it is important to see these conflicts and contradictions as opportunities for change and improvement rather than as problems to be erased.

To best accomplish mediation I argued here in favor of cogenerative dialogue as praxis. Cogenerative dialogue praxis is ideal in addressing these issues as its foundation is based on responsibility, communication, and equality. I show how cogenerative dialoguing allows discussions of the various systems in play to develop and ethically mediate contradictions. Although the cogenerative dialogue itself introduces another activity system into the class and with it other ethical issues its advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. Specifically in reference to teacher education, cogenerative dialogue, as shown in several studies (e.g., LaVan & Beers, 2005b; Olitsky & Weathers, 2005), is ideal for student teachers to work with their supervisors, students, and cooperating teachers to improve their teaching. Therefore, along with the reasons presented here introduction of the cogenerative dialogue earlier in the careers of teachers lays the foundation for a culture of communication and understanding for the future.

Chapter 6

Coming to See Teaching as Research: Learning from Maggie's Story

Chapter 6 – Thematic Introduction

Context of This Chapter's Creation

Throughout my student and licensed teacher experiences I have worked with researchers in some capacity. Particularly pertinent to the work described here is the time I spent working with Beth Wassell during my first two years of teaching full time. During that time I met regularly with a group of doctoral students, teachers, and professors that Ken Tobin had organized. This group met to discuss everyone's work and learn about current developments in the field. I had recently finished my Master's degree with Dr. Tobin serving as one of my supervisors, and after graduation he invited me to stay involved with the group and find a place for my own interests. In light of this I began working with Beth as a teacher/researcher because of our mutual interest in cogenerative dialogues and beginning teachers. As a student teacher I had cotaught and implemented cogenerative dialogues, therefore I was in a unique position to be studied as I made the transition to solo teaching in Philadelphia. The relationship Beth and I developed as we worked together for two years has effected how I view the roles teachers and researchers play in studies, and now that I am on the other side of the arrangement I have been curious as to how these relationships can develop.

This chapter describes Maggie's story, and what I took from our work together. Maggie and I developed together and concurrently as I went through my first study as the researcher and she continued to develop as a teacher/researcher. So to give as complete a picture of this study as possible it is important to include a description of how we worked together and to explore some of the implications of the topics Maggie and I discussed. Throughout the research process we had informal discussions, interviews, and

cogenerative dialogues together, but here I concentrate on Maggie's own descriptions taken from my interviews with her. I initiated the interviews simply because I was curious how Maggie was feeling about the study and where it was going. Although we did talk about this in passing, the interview setting allowed for recording and a set time in which to get things out in the open. That being said I rarely had a specific set of questions to ask, rather, I looked at it as a time for me to explore topics of interest as they arose.

Relation with the Overall Themes

This chapter is the story of the teacher I worked with throughout this portion of the study and so it provides me with a valuable exploration of the teacher researcher relationship. In terms of the new potentials for cogenerative dialogues this chapter is important as it touches upon the struggles Maggie faced as a teacher dealing with me while I learned as a student. Maggie had never done a cogenerative dialogue before and so her experiences with this new praxis are important to report as it expands to new fields. I engaged in these interviews to really try and get a complete view of how this new praxis was working out. What I ended up learning about was even more possibilities for the praxis as I learned about Maggie's understanding of research and how it may fit in. This demonstrates just how important leaving the study open to change is, as new directions appeared all the time.

Similarly, in terms of my second theme, this chapter aims to directly address some of the questions that arose in terms of the participants' roles in the study and in the class in general. I provide Maggie's story basically in the hope of making my account of our workings together more complete. Furthermore, Maggie's story is unique in that I am

able to report directly about a person who is working as a teacher/researcher in her own words.

Coming to See Teaching as Research: Learning from Maggie's Story

Abstract

As part of my intention of working in/with the participants I present here some of what I learned from the teacher involved in my study, Maggie. Through interviews, meetings with the students, and informal discussions I came to see Maggie's story as relevant to the struggles many teachers face in the field as their praxis changes over time. Specifically I focus on five aspects of her teaching life; (a) defining research, (b) working towards a Master's degree, (c) re-evaluating her practicum experience, (d) working with professors, and (e) participating in research studies. These topics provide a more complete story for my study and also introduce further discussion in regard to teaching as research and situating the teacher practicum as research.

With this chapter I introduce a teacher who, like many others, has taken it upon herself to continue her own development as both a teacher and researcher. Mrs. Maggie Stone teaches in a small elementary school, Blueberry Vale, in a suburban part of a Canadian city while working concurrently towards completing her Master of Arts degree in education. I have chosen to write Maggie's story because it is one that is important to teachers in training and professional teachers as she is a prime example of a teacher who is motivated to improve her own teaching and willing to expose her praxis to both herself and other researchers for analysis. For example in an interview Maggie provided me with her first hand perspective of how standardization makes her feel as a professional teacher.

“Like an assembly line worker, okay, I have to give them this this, this, and this, and no personality or humanity comes into the equation, it's just a filling up of the kid with the knowledge, putting on the lid, and sending em on their way, saying go ahead your done, and it doesn't work, I mean everybody's an individual and needs different things, and if I need to change in order to give the kids what they need every day, and I mean, teaching to the test isn't going to do that”

– From interview on 4/27/06

Maggie points to real problems that she faces in the field and her analysis of the situation. The implications of comments like this and the rest of Maggie's story are relevant to the continuing debate of teachers as researchers and arguing for the practicum as research. The need for teachers to be researchers is a cry heard across the various levels of education, from teacher educators (Darling-Hammond, 1996) to the standards handed down by school districts (NSES, 1996). In the process of working with Maggie, I have learned from her and want to give others a chance as well to hear about her experiences as part of a research study, a teacher, and a student.

Maggie has taught for eleven years after her initial training, but the school year during which this study was conducted was her first year teaching at this particular

school. Maggie teaches fourth and fifth grade concurrently and covers all subjects; art, language, and physical education, except music. A normal workday for Maggie includes up to five subjects covered and about one and half hours for lunch and prep, although students often stay in her classroom to complete work during prep time. For the past few years Maggie has also been working part time on her Masters degree and at the time of this study she was about to begin a research study of her own. Therefore Maggie's position serves as a connection between academics and practitioners, which further qualifies her story as important.

Maggie and the students involved in this study were not viewed as simply objects to be studied, but rather as full participants in the project and as such their views and feedback were vital. Therefore Maggie, as the teacher of the class, was involved with direct interviews with me along with cogenerative dialogues with the students (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000). Cogenerative dialogue praxis is a meeting of the stakeholders of a class; the teachers, some students, and others such as researchers, administrators, and so forth; to make sense of and improve the teaching and learning taking place during class. In this case these meetings involved four students, Maggie, and I and took place weekly during lunch. The interviews were to serve as both an opportunity for Maggie to give direct feedback concerned with the research project and introduce new directions for the study. Through these interviews and informal discussion five key topics emerged that reflect the experiences of teachers in general: (a) defining research, (b) working as a Master's student, (c) re-evaluation of the practicum experience, (d) working with professors, and (e) participating in a research study. Here I discuss these topics as part of Maggie's story and as they arise in two of the interviews between Maggie and I.

Maggie's Story

To begin to tell Maggie's story I start by explaining how I came to work with her and how their research study developed over time. Blueberry Vale Elementary School is a small school in suburban western British Columbia and served as lighthouse school for the large study⁹ of which I was a part. This school was chosen to serve in the capacity for various reasons including a previous research relationship with the University. Two people in particular at Blueberry Vale were associated with the larger study, the Vice-Principal and a teacher, Mr. Reed, and so these served as the points of contact for me as I developed a relationship with the staff. After observing and informally working with a few teachers at the school I was encouraged to talk with Mrs. Maggie Stone as she was someone generally open to working with academics and was a student of one of the primary investigators of the large study. At this point my research had not developed any particular focus but rather I meant to first become, as much as was possible, a part of Maggie's class and the school (Roth, Masciotra, & Boyd, 1999). Therefore, I spent time participating in the class in various capacities, tutoring at lunch, working one on one with students during class, etc. In total I made fifteen visits to the classroom prior to beginning any formal research. In this way I was able to experience the class first hand along with the students and Maggie, although, of course from a different perspective.

Throughout this time Maggie and I discussed what could be done with the class to improve things in a positive way. Eventually we decided to organize a group of students to regularly meet for cogenerative dialogues, a type of discussion where the participants first try to make sense of their classroom experiences and then form plans to improve

⁹ This work has been supported in part by the Centres for Research in Youth, Science Teaching and Learning (CRYSTAL) grant from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC).

teaching and learning, in this case called “students in action.” For me this made for an interesting study for multiple reasons, in particular because the cogenerative dialogue had never been used with elementary aged students, or outside of the urban setting, and as it was based on an open format allowed for the students to develop pertinent research questions. For Maggie, the cogenerative dialogue was intriguing because she was new at the school and wanted to get to know the students, she had done something similar before, and because she could learn about a new research tool. As Maggie was in the midst of earning her Master’s degree she indicated she was curious of the research methods being used and how questions were generated.

Cogenerative dialogue praxis was new to Maggie, but I had used it extensively as a teacher and researcher. A cogenerative dialogue is a meeting that takes place outside of the normal classroom activity, but is still very much a part of the general school activity and countless other social systems the students and teachers exist within. The actors of the cogenerative dialogue are the general participants in any class: teachers, students, and other people that may be involved, such as researchers. These actors equitably work together towards some actionable plan for the transformation of teaching and learning in the class. That is to say that the participants work together, discuss, and form a plan that they will enact during the regular class period with the intention of improving learning (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000; Tobin, Zurbano, Ford, & Carambo, 2003). Cogenerative dialogues arose as the dialectical partner of *coteaching* in the studies Wolff-Michael Roth and Ken Tobin conducted among new teachers in urban schools in the United States (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmermann, 2002; Roth & Tobin, 2002; Roth & Tobin, 2004b). At that time student teachers worked with each other and their partner teacher to teach the class

together and at the same time. I had learned the praxis of cogenerative dialoguing at this time as a student teacher under Ken Tobin's supervision, and in this study acted as much as a *coteacher* as possible.

Cogenerative dialogues were introduced to the students as an opportunity for them to voice their views about the class and discuss these directly with Maggie. As the study played out various issues arose related to the logistics of the meeting times, parent and student consent, and the meeting structure, that were dealt with by Maggie and I. In this vein then Maggie and I had a series of one-on-one conversations, recorded and transcribed, to discuss these issues and any other questions either had about the study, research, or teaching. These conversations allowed for free-form discussions to develop between two sympathetic people, I had previously worked as a teacher and had also worked with a researcher during that time. During these meetings I made an effort to understand Maggie's view of her own work, her education, and teaching in general. As the role of the teacher was an important aspect of consideration for me, specifically in regard to the encompassing nature of the cogenerative dialogue and generally to education research, this topic was discussed repeatedly through the interviews. As became clear then, the issues Maggie was dealing with, as a teacher with research aspirations, typified the struggles many teachers face as they begin to re-evaluate their role.

One particular struggle Maggie dealt with was in regard to how educational research can be defined. When I asked about her definition of research Maggie said,

“Well my research, my idea of what research is now is totally changed from I used to think research was, I used to think research was statistics and very, control group]”

– From interview on 4/20/06

As an experienced teacher Maggie has had time to reflect on her own learning and praxis and as she says here she has begun to re-evaluate what research really is. This is a struggle not that she is necessarily working against something, but rather that she is trying to understand something that is constantly changing. Furthermore then, the question is how does her work fit in. She continues with reference to her own work specifically,

“[Experiments, that would be the first, the first thing that I would jump to, but now after being at university for doing my masters degree I’ve opened up to, oh, there’s other ways you can do research and I sure like the new ways better than the older ways, so when I think of us doing research in my bachelors and I reflect on what I know research to be now compared to what I assumed to be before I entered into the programme (Master’s programme) I’m in, I say that, okay, yeah, maybe I did do research.”

Maggie has “opened up to” other ways of doing research and in so doing this has allowed her to contextualize her own previous work as research. This is important to Maggie personally and to the study in which she and I are engaged because it seems she is open to her own inclusion as a co-researcher. Trying to understand Maggie’s point of view is important to the study as it continues for multiple reasons, most importantly that I am able to report her voice directly. In this case I was interested not in pulling information from her, but rather, this interview is part of the process of a full participation for the teacher. In this case Maggie and I discuss possible topics for further conversation during the subsequent cogenerative dialogues, such as what the students think about research, or the roles students play in research. Because of conversations like this in fact I did begin to investigate different aspects of research, namely teachers as researchers, a topic of further discussion later in this chapter. Discussing the role Maggie played in the study, and her definition of research, was particularly relevant to our work

during the cogenerative dialogues, as we needed to be clear between us how we would interact with the students at that time.

In this case Maggie is demonstrating for us how a view of research and of teachers roles can change in real time. At the moment of this interview Maggie is reflecting on her view and it is changing as we spoke, just as mine did in real time. I could spend time discussing my changing views but Maggie's are more useful as she is a practicing teacher who demonstrates that change can actually occur over time. Additionally, Maggie reaffirms the need to include the teacher's views in the research process, because her view of what we were doing was changing and that alone is salient.

From what Maggie says it also seems that enrolling in the Masters degree programme has had an effect on her definition of research, as she says "I reflect on what I know research to be now compared to what I assumed to be before I entered into the programme (Master's programme) I'm in, I say that, okay, yeah, maybe I did do research." Maggie and I continued with this thread, following the above quotes, of re-evaluation of her previous work, I asked if they called her work as a student teacher research and Maggie responded: "Right, they didn't call it that, right, but I would call my practicum that." Maggie says in particular that her practicum experience wasn't called research but now she feels it can be analysed as a research activity. As opposed to her original concept of research, a distant and inaccessible resource, Maggie now can draw on her own experience directly. Therefore, Maggie could now include and take advantage of praxis she may have formerly appropriated outside of the realm of research. Maggie can now look back at her practicum as itself a research project structured around her own improvement. Maggie's development as a researcher is structured around her past

experiences and so it is vital that resources exist to encourage positively successful structures. In fact this change may also work to challenge Maggie's other views of teaching and research, which of course could restructure her teaching towards increased agency. Each day Maggie teaches she is presented with opportunities and resources in her class that could lead to new research questions and projects, but without the understanding of how to appropriate these resources they may go unrecognized. With her practicum originally presented as separate from research, Maggie was not trained how to recognize these resources and so her agency both as a teacher and researcher can be affected. As to why she thinks her practicum was not presented as research to her originally, Maggie had this to say after I asked that question:

“Well I don't think that it's been acknowledged and hasn't been valid for very long, like the research, what's true research hasn't really been that, there's been a real narrow definition, I think, and so now people are starting to open and I think a lot of what many, many people would consider research now is changing so more things are open and available for people to use as research rather than just your original old sciences.”

This may not seem like a struggle, as she implies that as she is learning while earning her current degree to re-evaluate her own work in a positive sense. But this does refer to a struggle as Maggie finds her place in her current work as a student and decides how she will conduct research herself, and in regard to the above statement in that she understands that her views may not be widely accepted. During the interviews and informal discussion with me the topic of how research should be done came up repeatedly as Maggie commented that there are many ways to do so. As Maggie says she has begun to rethink her previous work and now is confident that she has already done research in a way. This implies much for the continuing study as it contextualizes some of her behaviour as part of a process of learning for her own work and additionally could lead to

new topics of research. As I became aware of her research interests the door opened for a possible continuation of our working relationship. At various times throughout the study I offered to help with a study Maggie would design or work as co-researcher.

Understanding the development and the importance of her Master's degree also situates participation in the cogenerative dialogues in a unique way as it develops into a part of educational research praxis in general.

Maggie teaches me with this discussion of her Master's degree and practicum much about the interrelation of continual learning and reflection on previous work. In general sense Maggie shows the importance of continuing education for teachers, as this experience is part of the process of her changing views of her own praxis. Teachers like Maggie have to make sense of how they fit into their school and education in general, and Maggie shows me that exposure to new ideas helps in that process. Maggie also shows me that a teacher can change her views of her own practicum experience even after years of teaching. Furthermore she shows me that teachers must make sense of this experience even if in a broad sense their peers or academics do not universally accept their view. Overall, Maggie teaches me the importance of reflection and inclusion in the research and teaching process for all those in the field.

Throughout my work with Maggie and related to her work as a Masters student was her relationship with her professor, a principle investigator for the larger study of which we were a part. Her work with her supervising professor (Tim) was complicated by this relationship, as she questioned in passing how her work fit in with the larger project, and how her work may fit in with what he would find acceptable. As this study is concerned with cogenerative dialogue praxis, which is founded on the idea of equality among

participants, it was important to understand how Maggie saw herself in this process. She commented specifically about her views of Tim's teaching as compared to her own:

“[well, I've seen Tim in action as far as a teacher is concerned and would say that I am definitely not on his level as a teacher but I do know that I am giving something different than he is, so I can't do it like he does it, and he can't do it like I do it, so they're getting something else, what that something else is ((shrugs her shoulders)) I don't know.”
 – From interview on 4/20/06

Maggie states that her teaching is somehow not at the same level as Tim's which is then followed up by her claim that she does indeed bring something at least different to the table. In regard to my study this is important as I try to understand how Maggie views her own work, and likewise her role in our work together. Later in the interview I ask Maggie if she would be intimidated to show and discuss her work with Tim. Maggie responds that she wouldn't be intimidated:

“No, no I wouldn't, because I was surprised last time, I was describing something I did in class to him, that things that he noticed within our conversation that he found rich, which I was surprised at, so I wouldn't be intimidated because I know he would see things that I didn't see and I know he would find value in it somehow, even though I didn't think it was all that great.”

Maggie mentions that the last time she came to Tim with her work he found it “rich” with relevant material and so this has encouraged her to come back in the future. This is important to my study because I would want to know if a teacher was hesitant to talk with others about our work or nervous about interacting with researchers. In my case I was additionally interested in these relationships as the larger study involved many professors and teachers and Maggie, here and in other interviews not included, commented about how the teachers felt about the study and how best the professor could work with them.

Most importantly I wanted to know how Maggie felt about the work we were doing together, which itself became a topic of conversation throughout the interviews.

Working together on the study Maggie's struggles became mine and vice versa, so we needed to work together to address issues that arose during the cogenerative dialogues. This was part of my intention as my study was designed to incorporate the participants to as high a degree possible, particularly for Maggie, as she is the person who must usually deal with the issues as they occur in class. I analyse these conversations here for multiple reasons. First, generally I am interested in how conflicts were dealt with because generally there is much I learned and can now learn from Maggie and the role she played. Second, documenting how Maggie was part of the study on a daily basis is important to give a complete picture of what I did and makes my work more authentic. Third, I want to show how vital Maggie's role actually was, as she is the person more experienced with these particular students and with what they are working on regularly. Fourth, I feel that explicating partnerships such as these are important to the developing field of research methodology, as participants' roles become more central and questions inevitably arise. Throughout the study conflicts arose in various ways but generally Maggie and I talked about how we thought things were going. We talked about the challenges certain students behaviour posed, as some spoke infrequently and some spoke over other students. These moments allowed our different views to be articulated and our different interpretations of events to be further explained. We wanted to improve the quality of our cogenerative dialogues as we went so it was important to seek out points of conflict and new directions for study. In one case we talked about our efforts to discuss math with the students, a constant topic of complaint, and have them come up with some lessons they would like.

During the cogenerative dialogue we ended up spending a lot of time explaining the math instead of generating ideas. Later Maggie and I talked about this exchange and Maggie suggested that maybe they were just bored or too young and not interested. I responded:

“Cause I feel like if I had to explain to them what we were doing, like show them what the topic is first, like teach it to them, and then have them come up with ideas, um, I don’t know If we have to do that, that’s how I felt at them time, but I don’t know if that’s necessary or not, we could do something like, um, it would work in a situation like you were doing the same topic for a couple days, for example you were doing decimals for three or four days, which you probably do from time to time, then it might work, cause they’ve already learned some of it”

– From interview on 5/11/06

In this case I reflected on how I felt during the cogenerative dialogue about teaching during that time and if that was appropriate. Working out these issues is important for the cogenerative process to continue to develop towards improving learning. What is interesting here is that Maggie then noticed a conflict between her own goals and mine.

“So you’re thinking of specifics, I was never thinking of specifics, that’s why at the end I brought up the idea of, um, how many questions of, um, a procedure, or a specific question do you have to do to understand it, or to have mastery over it, it depends on the kid, but]”

Maggie points out that she and I seem to be looking for different things during the cogenerative dialogues and goes on to give some explanation for her own actions. Here I see the importance of Maggie in this process. Even if I had been able to instigate a design of a lesson to be taught in class it most likely would need to be facilitated by Maggie, unless it was arranged around my schedule. That being said Maggie is more interested in the procedures the class uses, as in how many questions should they answer and so forth. In this the different experiences of the teacher and researcher are explicated such that we can learn from each other. In this case I was worried about how time was spend during the cogenerative dialogue while Maggie was looking for some views from the students. If

I set out with this study to just examine the class from a far and the cogenerative dialogues as a removed observed much has the potential to be lost. The difference of view here demonstrates how important it is to try to get as complete a picture as possible of what is going on. Maggie shows me how important it is to let things happen as they will and understand what is most important to those whom it is really affecting.

Maggie is a teacher working with both her professor as a student and as part of a researcher project, and this is relationship much can be learned from. Maggie shows here a first hand account of these two relationships with specific reference to how she has worked with her professor and how she compares their praxis. Furthermore, I get to hear Maggie's view of what is important during a cogenerative dialogue discussion. As this praxis is new to elementary schools we all were learning as it went along and so I was able to keep tabs on her perspective throughout. Maggie, in this case, had a closer relationship with the students and therefore I was able to learn what may be important to cover from her. Finally, in terms of her work with me she taught me about how a teacher can work in a research study in general, what her concerns were, what the limits of the study may be, and how she felt comfortable with me.

Re-evaluation of Teachers' Roles and the Practicum

Maggie's comments displayed here set the stage for a more general discussion of the topics they reflect. This is not to say that I know what Maggie is or was thinking about these topics but rather that as a practicing teacher her comments allow for a window into challenges facing teachers in general. Specifically I consider the idea of teachers as researchers in light of Maggie's changing view about research, her role in this study, and

her relationship with her professor. Additionally I will talk about situating the practicum as a research activity, something Maggie and I discussed, as related to teaching as research.

Teachers as Researcher

Overall I see Maggie's story as an exemplary case to continue the discussion of the reformulation of teaching as researching. As Maggie redefined research in general this opens the door to understanding her own praxis differently. Therefore, her teaching experience could be used as a resource for her to build her own teaching and research on. Teachers, as do all professionals, need to be able to recognize the resources at their disposal and appropriate them as to achieve their goals. Situating teaching as research accepts and encourages the development of the teacher as an active agent in the learning process and contradicts the concept of the teacher as transmitter of knowledge. In line with this then is the restructuring of her teaching from a base schema of acceptance to a schema of questioning and inquisition. Teaching, as any social activity, inevitably changes and develops over time, and unlike a traditional view of teaching, teaching as research embraces this reality. Teaching as research acknowledges the roles teachers play in this every changing structure and as such intends to help teachers understand how they define what being a teacher means. Furthermore, a larger picture of teaching is encouraged by teaching as research, which in turn develops the agency of teachers as they have access to the works of other teachers, researchers, etc. and they themselves are accepted as a part of the research field.

Teaching as research embraces the relationship each teacher has with the structure of education in general, teachers continually transform teaching, through their work (Ball & Cohen, 1999), and as such connect the agency of one teacher to all others. By *being* a teacher Maggie relies on and represents the historical basis that constitutes what it is to *be* a teacher, therefore Maggie is also part of the future of education and so must acknowledge that responsibility. Alternatively, by denying this responsibility both truncates the agency of teachers and implies their acceptance of the continuing structured activity. As with Maggie, for the period of time during which she held to the definition of research that excluded her input, her praxis was in fact perpetuating the dominant structure. Conversely, now Maggie has begun to change her praxis, in light of her new understandings of research, and therefore can positively influence the field of teaching. Teaching as research is structured such that change is encouraged with teacher agency as a focal point and so for Maggie, her previous involvement and future educational research makes her part of the development process of the teaching field.

Returning to the idea of agency: it is important for someone like Maggie to take an interest in and understand how their work fits in with the work of others, such as Tim, to structure the field of education. For Maggie to truly be agentic she likely has to access resources, for example, the work of other teacher researchers, or professors, or just general information. Maggie's use of these resources contributes to her experience in the field and further lays a foundation for her to contribute to the changing structure of education. As long as research stays a distant and removed topic, minimal expectation will exist for teachers to jump into that field. Symptoms of this ideological base are exemplified by the increased dependence of top-down designed standards of education

and the general deskilling of teachers. Teachers own work is therefore seen less as a resource and more as a series of practises to compare to a list of norms. Teaching as research stands opposed to this and encourages all stakeholders in education to understand their place in the production of knowledge (Lasch, 1979; Carson & Sumara, 1997; Kincheloe, 2001). Throughout the study, Maggie comments that she has begun to see how her own work can fit into the general pool of education research. Maggie specifically referred to the changing acceptance of certain types of research, as I questioned why her view of her practicum is not a widely accepted stance to take. In terms of her agency she must have access to the larger picture of education to be able to answer this question and teaching as research promotes this.

Practicum as Research Activity

As part of this research study it was important that I come to understand the circumstances that led to Maggie's training and becoming a teacher in British Columbia. Because teacher education is not universal Maggie and I engaged in a discussion of both how Maggie herself became a teacher and what some of the programmes look like across the Province. After some of the logistical aspects of the training were covered, such as length of practicum and so forth, the discussion came to focus on how research was presented and defined throughout that process and how the practicum was contextualized. What Maggie described as her initial concept of research seemed to be a quantitative, statistical, and experimental interpretation. As she told me during the interview (excerpt not included) research was not covered as part of her undergraduate work, so it appears she referred to research as limited to the sciences at that point. This is in line with a

theoretical basis that influences so much of the educational systems she is part of (Frankel, 1986; Kincheloe, 2003) and restricts her concept of what research is. In the previous section I discussed this change in definition in terms of teachers as researchers but now here I place the question; why is this stance not reflected in terms of teacher input on the whole (Novick, 1996; Norris, 1998)? In other words what are some of the reasons for the continued commitment to top-down control and division between teachers and researchers (Giroux & Aronowitz, 1985; Pinar, 1994)? These are important questions if the field of teaching is to be altered and teachers' agency increased in general, but as of yet they cannot be sufficiently answered.

Here I focus on a particular aspect of the overarching challenges facing teaching as research, the teaching practicum (the student teaching experience as it is sometimes called). I describe the teaching practicum as the time teachers in training spend working in schools learning and practicing teaching. I focus on the practicum experience because of its vital position in the training and continual development of teachers in general, and specifically in regard to them as researchers. Using Maggie's experience as an example I discuss three aspects of the teacher practicum that demonstrate how structurally important the practicum really is to the development of teachers as researchers. This is one way in which the obstacles facing teaching as research may be addressed as drawn from Maggie's case. Without Maggie's re-evaluation of the practicum and the realization of it itself as a research activity it simply would have remained as a resource to reminisce about but not the foundation of her research base. More is accomplished during then that often goes unnoticed and unused in the future than perhaps any other period of time in a teacher's development and so it should be taken advantage of. This period of time is also

vital as it serves as the first opportunity for teachers to be introduced into the community of teachers and as such set the precedent of research. It is a time when the role that research plays in teaching can either be developed and encouraged or simply ignored. Finally, conducting the practicum as research encourages the link between teachers and other researchers, and in so doing breaks down some of the existing barriers between teachers and *experts*.

Teachers rely on their practicum experience as a resource as they continue to practice and so as an experienced teacher Maggie needed and needs to be able to reflect on this process both in terms of teaching and research. A teacher's agency, or power to act, relies on access to resources and their ability to appropriate these resources; therefore I need to question what resources teachers have access to and how they can effectively appropriate them. Specifically, from the interview it was clear that Maggie has changed her view of her practicum, "I would call my practicum that (research)" and so I am interested in how the practicum is therefore used as a resource in regard to teacher research. If teachers are to work as researchers throughout their career they will need to access their practicum as a resource related to research. In other words the agency of the teacher, in regard to both traditional teaching and researching, is hindered by the lack of a research base.

If teachers in general are to develop into teacher researchers it makes sense that the associated praxis should become expected and encouraged. Student teaching that encourages only observation, the following of steps, and an overemphasis on classroom management devalues the role the teacher has in the development of knowledge. Student teachers who stand on the sidelines waiting until they "know" what to do are not truly learning their own methods of teaching, their skills and agency are not being developed,

but rather they are simply retesting prescribed experiments. What is ignored at even the simplest level by the reliance and referral to *expert* educators is the unpredictability and non-uniformity that each student presents as a person and in so doing redirects attention away from where it is needed most. Teachers who are told that following a particular set of instructions will invariably lead to educated students allow themselves to devalue their own work. Student teachers who are conducting research come to rely on themselves and their own findings as evidence for what works and encourages continual development. It is unrealistic to expect teachers to be trained as passive receivers of knowledge about their work and then transform into researchers of their own practice somewhere down the line. Structurally if teachers do not move away from the notion that knowledge of their profession is produced outside of schools (by non-teachers) because it ignores their participation in the structuring process. For Maggie, she now realizes the true value of her practicum experience, but this has only happened at the tail end of her graduate level work.

The implications of this change in formulation of the practicum would be seen at all levels of education and educational research. For example currently teacher education models, such as coteaching (Roth & Tobin, 2002, 2004b), have been introduced and implemented to varying degrees of success and relate directly to the idea of teacher as researcher. Coteaching is designed such that novice teachers work together or as equals with more experienced teachers so that they can learn to teach by teaching. As opposed to more gradual and passive approaches and as opposed to sudden and solitary approaches, coteaching allows two teachers to work through problems together and reflect together. For example, Gallo-Fox, Wassell, Scantlebury, and Juck (2006) attempted to implement a

programme wide coteaching model and achieved both successes and difficulties given the varying degrees of commitment to the coteaching model among the participants. Yet, despite these struggles, the coteaching model included evaluation methods and attempted continual development of the pre-service teachers as researchers (although not formally). Projects such as these change the attitudes about teaching, the time teachers have for their own professional work, teacher education, and administration need to take place for teachers to truly be able to realize their role as researchers.

Conclusion

The experiences of Maggie are important to education in general because they are indicative of the problems, triumphs, and development of teachers everywhere. Maggie is a teacher who was traditionally trained to be a teacher but not to be a researcher, and as such I can see how this aspect of her teaching has changed up until now. This chapter is not meant to summarize a study focused on Maggie as an individual, but rather I mean to put forth her story as a vital component of a complete account of my study and to put her input on as equal a level as possible with mine. I found five aspects of her teaching life as particularly salient: (a) defining research, (b) working towards a Master's degree, (c) re-evaluating her practicum experience, (d) working with professors, and (e) participating in research studies. Maggie's changing definition of research provides me with both possible topics for discussion during the subsequent cogenerative dialogues and a new direction for the research. Also, this allows me to hear directly how Maggie saw herself fitting into research with me and in general. This leads to her comments about her Master's degree and how this has changed her view of things. This too is related to her

role in research as it ties in with her relationships with her professor, with me as part of a team, and with regard to her own interests. Maggie mentions how she has interacted with her supervising professor and how he respects her work. This is important given the role teachers play in the creation of knowledge about teaching and distance traditionally placed between teachers and academics. Likewise as Maggie worked with me we faced struggles and made sense of them together. We had our differences of view but this is all part of the learning process and allowed us to improve together. With all that said I see Maggie as someone I can learn from, especially with regard to how I conduct educational research in the future.

The struggles Maggie faces and that I learned about in turn are relevant to some of the larger concerns for teachers in general. I focus on two issues in this respect: teachers as researchers and the practicum as research. The idea of teachers as researchers continues to be discussed in the scholarly literature, but it has to be taken up to a greater degree in the praxis of teachers generally. Maggie is one teacher whose ideas of her role have changed over time such that this connection is strengthening. Specifically, Maggie talks about reflecting on her own praxis in a different way: as a resource for continual development. Situating one's own work as an equal resource with the work of academics implies greater agency. Contrary to the idea that teachers are transmitters of knowledge, putting one self at the centre of teaching encourages continual learning and positive movements forward. This relates also to her changing idea of how she fits in with the research community. Teaching as research dismisses some of the barriers traditionally placed between teachers and the accepted academic knowledge about teaching.

Situating the practicum as research activity relates to what Maggie tells me about her own experiences as a teacher in training in a number of ways. In terms of Maggie's re-evaluation of her own experience I see this as a change to use her practicum as a resource in a different way than before. Limiting the practicum to just the experience of working as an apprentice teacher leaves out its future use as a resource for conducting research. If a natural progress towards teachers as researchers is to occur it may help to expect research be carried out from the beginning. Maggie is someone who learned only later of her potential as a researcher and therefore missed out on a lot of time to do so. Leaving this aspect of teaching till later leaves the generation of knowledge out of the job description for teaching whereas student teachers that are conducting research come to rely on themselves and their own findings as evidence for what works and encourages continual development.

Overall I see much that can be learned from Maggie that will both help me and add to the methods and considerations people use and take as they conduct research. Furthermore the example provided here encourages researchers to look to the teachers they work with for inspiration and as equal participants in their work.

Chapter 7

The Contradictions of Cogenerative Dialogues: How an Open Meeting of Teachers and Students Can Lead to Exclusion for Some

Chapter 7 – Thematic Introduction

Context of This Chapter's Creation

After a number of cogenerative dialogues with the students, one aspect of the conversations started to bother me on a personal and professional level. On the one hand some students, namely Bob and Lacie, spoke with a high frequency, whereas, on the other hand, Amy and Mark spoke very little. A similar ration could be observed from a given regular class lesson as well, but given the intentions of cogenerative dialogue praxis it felt insincere to let one or two students dominate the conversations while others just listened. Neither Maggie nor I knew how to solve this problem, but then an interesting thing happened during a particular meeting that Maggie could not attend: Amy spoke up much more frequently. I cannot say for sure why this was the case, although Amy did express some uncomfortable feelings towards Maggie, at the time I just wanted the trend to continue. Part of this cogenerative dialogue, during which the topic of stereotyping comes up and is dealt with by the participants, is presented here. This episode represents one of the many times I felt my role was complicated by the open nature of the discussion, my own interests, the best interests of the students, and uncertainty of the outcome of the activity. In this case I saw Amy involved in a way not seen before, and after only a few minutes this was changed as we began talking about “what girls do” and what it means to be a “tomboy.” Situations had arisen like this before, with comments about things well out of the range of schooling coming up, but this situation really bothered me because I knew how difficult it was for Amy to get involved and now the group was working against her. I was in a tough spot as well because I didn't want to come out and force the conversation in a less controversial

direction, but I also didn't think it fair to continue the conversation in its current direction.

In these situations my role as the researcher was problematic, but generally the structure of the cogenerative dialogues was contradictory, open but not open to anything. On the one hand I could, when faced with a challenge such as this, direct the students to change topics, but this would not conform to the open activity we, the participants, were a part. Or on the other hand I could have let the conversation continue as it would, unimpeded, and hope that a more equal, focused, and positive discussion would result. But there were no guarantees of this gradual change and at the moment it felt that the open nature had already been lost. In reality, what happened was a sort of combination of these approaches, where I used my role as a participant to allow me to direct the conversation, but did so without punishment or reprimand. I cannot say that this worked each time these situations arose, but I can say that given the variety of perspectives a class brings together it is very likely that complications such as these will eventually arise.

Relation With the Overall Themes

The challenges described in this chapter were not restricted to just the excerpt included but rather were common through most of the study. This chapter is directly related to my first theme, as the problems faced here are likely to occur with any group. In my case the open nature of our discussions were challenged in various and unexpected ways. Part of the question of new frontiers for cogenerative dialogue praxis is, what can be guaranteed and how should problems be handled. In my case it was clear that a

guarantee of peaceful discussion could not be made, but this is okay. Part of moving praxis forward involves understanding how it changes over time and where it has room to improve. This chapter addresses one of those areas as one of its foundational assumptions, an open policy, is challenged in real time. Similarly, the roles the participants play in this development are discussed here. If an open nature is to be continued, how then can challenges be handled with this still intact? And more specifically, how is the role of the teacher or researcher complicated by trying to keep the conversation moving forward and at the same time avoiding possibly restricting commands?

The Contradictions of Cogenerative Dialogues: How an Open Meeting of Teachers
and Students Can Lead to Exclusion for Some

Abstract

Improving teachers' engagement with students in the classroom has been a goal for educators at all levels for quite some time. One proposed form of praxis to address this desire is the cogenerative dialogue, a meeting of the relevant stakeholders of an educational setting for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. Advocates focus on this praxis because of its open and equity based inclusion of students, teachers, and researchers from the class. This chapter focuses on this open format and, by using Derrida's (2005) analysis of democracy, questions how it may lead to a form of conversation that is exclusionary. To do this I analyse my study of cogenerative dialogues in elementary schools and show that by opening the floor to comments and opinions of any type, interactions may, in time, digress to a state of exclusion and conformity to traditional membership categorizations.

Communication in the classroom is a complicated but necessary aspect of learning and as such teachers and teacher educators continually strive for engagement between teachers and students. There are potentially countless methods to increase engagement that have been proposed and enacted by teachers all with different degrees of student participation. For example, there is often much discussion of how the rules of a classroom should be established; some promote the teacher directly setting the rules while others encourage a discussion between the teacher and students. Despite their differences though the ranging perspectives in regards to rule establishment all depend on those rules being understood and adhered to by the students, which depends on engagement. Even in the extreme cases of total personal distance or total personality exposure the teacher always depends on the students being engaged in what they are doing in the class for the class to function properly. There has been some that have proposed the use of the cogenerative dialogue to establish a relationship of trust, respect, and mutual responsibility between the students themselves and with the teacher (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000; Roth & Tobin, 2002, 2004b). Generally, cogenerative dialogues are meetings involving all stakeholders in a setting—teachers, researchers, students, and others—intended to discuss and develop issues that have arise in class and collectively form actionable plans to improve teaching and learning. In practice, cogenerative dialogues have been used during teacher education, educational research, and by teacher researchers to develop a space for educational issues to be raised and addressed without fear of repercussions.

In this study, cogenerative dialogues were adopted in an elementary school environment as both a research and teaching tool to be used and analysed. Previous to this study cogenerative dialogue praxis had not been used with elementary aged students

and as such an expectation of quality communication and engagement could not be guaranteed. At this point it is important to stress the open-endedness of the study and how this allowed for points of conflict to be addressed and analysed as they arose. I had experience with cogenerative dialogues praxis in its more developmental setting in urban high schools where issues such as ethics, student voice, and solidarity had been discussed. These issues relate to communication and engagement directly to both complicate and simplify the social interactions in some cases. The general complications associated with the cogenerative dialogue are true of any attempt to develop communication and engagement between students and teachers, but as a new and specific tool there is much debate about the practicality of it (e.g., Emdin & Lehner, 2006). The intention for equity among the participants, for example, is one such aspect that seems to draw attention as a point of contention, in that, as is evident from the general context of the classroom, the teacher is undeniably in a different position than the students. There is inequality in terms of the consequences for the outcomes of the class, to do with grades, job security, and so forth. But what the cogenerative dialogue does is focus on the mutual experiences of the participants to explicate the roles they play in each other's lives. In my own study I saw evidence of this, as the students were able to talk directly with their teacher about their experiences in the classroom and also work together to improve communication.

As a researcher I strive to understand the problems evident from my own first-hand experience, the reactions of the other participants, and the subsequent analysis. I do not study the participants as objects but rather it is the experience that determines the problem I will study (Smith, 2005). Therefore as comments were made during my series

of cogenerative dialogues that some might call “gendered,” “offensive,” or simply “out of line” with the going norms a problem was presenting itself in real time. The structure of the cogenerative dialogue relies on an open format with each participant able and encouraged to contribute in any way they can. That being said comments made as described above dictate that the participants had to choose how to react, should the comments be denounced as out of the range of acceptability, discussed further, or simply ignored as opinion? These questions then led to a further questioning of the open nature of the cogenerative dialogue itself, and form the basis of this chapter; does a meeting that allows for anything to happen inherently allow for its participants to act against its open nature? In other words, does the open nature of the cogenerative dialogue imply a contradiction in that there is the potential for its openness to collapse to a state of exclusion? In this case I use the term contradiction not to imply a necessarily negative cogenerative dialogue, but rather as label for an inherent tension that mandates attention enough to continually develop the cogenerative dialogue itself. Specifically contradictions are defined as “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). I ask these questions of cogenerative dialogue praxis as Derrida (2005) analysed democracy, or “the democracy to come,” with regard to an internal contradiction. The connections between my analysis and that of Derrida’s (2005) begin with the social format of each system. Democracy and cogenerative dialogues both claim an open format, or room for near limitless discussion among a group of individuals. Derrida (2005) challenges this in various ways, from the necessary forced end of this discussion to the “sending off” of those who might challenge

the system. Here Derrida's analysis shapes my own, with reference and explanation as becomes relevant.

Throughout my analysis of the example cogenerative dialogue I will use "Membership Categorization Analysis" (Hester & Eglin, 1997) to makes sense of how the participants interact in that social setting. Membership Categorization Analysis or MCA is intended to bring to the forefront the dialectical relationship between the sequential utterances that form an interaction and the social identity of the speakers. "Social identity provides for a sense of the (sequentially organized) talk, just as the talk provides for a sense of social identity" (Hester & Eglin, 1997, p. 2). Thus, MCA attempts to uncover the social categorizations people are, or treated as, members of such that normal social interactions can take place. Membership categories are classifications or social types that may be used to describe a person (Hester & Eglin, 1997). For example, categories could include "professional athlete," "student," "salesman," and so forth. What is important given these categories is how they are used in the everyday sense, and in my case how they may be used in the construction of the social setting I participated in. Membership categorization devices (MCDs) are collections of membership categories such that they provide guidelines for the application of the categorization. For example, the MCD of "school" may include such membership categorizes as "teachers," "students," "administrators," etc., and exclude "mothers," "pet lovers," and "environmentalists." This is not to say that people who are members of the later mentioned categories do not function in schools, but rather that the MCD of "school" is not heard commonsensically to include those membership categories as going together. These devices are useful for my analysis because I am able to understand how some

participants are excluded because of how they seem to be categorized. Likewise I am able to understand how some participants are categorized such that their interactions place them in dominating position.

To exemplify my questioning of cogenerative dialogue praxis, I refer to moments that challenged me in real time and I analyse a cogenerative dialogue in which the actions of the participants implied a conformation to traditional membership categorizations. My purpose here is not to discredit the successful implementation of this tool but rather to add to the complete understanding of it by discussing one of the real problems that arose as a meeting of theory and practice.

The Development of Cogenerative Dialogues

Cogenerative dialogues arose in the studies Wolff-Michael Roth and Ken Tobin conducted among new teachers in urban schools in the United States (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmermann, 2002). At that time student teachers worked with each other and their partner teacher to teach the class together and at the same time. I learned the praxis of cogenerative dialoguing at this time under Ken Tobin's supervision. The cogenerative dialogue arose in this context as all involved, including the supervising professor or researchers, met together to discuss issues that arose in the class (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmermann, 2002). In this way cogenerative dialogues are intended to allow the participants to make sense of their mutual experiences. As each person involved is also a part of the class and had some role in what has previously occurred there, they each have the chance to express their view. This, taken a step further introduces the concepts surrounding communal responsibility in classrooms.

Specifically, cogenerative dialogues are meetings that take place outside of the normal classroom activity, but are still very much a part of the general school activity and countless other social systems the students and teachers exist within. The actors of the cogenerative dialogue are the general participants in any class: teachers, students, and other parties that may be involved, such as researchers or supervisors. These actors work together, as much as equals as possible, towards some actionable plan for the transformation of teaching and learning in the class. That is to say that the participants work together, discuss, and form a plan that they will enact during the regular class period with the intention of improving learning (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000; Tobin, Zurbano, Ford, & Carambo, 2003). Of course the formation of this plan is complicated, as any social system is, by the mediation of interaction by the rules and the resources associated with the system (Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). For example, in the case of the cogenerative dialogue, there is a general heuristic as to how the participants should interact, such as that no voice is privileged and that general complaining is not allowed, and so the participants interactions are mediated by these norms. In line with this heuristic is the intentional commitment to equity and communal responsibility in the face of divisions of institutional position, gender, race, etc. Equity is vital to the cogenerative dialogue and every effort is made to reduce the barriers normally associated with the division between teachers and students. This is not to say that all barriers will or can be eliminated but rather that they are intentionally discussed and negotiated. Likewise there is the intention to develop a community of learners among the participants, students helping each other, teachers learning from students, and everyone working together

towards a positive outcome. In other words, by allowing for an open exchange of ideas and opinions there is the potential for a team focused on learning to develop.

Blueberry Vale Elementary School

The cogenerative dialogues analysed here constitutes a portion of my work done concerned with the use of cogenerative dialogues in elementary schools. Starting in October of 2005 I began making bi-weekly visits to a class at Blueberry Vale, a small elementary school in suburban, western Canada. This class was taught by Maggie, a veteran teacher but in her first year of work at this school, and made up of grade 4 and 5 students concurrently. Over the course of five months I made regular visits to the classroom, where I helped during class time and lunch with regular teaching activities prior to beginning the collection of any data sources. During this time Maggie and I discussed the class and eventually decided to hold regular cogenerative dialogues with the students during lunch periods. At this point there was no overall driving question behind the study other than to basically see what would happen with a cogenerative dialogue done in an elementary school. In line with *Fourth Generation Research* (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) Maggie and the students were involved in the research process in as large a role as possible. Maggie and the students were not simply objects to be studied, but rather as full participants in the project and as such their opinions and feedback were vital. Therefore Maggie and a number of students were involved with direct interviews with me along with the cogenerative dialogues to provide as much opportunity for insight as possible. There were eight cogenerative dialogues recorded and transcribed. In general the meetings took place once a week with four students, Maggie, and I. The participants

did vary on occasion because of absence or other meetings, but in general the same group participated throughout. The student participants were chosen based on a number of factors. First, only the students who were given permission by their parent or guardian were considered. Second, there were logistical issues to consider such as music lessons and sport team practice during lunch period, which ruled out some students. Third, Maggie and I wanted to have a mix of female and male students to try and get a range of opinions. Fourth, some students were not interested when asked. Fifth, the number of students was intentionally small as to allow maximum time for each to speak and to minimize the resemblance to the regular class atmosphere. Finally, Maggie and I discussed who they thought would be willing to speak up and express their views about the class in general. Therefore four students, two fourth grade boys, and two fifth grade girls, were chosen to participate: Bob, Mark, Lacie, and Amy.

In general, the roles the Maggie and I played were those of facilitators of the discussion, to suggest new topics if the conversation trailed off and to remind the students of their goals for each meeting. It is important to remember that each person in the context of the cogenerative dialogue is seen as equal and so it was not a time only for the students to speak but rather for anyone to introduce a topic of concern with regard to the class. Therefore, evident in the examples is both students and the adults introducing new topics that the group subsequently discusses. Cogenerative dialoguing was introduced to the students as an opportunity for them to voice their views about the class and discuss these directly with Maggie. This class made for a number of possible points of discussion simply because of the various ages of the students, their lack of previous work with

Maggie, and significant differences in demographics as compared to the populations originally involved with cogenerative dialogues.

A Contradiction Arises

Throughout this study conflict arose in various ways and at different times, for example, during class with regard to the researchers role, during the interviews with regard to confidentiality, and during the cogenerative dialogues with regard to openness. As these conflicts played out it was my job as a researcher to attempt to understand them in context. Here I focus on the one of these mentioned conflicts, as it is the most far-reaching, with immediate implications for the people involved and for the continued use of cogenerative dialogue praxis. During cogenerative dialogues the goal is for the participants to be completely honest and so any conflict that may lead to hurt feelings, exclusion, punishment, or stratification needs to be addressed. This is where the relation of my study with that of Derrida (2005) begins. Cogenerative dialogue praxis could be idealized as an open, democratic system, with those that participate in it simultaneously controlling it. But, Derrida (2005) argues against the applicability of this process of idealization to democracy because democracy itself cannot be defined, it can only be understood as it is experienced. Derrida shows that the very idea of democracy encompasses the potential for its own destruction: this contradiction is *necessary* for otherwise the concept and praxis would be useless. In this way then I can say that both cogenerative dialogues and democracy, as I have experienced them, involve representation and open debate. That said neither could be defined by these characteristics as each is redefined with each passing moment of en-action. Derrida

(2005) cites numerous examples of democracy changing over time to a form of totalitarianism, should this then imply that democracy is defined as such? In my study, through the series of cogenerative dialogues I experienced specific cases of the openness of the cogenerative dialogue being threatened as in real time its structure changing, and here I analyse those moments. For my purposes I analyse one example of such an occurrence and refer to others in text.

One threat to the openness of the cogenerative dialogue I experienced was the domination of the conversation by one or two of the participants. The most obvious case of this is clear in the light of the traditional “teacher” categorization in the classroom as the leader and decision maker. As part of the MCD of “school,” the students may, based on their common sense understandings, interact with the teacher as a member of the “teacher” category. Therefore there is always the potential that a teacher or researcher may dominate a conversation. This is complicated as the teacher or researcher is open to do this in a sense because the format allows it. In my study I experienced this issue as Maggie and I made statements on occasion as commands for the others to follow, reinforcing the controlling attributes associated with membership in the “teacher” category. Similar to the issue of the power to end debates Derrida (2005) questions in democracy, I experienced moments when the openness of the cogenerative-dialogue conversation ended without a group decision to do so. This was not only the case for the adults as the open format did allow Bob, who can be categorized as a “student,” to dominate the conversation in various ways. In the following example I see the group of students: Bob and Mark (who does not speak in this exchange) (grade four students), and

Lacie and Amy (grade five students) and I talking together in a cogenerative dialogue and as I show the open nature of the discussion allows exclusion for some.

Prior to Excerpt 7.1 the cogenerative dialogue had focused on projects the students had done in the class so far, and in that light the group was attempting to formulate some ideas to be done in the future. Specifically Mark and Bob describe an activity they did with the other grade four students that involved math and travel. In reference to this I asked the students to think of an idea similar to this that could be done with the class in the future (line 01). To this question Amy responds that a project could be done involving shopping, money, and math (line 04). Significant here is that Amy very rarely talked during the cogenerative dialogues conducted throughout the study, but in this case she acts enthusiastically in giving a suggestion, as implied by “ooh” in line 02 and the raising of the hand. Also, Amy’s response is directly tied to the question I posed but, as will become clear, this topic of conversation is quickly diverted by Bob’s comments and the subsequent reactions by the other participants. In fact, Amy, who provides the only response to the original question, does not speak again in this series for approximately another six minutes. With Bob’s comment (line 05) I see a generalization made about the interests of boys and girls, specifically that “girls” are “a little more into shopping than boys.” According to MCA, by describing a category “girl” in terms of interests Bob is both situating “girl” as a category and defining some rules of application. With this statement the conversation changes direction into a sort of debate of this claim and as such Bob has, his intentions aside, initiated this change. Important here is not whether Bob has chosen this course or planned to create a debate, but rather that that is what ensues. Therefore, as such this begins to reflect that the openness of the cogenerative

dialogue may collapse, as the participants seem to conform to membership in traditionally defined categories, such as Bob, a “male,” directing the conversation of the group. In other words, the participants’ interactions imply they identify each other as members of particular categories and act accordingly. This does not mean that the participants are acting in some predictable manner, but rather that as the conversation develops I can make sense of their interactions given membership to particular categories.

Excerpt 7.1¹⁰

- | | | |
|----|-----|--|
| 01 | Ian | so couldn't I come up with something to do like that? |
| 02 | Amy | ooh ((raises her hand)) |
| 03 | Ian | yeah |
| 04 | Amy | like when you go grocery shopping, you add up all the money you spent on all the things that you got |
| 05 | Bob | I think some of the girls would like that, girls are a little more into shopping than boys |

The cogenerative dialogue continues with my indirect counter (line 06) to Bob’s generalization about “girls” and shopping. This redirection by me is the start of a trend in the data of indirect responses to the stereotypical membership categorizations Bob implies with his comments throughout. In terms of MCA I understand this conversation as making sense in real time in part because the participants are identifiable as members of a particular category, such as “student,” or “adult.” That said these categorization do not serve as stagnant labels for individuals, rather they allow the participants to navigate the social activity in which they are engaged and in turn are manipulated. Bob’s comment (line 05) is important as he implies the category of “girls” can idealized and non-contextual. In that sense then, female students can fit this mold or not based on particular

¹⁰ All excerpts taken from cogenerative dialogue conducted on 4/25/06.

individual interests based stipulations. Membership categorizations on the other hand are applied during interactions to help people makes sense of the activity in that context. In this case, instead of discussing the generalization as a stereotype I ask Bob to remember the exact comment by Amy (line 04) because what she said refers to all people. As is evident from how Bob responds (line 07) I have not effectively changed the course of the conversation as Bob again states his claim about “girls” and shopping. Lacie and I both then disagree with this statement, but in different ways. I again indirectly address the rules for application of this categorization by attempting to disprove any of the evidence in support of it (line 09), instead of addressing the inappropriate use of the categorization I talk about the membership category “girls” and so my own observations about the gender as a whole. Lacie on the other hand talks from personal experience, as a female, and states that she herself is evidence to the contrary of Bob’s generalization (line 08). Lacie’s comments then imply issues related to the situating “girl” as a category one can be a member of based on strict applicability. This student would seem to start the conversation in a different direction but Bob quickly reestablishes himself as the dominant speaker with his categorization of Lacie as a “tomboy” and therefore not a member of a “girl” category (line 10). In this way Bob can be heard (by culturally competent individuals) as implying that Lacie should not be interacted with as a “girl,” but rather as a “tomboy.” The deployment of this term produces a resource others may but do not have to pick up in their own discursive actions, including Lacie herself. This points to a contradiction, as she is later not treated as such but as a traditionally defined “girl.” Multiple implications spring from this statement by Bob. First of all there is the obvious possible negative effect of labeling anyone a member of category traditionally

defined in unequal terms, in particular, in this case in front of peers and in a supposedly safe environment, a topic to be explored later. Also, Bob reaffirms his place in control of the conversation as he effectively discounts Lacie's argument and implies other comments can similarly be discounted. In fact Bob continues a trend, of discounting the opinions of the female students by Bob and I. The effective membership categorization of the female students as "girls" and as such unequal to the males is reflected in this interaction trend. Additionally, the action of labeling Lacie a "tomboy" reflects the identity Bob has created for himself in this context as the "male." In this way it is acceptable for Bob to label Lacie because that type of control is associated with acting as a member of the "male" category. Regardless of what Bob labeled Lacie, the direct control the action implies reflects the conversational position he is establishing.

Excerpt 7.2

06	Ian	She said grocery shopping, everyone has to eat don't they
07	Bob	I know but girls are more into shopping than boys
08	Lacie	I'm not into shopping
09	Ian	I don't think girls are more into grocery shopping
10	Bob	But you're a tomboy

Following Bob's comment about Lacie (line 10) I respond with my first possibly direct comment to Bob about the nature of his participation (line 11) by telling him not to judge. In other words I imply the inappropriateness of the membership categorizing Bob has done to that point. In doing so I refer to the activity in which they are currently involved, the cogenerative dialogue, as rules were previously established to avoid these kinds of issues. My direct tone is quickly abandoned though as I obliquely agree with Bob's categorization of Lacie as a "tomboy" (line 13). Furthermore I then refer back to grocery shopping as if that was still the topic of conversation (line 15). Bob in fact asks

me directly why judgment should be avoided (line 14) and instead of responding to this I attempt again to disprove the generalization (line 15). So, as is clear by Bob's comments (lines 12, 14, 16) the conversation is still about stereotyping and Lacie, Mark, Amy, nor I have effectively altered its direction, underscoring the gendered membership categorization.

Excerpt 7.3

- 11 Ian Bob, let's not judge here
 12 Bob It is true though
 13 Ian Yeah well, I don't need to label here right?
 14 Bob Why not?
 15 Ian Well, I don't think that it's true, I mean I grocery shop
 16 Bob Yeah, but girls are just more into it
 17 Ian I think you're getting confused
 18 Lacie I don't think so

As this series of interactions comes to a close, the process itself is of importance. I see a precarious agreement between Bob and me develop in that we agree maybe some girls like shopping more than boys (lines 20 & 21). In other words, that "liking shopping" may be an appropriate attribute of the categorization of "girl" and that forming stagnant categorization is acceptable. At this point the stereotype, the categorization of Lacie, and the application of stereotypes have not effectively been addressed by any of the participants. In fact Bob and I both agree in a sense that maybe the stereotype is partially valid for some members of the category. Instead of arguing about stereotyping in general I have reconciled to concentrate my comments on the specifics of that category being discussed. In this final excerpt I also see myself redirect the subject of the conversation, essentially rephrasing the original question (line 01) with regard to the conversation that

took place (line 27). What I see here is that apparently it is assumed that the original idea proposed by Amy (line 04) is satisfactory and will only work for the “girls” in the class. With that portion of the class covered then the other portion, the “boys” must be covered with a new suggestion. This implies then that a general rule for labeling people as “boy” and “girl” exists for them to compare to rather than that these categorizations are in a constant state of reconstruction. Again, I have avoided the opportunity to act agentically and open up a discussion of the problems of stereotyping. What this implies is two things, one that I failed in this regard and two that the other students, specifically Amy and Lacie have been completely ignored as traditionally associated members of the “girl” category. It is almost as if, now that Bob and I agree, the group may be able to move to a new topic. Lacie and Amy both introduce other girls (line 23 & 25) for which to compare to but these statements are left unexplored by the group as I move on (line 27) and Lacie answers (line 28). These comparisons reflect the diversity of a membership categorization like “girl” as many people constitute it and it lacks universality. For instance, I could speculate that Amy interacts with Macy such that they are members of the category “girl” but Amy, up until this point was unaware that Macy liked shopping, as reflected by her utterance in line 26. It is not important that Macy likes shopping for Amy to interact with her as a member of the “girl” category but rather that they could successfully interact together.

Excerpt 7.4

- 19 Ian I don't think it's good to generalize that all girls like to go to the grocery store to hang out
- 20 Bob Some girls like it, some girls like it more than boys, that's what I'm saying
- 21 Ian some girls maybe like shopping for clothes and stuff, maybe

- 22 Lacie ((Shakes her head))
- 23 Amy Crissy does
- 24 Ian Crissy does?
- 25 Lacie Macy
- 26 Amy Really?
- 27 Ian Well let's see, what would be something more that the boys would like? Similar to that
- 28 Lacie Ooh, something with video games

Traditional Gender Roles

Reading and interpreting the entire series of excerpts as one continuous stream a number of trends relating directly to the open nature of the cogenerative dialogue are evident. As discussed throughout, Bob, starting with line 05 focuses the conversation on the general issue of the categorization of “girl” as to do with their a particular set of interests. This is not to say that he controls the flow of the conversation without input and influence from the participants, but rather, that by the nature of his comments, the traditional categorization as a “male,” and commitment to his opinion the conversation is directed. That said, can I then claim that the cogenerative dialogue remained open to the comments of the other participants, or that the openness was lost, and if it was, does openness not include the openness to control? Derrida (2005) discusses control or power to move the debate along in the context of democracy as something the group possesses. But also, Derrida (2005) points to this as an example of a contradiction, because if the system were open to debate, there would be no stipulation mandating the debate end. In my case I do not claim that one person had the power to stop the discussion, rather what I experienced was evidence that the participants’ actions could be understood in terms of traditionally constructed membership categorizations that are inherently unequal. This is

particularly true as I respond to his comments directly to Bob as if we are the only two stakeholders. Furthermore, starting with line 05 I can see the open format of the cogenerative dialogue in play as I, in this case the “adult,” do not directly reprimand Bob but instead discuss the comment further.

Returning to line 05 I see multiple implications for this utterance. In addition to the already stated outcome of introducing a new line of conversation, Bob also effectively ignores the validity of Amy’s comment in two ways. First, by changing the focus of the conversation the previous line of thought I started (line 01) is ended making Amy’s comment stand alone to be judged and its relevance to math and the learning lost. Second, Bob critiques Amy’s comment on grounds of difference, difference that has traditionally placed the male gender as the centre of comparison (de Beauvoir, 1949/1972). By introducing difference between gender categorizations into the conversation reference is made to the traditional power structures in place and subjects the “female” to the “males” apparent interests. In a sense by the participants being differentiated some of them are “sent away” as Derrida (2005) discusses with regard to democracy. Derrida describes democracy as defined by this process of excluding those who would, it would seem, work against democracy. Then again there is the potential for participants to send away those who are working towards equity, similar to the example presented here, as the females students are “sent away” as unequal members. In this case, Amy does not argue with Bob at all and instead I argue with Bob with occasional comment by Lacie. In other words by referring to the differences between the “boys” and “girls” categories Bob situates his comments as truth as his opinion is based on logic and apparently some type of statistical account of reality (Hekman, 1990). In fact, as the

conversation develops Lacie (line 08) and I (line 15) provide extensive anecdotal evidence to the contrary, but this does not dissuade his comments. Given the open nature of the cogenerative dialogue there is little precedent for any one member of the group directly forcing another to stop a line of conversation, instead the norm would be for the conversation to develop such that a potentially negative practice would change. This is similar to the “democracy to come” as Derrida (2005) describes, in that the open format allows its own definition to change over time. A democracy may then encourage higher levels of inclusion over time, redefining democracy as such. In my study, in regard to Lacie’s comment (line 08) there is particular evidence of a separation between boys and girls as Lacie is both invalidated as a representative of the “girl” category and contributor to the argument. As discussed earlier, Bob reaffirms his position in control of the conversation, but it must also be clear that this is a masculine position to take. By labeling Lacie a “tomboy” Bob has again referred to the stereotypical attributes of “girls” and “boys,” in this case that “girls” must not act in any way associated with being a “boy,” or correspondingly be removed from their gender category. By generalizing about “girls” and what it means to be a member of such a category Bob refers to the scientific, masculine, practice of strict categorization and differentiation and implies the apparent appropriateness of this position. With this comment (line 10) Bob also continues the masculine trend of ignoring the influence of the females involved in the conversation, a practice also reflected in my comments, and allowed given the open format (Gordon, 2006). Lacie, as Amy did previously has attempted to add to the conversation with her own observation and experience but instead her comment remains disjointed from the direction the men take it. In this case then, as the males “take” control of the open

situation the women are forced to the periphery and as such the context ceases to be completely open.

We do not intend to say here that Lacie and Amy's comments do not in part construct the conversation as such and contribute to what is discussed, but rather that there are differences in how their comments are reacted to and incorporated into the dialogue. In line 18 Lacie states that she disagrees with a comment made by Bob (line 16) but Lacie's utterance is not addressed by any of the other participants. Instead Bob and I talk directly to each other, as is evident from lines 19 and 20, reflecting the closure of the cogenerative dialogue to the "girls" comments. Later, Lacie expresses her disagreement with my comment (line 21) by shaking her head, but Amy who instead responds to my comment also ignores this expression, in this case. From these examples and in particular reference to Bob's comment (line 10) it is clear that Bob and I effectively reduce the role of the two "girls" in the dialogue. Bob and I repeatedly talk directly to each other without asking the girls what they think and in fact when uttered the girls comments are apparently ignored. This type of interaction plays on the traditional category of men as the creators of knowledge and women as spectators (Hekman, 1990). In this case this is particularly troublesome as the topic of conversation itself is exactly these types of membership issues. In discussing the gender stereotypes for women Bob and I fail to access and refer to the people most affected by those stereotypes and best suited to discuss them.

Through the lens of Membership Categorization Analysis I understand the manner in which these participants interact forms and is determined by the manner in which they are categorized. Bob's and my actions are treated, at it seems, in a masculine way, as of constructors of the conversation with the implication that when they are satisfied the

conversation can end. This is not to say that I claim they act as they should or that they identify themselves as such, but rather as the interactions proceeds it is reasonable to categorize them as such. Also, this categorization is important as it is reflected in how they are interacted with. Amy does very little talking and Lacie allows her comments to remain as unincorporated into the other conversation. This is exactly what happens as the discussion of this topic comes to an end when Bob and I come to a shaky agreement (lines 20 and 21). Overall, I begin to see how by all involved allowing Bob and correspondingly I to overtake the direction of the cogenerative dialogue its openness collapsed. In this example the closure was evident as it was the result of gendered utterances. This is not to say that males and females will invariably speak this way, but rather that by being open to any comments, even those associated with the repression of others, the cogenerative dialogue has an inherent contraction.

Relation With Overall Question

We progress through this section in a manner reminiscent of Derrida's (2005) analysis of democracy, in that I focus on particular issues of relevance one at a time. Given the complex nature of cogenerative dialogues I must choose to ignore some questions until later in the analysis simply for organization's sake. Therefore, I resist the temptation to address every possible question as it could arise in favor of an analysis building in steps. For example, I begin by questioning the inclusion of certain people in cogenerative dialogues and excluding others, which relates directly to the question of what a "proper" cogenerative dialogue would look like. This valid question stands at that

point until it is addressed later. I address these questions as I identify the internal contradictions of cogenerative dialogue praxis as evident from my study.

Returning to Excerpt 7.3, I can see myself directly referring to the openness of the cogenerative dialogue in case as I refer to “here” (line 11) as in the context as such. I refer to the openness of the cogenerative dialogue to effect the categorization done by Bob of Lacie, in that this action therefore could be limiting the openness of the context for Lacie. But, conversely, by attempting to control the behaviour of Bob the openness of the cogenerative dialogue is also lost. As such then, given a complete openness Bob should be allowed to pursue this path of conversation despite the fact that it could lead to a future closure of the cogenerative dialogue. This relates to the question posed by Derrida (2005) in regard to the “sending away” of some people to allow democracy to continue. In this way Derrida says:

Democracy hesitates always in the alternative between two sorts of alternation; the so-called normal and democratic alternative and the alternative that risks giving power to the force of a party elected by the people and yet is assumed to be nondemocratic. (p. 30)

Using elections in Algeria as an example Derrida points to the need for democracy to suspend itself in the interests of itself. In Algeria the government suspended the election process in order to disallow a party from coming to power because this party, it was assumed, would function undemocratically if elected. In terms of cogenerative dialogues, the question then is should some people be sent out of the group to allow it to function cogeneratively? Given the example of Bob’s categorization of Lacie, this goes against the function of cogenerative dialogues and thus he should be removed, or sent away, as to not restrict Lacie. In this sense Bob is working in the structure provided by cogenerative dialogue praxis but his actions seem to work against this structure. This relationship

begins to bring the internal contradiction of cogenerative dialogue praxis into focus as Bob's action are acceptable given the open nature of cogenerative dialogue. As the very idea of democracy has to be internally contradicting to be of use, so too are cogenerative dialogue praxis as I could have sent Bob away despite the closure this implies.

This issue is not restricted to the above-analysed example but is evident from other interactions throughout the study. Periodically the openness of the cogenerative dialogue was challenged as some students would "goof around," laugh, and bring up gossip from class, etc. This presented a challenge for the participants not engaged in the off topic interaction, should they tell them to stop and refocus, or send them away? Sending someone out of the group, in hopes of maintaining an open format, then begs the question of what to compare their actions to, to warrant the dismissal. This, of course, implies an ideal and definable form of cogenerative dialogue praxis for me to compare to, but does this in fact exist? Derrida asks the same question of democracy and concludes that it is only definable in terms of what it is. I cannot know what democracy will be in the future; I can only try to understand what is taking place around me. Furthermore, democracy *is* being defined at all moments by what it is not. As mentioned previously, democracy functions by self control, self-legitimization, and by its openness to restricting itself in terms of who is involved, or time spent on tasks. Similarly, cogenerative dialogue praxis is self-defining, ever changing, and exclusionary if need be. Therefore cogenerative dialogue praxis can be defined by what it is not, those moments when a participant is cut off in favor of an explicitly class related topic. If an ideal form of open format was held to cogenerative dialogues then, like in democracy there would need to be a freedom to play, to allow for no decision to be made, or the conversation to continue indefinitely, but

this is not the case. This continues to reflect the internal contradiction of cogenerative dialogue praxis, as its definition in real time is indeterminate. This relates back to “the democracy to come,” as in democracy is defining itself in real time, in part, by what it does not allow; this leads Derrida to say that the definition of democracy is the lack of a definition or lack of the self same, it is only defined in turns. Something cannot be proved to be democratic or not, rather, the ideal definition, a static comparison does not exist.

Derrida uses a wheel metaphor in his analysis of democracy for both the defining of democracy and his own process of questioning democracy. Likewise I acknowledge that what takes place during one cogenerative dialogue will take place again, but in a different way. By this I mean that what occurs now as I analyse a particular cogenerative dialogue is not the same as what took place then, nor is it the same as an analysis I may do down the road, but they are related. Further, what takes place during a particular cogenerative dialogue will not occur again in exact repetition, but will be repeated in such a way that may or may not be noticed. What occurs with each meeting is the same in that the group may remain the same, the students will still be students, the group may always follow the same pattern of interaction, but what is not the same is evident as the group dynamic change over time, some students become more vocal, the time spent on rules and logistics decrease and so forth. So, too, does the definition of cogenerative dialogue praxis change as time goes by, turn-by-turn, instantaneously updating what is acceptable and how the praxis is played out. Although this could be said for potentially any social system, this is particularly relevant given the open nature of the cogenerative dialogue and intention of a collectively formed outcome. The definition of cogenerative dialogue praxis is likewise then open to be redefined by the group, in other words the group forms the law by which

the group will function. As Derrida says of democracy, people are forming the laws that will in turn govern the continuing establishing of laws. This in essence is the inner contradiction of the cogenerative dialogue, encouraging free exchange opens the door for restrictive behaviour and speech, which in turn can define cogenerative dialogue praxis as such. This is important given the reasons teachers may use the cogenerative dialogue in class, as discussed, to improve communication and engagement with the students. The internal contradictions evident here must be made explicate if cogenerative dialogue praxis is situated as an activity where the students may introduce any topic without repercussion or fear of punishment.

With these examples I show that there is the potential for the cogenerative dialogue to digress to a point of exclusion, but what does this mean in regard to it as praxis? Should praxis that has such a contradiction be considered when trying to address issues of student engagement and communications? What is important to remember is that in my understanding of the cogenerative dialogue as a social activity contradiction is a positive aspect. In this case that contradiction has lead me to alter the make of the cogenerative dialogues periodically and to instigate the analysis shown here. In addition, that contradiction is at work in most situations a teacher and students may find themselves in as they try to effectively communicate and engage with each other. It is unfortunate that the participants in the example analysed digressed into categorically gendered interactions and the associated inequalities were allowed to perpetuate. If the cogenerative dialogue is to develop both practically and theoretically than all aspects of it will be analysed, even those that are seemingly entirely negative.

Conclusion

In this chapter I analyse one of the proposed forms of praxis to improve teachers' engagement with students, the cogenerative dialogue, and in so doing have revealed driving internal contradictions. The cogenerative dialogue has been so proposed because of the various positive outcomes it can produce through its use over a period of time. Cogenerative dialogue praxis is able to bring the students and teacher together in a manner impossible in the classroom given the associated expectations and allows them to construct viable solutions for the class. The cogenerative dialogue can accomplish this given its open nature, the equality each participant has in that context, and the difference in perspectives. That being said this openness allows for internal contradictions that, I claim, provide the potential for that openness to collapse. These internal contradictions can potentially appear in various forms but given that cogenerative dialogue praxis is intended to face potential conflicts head on it must be seen as a force of positive change.

The internal contradictions of cogenerative dialogues were reflected in the problems that arose through my study and evident from my analysis. During the series of cogenerative dialogues various conflicts arose as certain comments were made and actions taken that immediately and over the long term served to restrict the conversation. This was exemplified here in part with the case of the conversation digressing to such a point that the participants interacted as members of gendered categories, as un-equals. In this sense some of the students were "sent away" in the same way, in Derrida's account, as democracies "sent away" some of its members (putting "criminals" into prison, "psychopaths" into wards, and so on). They were not physically moved, but rather as the males dominated the conversation the "female" students comments were kept out of the

debate. This relates then to the contradiction of cogenerative dialogue praxis as its openness allowed those interactions to take place and at the same time those interactions restrict openness. Derrida claims that democracy is in a constant state of alteration between openness and exclusion as it tries to maintain openness. Likewise, cogenerative dialogue praxis can be seen in this way, as the openness to allow exclusion can only be altered with some amount of exclusion.

An internal contradiction of cogenerative dialogue praxis is also evident as its definition is in a constant state of flux and tied to those moments of closure. In my case the adults involved sometimes forced conversations to end without the consent of the group. This implies a contradiction as these moments come to define what cogenerative dialogue praxis is, despite the apparent lack of openness evident in the interaction. This is evident both from the closure of the conversation in general and by the actions of some of the group halting the debate. Again, Derrida makes similar arguments with regard to democracy as a debate must eventually come to an end, but this contradicts a completely open format.

The contradictions discussed here have implications both for researchers and teachers, as the cogenerative dialogue is valuable in both fields. In terms of research, there is always much concern about reliable data collection and so it is clear from this example that the gender of a group can matter if each participant is to be represented equally. Additionally the role of the researcher in determining those groups, or who to interview, or how to run a cogenerative dialogue must be aware of how their membership category constructs the outcome of that activity. During this study I did in fact change the gender dynamics of the group as the study continued. In terms of teaching similar

implications exist as teachers attempt to increase their students' engagement. The cogenerated dialogue is not another context for the teacher to accomplish their own teaching goals, but is a place open to their concerns.

Chapter 8

When Kids are Kids: Framing Positive Use of Time During Cogenerative Dialogues

Chapter 8 – Thematic Introduction

Context of This Chapter's Creation

Whenever I have mentioned the idea and goals of cogenerative dialogues to new people, particularly teachers, one of the first questions they have is, what about the kids just being kids. In other words, teachers are people who generally are asked to be “in control” of their class and as such the idea of letting the kids run things or do as they please can sound unrealistic. When I first learned of cogenerative dialogue praxis I was a student teacher and as such it was just an expectation of the course and so I didn't question it at first. Although I stayed committed to using cogenerative dialogues, as I gained experience I started to see where some concerns could arise. As I worked and interacted with other teachers I encountered a lot of resistance to working this closely with the students simply because some teachers felt a certain distance must be maintained between teachers and students. Other teachers asked questions such as mentioned above. In truth, doing cogenerative dialogues is a difficult balance of maintaining an open format while also keeping things moving and as such it takes time to get accustomed to. As I moved from teaching back to my studies I have continued to think about these types of questions and what it would really take for a teacher to try cogenerative dialogues in her class. This was not a driving question for me, but rather it was something I encountered before and developed again in the course of my work described here.

In my study Maggie and I encountered many moments that in the setting of the classroom could be cause for discipline, but given the open intentions of cogenerative dialogues we let them go. In this chapter I focus on those types of moments both because they were something I really had to deal with and because they are indicative of what

many people could see as a barrier against actually enacting this praxis. I label these moments as “unfocused” or “off task” in this chapter, to reflect their apparent disconnect with the rest of the discussion or the goals of cogenerative dialogue praxis. What I had to ask myself about those moments was, should I let them continue as they would or, should I try and curtail certain behaviour? As I discuss here it is a difficult question, particularly as you start to question those moments more and start to see some potential benefit in them at the same time. In addition, I see these series of unfocused moments as indicative of internal contradictions of cogenerative dialogue praxis in that, given its open nature, there is the potential for exclusion.

Relation With the Overall Themes

Generally this chapter addresses one of the issues that can possibly arise as cogenerative dialogues are introduced into a new setting, “wasted time.” Of course this concern is not limited to new settings, but given my own experience, it is a constant issue to be dealt with. It is important here to give a more complete account of this experience and put the difficulties out for others to see. There is a lot to be learned from these unfocused moments, as I discuss here, and it is important to not brush these times aside simply because they don’t fit with the stated intention of cogenerative dialoguing. In addition, this chapter reminds me to keep open to new developments through the study, even if in the moment they seem totally out of place. I never know where the conversation may lead.

Related to my second overall theme the discussion here is relevant given the roles the participants play in how these unfocused moments are developed and enacted. Although

it could be assumed that the majority of these moments could be “caused” by the students, I also discuss here how complex the activity really is and how in my study Maggie and I both had moments when we introduced off topic subjects. Furthermore I aim to challenge the notion of individuals “causing” the off topic moments based on what really occurred during the conversations. I can’t say that one person was the root of a discussion because everyone is there creating the activity together and as such I don’t aim to point fingers but rather look at the activity in its entirety.

When Kids are Kids: Framing Positive Use of Time During Cogenerative Dialogues

Abstract

Cogenerative dialogues, meetings that bring together all stakeholders in specific school classes for the purpose of understanding and changing classroom life, often are idealized as the bringing together of theory and practice. But how does this actually occur in real-life situations? How do cogenerative dialogues work when this practice, first developed for use with inner-city high school students is transposed into upper-level elementary school classes? In this chapter, I report on my experiences with offering cogenerative dialoguing to elementary students. In the process, the group faced the conflict of “unfocused” and off-topic discussion. Specifically, I found that (a) a significant amount of time may be spent “unfocused” but that (b) many of these moments can be contextualized positively in terms of building relationships, introducing new teaching topics, and so on. By addressing a potential aversion teachers/researchers may have to unfocused conversation, this chapter is important to the continuing development of cogenerative dialogue praxis both theoretically and practically.

Generally cogenerative dialogues are meetings between teachers, researchers, and students intended to discuss and develop issues that have arisen in class and collectively form actionable plans to address them (Roth & Tobin, 2002). In practice, cogenerative dialogues have been used during secondary teacher education, educational research in secondary schools, and by teacher researchers to develop a space for educational issues to be raised and addressed without fear of repercussions (e.g., LaVan & Beers, 2005; Tobin & Roth, 2005). Integration of the cogenerative dialogue into teacher education programmes and professional development occurs slowly (Emdin & Lehner, 2006), but what are the other impediments aside from time? That is, for the cogenerative dialogue to become a part of general teacher praxis the potential complications for the teacher must be addressed. Some studies have focused on the ethical concerns associated with the cogenerative dialogue. There are, for example, general ethical concerns related to cogenerative dialogue praxis, including how questions are generated and responsibility is understood (Stith & Roth, 2006). The group dynamic of cogenerative dialogue praxis may in fact encourage a cosmopolitan ethic. Other ethical concerns pertain to the central role that students play in the research process including the potential harm or inequality inherent in the researcher student relationship (Olitsky & Weathers, 2005). In this chapter I focus on an issue that arose as part of my study of cogenerative dialogues in upper-level elementary schools, a new field in which this method is practiced: those moments that some educators might consider “unfocused” and “off-task.”

This study developed from the open-ended question of how cogenerative dialogues would function as part of an elementary school classroom. Throughout this study I faced various conflicts and questions; but in light of the age of the students one question stood

out. I was challenged to answer my own questions such as, “what about the kids being kids?” “How can we accomplish anything if children are off-task?” “How is cogenerative dialogue different than just talking to them?” In other words the implementation and study of cogenerative dialogues in elementary schools forced me to consider what to do with those moments when the meetings appeared “unfocused.” I use this term to reflect what I felt at the time and what a teacher/researcher may consider time “off task” or unstructured. It is not my intention to “prove” the effectiveness of cogenerative dialogue praxis in this setting but rather to understand what occurred naturally as the activity played out. In that light, I focus on the extra, possibly distracting talk and on the spontaneous talk that sometimes occurred during the cogenerative dialogues. These moments demonstrate real examples of the complications teachers may face when they implement this practice and constitute an open door for discussion of how even these aspects may benefit the series of cogenerative dialogues.

In this chapter I use cogenerative dialogue excerpts to exemplify the challenges I experienced in the field. Specifically, based on the entire study, I found that: (a) A significant amount of time may be spent “unfocused” through the discussion and (b) many of these moments can be re-contextualized in a positive way. I see this chapter as directly related to the successful introduction of the cogenerative dialogues in teacher education programmes, the work of active teachers, and as a taking off point for studies concerned with the applicability of the cogenerative dialogues in elementary education.

Context & Background

To begin the discussion of the challenges the group faced I first explain what a cogenerative dialogue actually is and what it looks like in action. Cogenerative dialogues arose as the dialectical partner of *coteaching* in the studies Wolff-Michael Roth and Ken Tobin conducted among new teachers in urban schools in the United States (e.g., Roth, Tobin, & Zimmermann, 2002; Roth & Tobin, 2004b). At that time student teachers worked with each other and their partner teacher to teach the class together and at the same time, a practice reflected in this study as I taught along with the teacher of the class. I learned the praxis of cogenerative dialoguing at this time as a student teacher under Ken Tobin's supervision. The cogenerative dialogue arose in this urban context to involve all stakeholders, including the supervising professor, researchers, classroom teachers, new teachers (in training), and department heads in meetings together to discuss issues that arose in the classes they experienced. This form of meeting was expanded as students became involved, their roles in terms of research changed (Elmesky & Tobin, 2005), and concepts surrounding communal responsibility developed (Tobin, Roth, & Zimmerman, 2001).

The cogenerative dialogue is a meeting that most frequently takes place outside of the normal classroom activity (for an exception see LaVan & Beers (2005b)), but is still very much a part of the general school activity and countless other social systems the students and teachers exist within (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000). The actors of the cogenerative dialogue are the general participants in any class: teachers, students, and other individuals that may be involved, such as researchers. These actors work together in equitable ways towards some actionable plan for the transformation of teaching and learning in the class.

That is to say that the participants work together, discuss, and form a plan that they will enact during the regular class period with the intention of improving learning (Tobin, Zurbano, Ford, & Carambo, 2003).

The cogenerative dialogues analysed here constitute a portion of my work concerned with the use of cogenerative dialogues in elementary schools. Starting in October of 2005 I began making bi-weekly visits to a class at Blueberry Vale, a small elementary school in a suburban area of in Western Canada. This class was taught by Mrs. Maggie Stone, a veteran teacher, but in her first year of work at this school; her class included grade 4 and 5 students. I made 15 visits to the classroom, where I helped during class time and lunch with regular teaching activities prior to beginning the collection of any data sources. During this time Maggie and I discussed the class, our backgrounds, and issues that were developing in the class and eventually decided to hold regular cogenerative dialogues with the students during their lunch periods. At this point there was no overall driving question behind the study other than to observe what would happen when cogenerative dialogues were implemented in an elementary school. In line with *Fourth Generation Research* (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), Maggie and the students were involved in the research process as much as they could be to maximize the authenticity of the study. Maggie and a number of students also participated in interviews to provide as much opportunity for insight as possible.

The series of cogenerative dialogues began in April of 2006 and continued through the end of the school year, in total there were eight cogenerative dialogues recorded and transcribed. The meetings generally took place once a week including four students, Maggie, and I. The participants did vary on occasion because of absence, other meetings,

and so on, but in general the same group of students participated throughout. The student participants were chosen based on a number of factors. First, only the students who were given permission by their parent or guardian were considered. Second, there were logistical issues to consider such as music lessons or sport team practice during lunch period, which ruled out some students. Third, Maggie and I wanted to include a mix of female and male students for reasons of equity. Fourth, some students were not interested when asked. Fifth, the number of students was intentionally small as to allow maximum time for each to speak and to minimize the resemblance to the regular class atmosphere. Finally, it was discussed who would be willing to speak up and have views about the class in general. Therefore four students, two fourth grade boys, and two fifth grade girls, were chosen to participate: Bob, Mark, Lacie, and Amy.

In general, the roles the Maggie and I played were those of facilitators of the meetings to suggest new topics if the conversation trailed off and to remind the students of their goals for each meeting. Following a heuristic for equitable participation (Roth & Tobin, 2002), I wanted students not only to contribute but also actively seek and listen to the contributions of peers; and I wanted both students and adults to introduce new issues as salient topics to be discussed. Therefore, as evident in the examples provided below, both students and the adults introduced new topics that the group subsequently discusses. Generally the cogenerative dialogue was introduced to the students as an opportunity for them to voice their views about the class and discuss these directly with Maggie.

“Unfocused” Talk?

Labeling particular interactions as “unfocused” could be interpreted in various ways. Therefore I am very particular in what these interactions look like. Cogenerative dialogue praxis developed as a space for stakeholders to discuss and debrief each other as to what occurred in their class *as they experienced it*—which, because of the different prior experiences and institutional positions, is expected to differ among the participants. Furthermore, the goal of a cogenerative dialogue is to improve teaching and learning and so issues surrounding the teacher’s praxis or the students’ behaviour generally become relevant issues to be discussed. These intentions help contextualize comments during a cogenerative dialogue and for me in particular, they set a sort of outline to be followed during the course of discussion.

From the point of view of the teacher, engaging in the cogenerative dialogue practice in and of itself was a big step simply because of the additional time it takes for the organization and implementation involved. In my experience with this practice, specific reasons for a teacher to conduct cogenerative dialogues vary, but there generally is an intent of improving teaching and the students’ learning. Therefore, as Maggie and I engaged in discussion with the students certain topics were obviously favored, specifically discussions of the class in general: the rules for a game at gym, how many spelling sentences to do, or how reading groups were divided up. A student or the teacher could have initiated these focused discussions, but as long as they were pertinent to teaching and learning they were encouraged as relevant to the task at hand.

The flip side to these focused conversations were those comments that did not directly relate to the class or the school or that did not follow the standard interactions of

the cogenerative dialogue as per the heuristics for making cogenerative dialogues work (Roth & Tobin, 2002, p. 196) that was followed. During the course of the study comments such as, discussions of home life or personal perspectives on the weather, for example, emerged and were cause for concern at the time. This is not to say that Maggie and I actively searched out these moments to correct them but rather that given the goals of the study they were noticed at the time as contrary to the norms. This is not to imply that these “unfocused” moments were unimportant; in fact my claim here is exactly the opposite. But these moments challenged participants to stay committed to the open and equitable format of the cogenerative dialogue. Additionally, moments of parallel talk were classified as unfocused as they conflicted with the rules the group had established at the beginning of the series, specifically that one person would talk at a time and that everyone should listen attentively. These moments are particularly interesting as they involve participants interacting across conversations and provide me with two topics to analyse. To analyse parallel talk I will relate my cogenerative dialogues to the dinner conversation discussed by Erickson (1982).

How is Time Spent?

In the cogenerative dialogues at the elementary school, a significant amount of time was spent in ways that some might gloss by the term “unfocused;” the amount of this time varied greatly, but there was one instance where about half the time was spent talking about unrelated topics and in other instances, less than one percent of the time was spent on such unrelated topics. That is, some of the cogenerative dialogues performed were comprised almost entirely of focused conversation and others had a

substantial amount of time spent “unfocused.” From this distribution it is clear that such time must be accounted for as any discussion ignoring it leaves unaccounted more than half of the time spent. With this in mind I now analyse this time spent and try to understand if it was “wasted time” or if it these moments could provide the participants with positive benefits.

Lacie’s Home Life

Throughout this study one of the major subjects of conversation classified as “unfocused” concerned students’ home lives. These conversations often began with off-hand references to something a student was going to do over the weekend or with a comment on a parent’s reaction to an incident. Such moments may be qualified positively because of the opportunity they provide to students and teachers to develop an open dialogue without fear of rejection. Thus, Maggie was able to speak directly with students about their interests and how they interact with their parents, and, in the process, was able to better understand the students’ perspectives. In my experience of teaching in schools, I know that my colleagues interests in students’ home lives varies greatly from those who do not see that as part of their job to those who see knowing about students as central to education. A result of the openness of cogenerative dialogues is the room for occasional overlapping conversations between participants. An example of unfocused (side) talk is presented in the following excerpt, where one conversational topic (weather) comes to be paralleled by another topic (Lacie’s home life). To understand this moment of parallel talk I refer to Erickson’s (1982) study of overlapping talk during a family dinner. In that case there was evidence of attention being paid across conversational partners, as there is

here, and topical cohesion was maintained. Topical cohesion is defined as, “how topics and topical items are cohesively tied together in strips of discourse across turns at speaking” (p. 43). Erickson (1982) discusses four sets of production resources as they construct topical cohesion across multiple conversational floors; in this case floors are defined as “a sustained focus of cognitive, verbal, and non-verbal attention and response between speaker and audience” (p. 47). The production resources that relate to my study are the commonplace sources of topical content, the immediately local physical resources such as the table, camera, and participants, local resources once removed such as the previous cogenerative dialogues held, and the non-local resources such as the recent weather.

This discussion of weather proceeds, with turn taking and so forth; but as Lacie starts to speak directly to Maggie two conversations ensue. Maggie and Lacie start to talk directly to each other while Mark, Bob, and I continue to talk about a different topic (Math), Amy is absent from this example. Thus, I say that two conversational floors have developed, one between Maggie and Lacie and the other between the other participants. These floors are not exclusive though; in fact Bob does speak to Maggie (lines 10 & 12) as Maggie listens simultaneously to what Lacie is saying (line 09a). This occurs in the conversation analysed by Erickson (1982) as the adults talk separately from the children, but with numerous overlaps. The coexistence of these conversations distinguishes this period of time as unfocused because the participants stop working collectively by discussing separate topics. This distinction is important, as I do not claim that the conversational floors do not overlap, mutually influencing each other, rather given the intentions of cogenerative dialogues the group should function together to improve

teaching and learning. Furthermore the dialogue is unfocused because Maggie and Lacie begin talking about the latter's home life, which is not directly tied to the teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom. To analyse the text I will break it up into groups with further explanation and commentary between.

Excerpt 8.1¹¹

- 01 Maggie I think it's so hard here because we're on a tiny little tip of landmass at the end of an island and so I think things are flying by so quick that they miss us or we're surprised by things too.
- 02 Ian Well compare to where I used to live, on the east coast where the weather comes down, like from Toronto, it is a lot more predictable.
- 03 Lacie That's where my Grand-mom lives; I mean that's where my Mom's from.
- 04 Ian I mean, it's not like the weatherman, he's still a liar there too Mark, but it doesn't change ever hour, like it does here.
- 05 Bob It can change every hour.
- 06 Ian It could.
- 07 Lacie (to Maggie) I get to sleep in my sister's bedroom this week cause she's at my Mom's and I am at my Dad's.
- 08a Maggie Are you one week at your mom's and one week at your dad's?
12
- 08b Ian Think of anything to do with the class Mark?

Lines 01 and 02 continue the previous conversation about weather and allow me to contextualize the change in course that does occur. Lacie makes a connection with her Mom and Grand-mom in reference to Toronto (line 03) and the weather to the group. This comment remains incomplete as no one responds to it. Bob and I continue to discuss the weather. But in line 07, Lacie continues the topic of her family when she speaks directly to Maggie about her sleeping arrangement. Maggie then does respond to the

¹¹ Transcript from 6/10/06

¹² Transcript convention: Overlapping utterances are labeled with the same number and different letters.

comment with a specific question about how Lacie spends her week outside of school (line 08a). Some situation, be it divorce, separation, or sickness necessitates Lacie to spend part of her week with her Mother and part with her father. Although Lacie does not overtly bring her family situation up as a topic to be discussed, its mention calls for an explanation Maggie directly asks for. Line 08a and 08b happen simultaneously as Maggie speaks directly to Lacie and the rest of the group changes topics.

Lacie does respond to Maggie's question about her living situation and explains that during the week she is with her dad and on the weekends she is with her mom (line 09a). Mark simultaneously answers the question I posed in line 08b with reference to math (line 09b), a local resource once removed, talked about at previous meetings. At this point in the dialogue the conversation splits to form two conversational floors with participants are talking over each other. Maggie comes to be faced with two comments directed at her as Bob interrupts Mark (line 10). This exchange exemplifies the concern some may have in regard to the cogenerative dialogue, as the teacher is torn between class related issues and a student opening up about their home life. In the dinner conversation, the mother similarly talked to a guest and her son at the same time. It is a very real concern that a teacher may have with regard to the cogenerative dialogue that it could just turn into a chatting session among the students and no real development is achieved. But as I pursue the group in their endeavor, it is clear that Maggie and Lacie are experiencing an opportunity that would not otherwise be possible in the classroom setting.

09a Lacie Um, no, um, Monday, no, um, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday is with my Mom, and Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday are at my Dad's.

- 09b Mark Only the fact that math is the]
 10 Bob [Why don't we stop doing math?
 11 Maggie Stop doing math?
 12 Bob We're almost at the end of the book.
 13 Maggie Well, what happens when you come home, where to do you go?

Starting with line 10 Maggie was talking to two people at once, Bob and Lacie, but when Bob utters line 12 Maggie does not respond to him. From that point on until line 19, where Bob directly addresses her, Maggie only talks with Lacie. With line 19, the dialogue actually resumes to be one conversational floor and focused on a topic directly related to the class, as participants discuss changing the Math lesson schedule.

- 14 Lacie I'm at my Mom's Friday afternoon till Tuesday morning, and then from my Dad's from Tuesday afternoon till Friday.
 15 Maggie I see.
 16 Lacie It's annoying but that is how it needs to be.
 17 Maggie So that means that your Mom has you every weekend and so]
 18 Lacie [yeah, but they're gonna change when I go to middle school.
 19 Bob Mrs. Stone? Maybe we can do math twice a week instead of every day?
 20 Maggie we could make some sort of compromise, but um, we only have, we talked about this in the staff room the other day, twenty days left.

One can see that this particular cogenerative dialogue did involve some unfocused moments, so what does that imply about its effectiveness? First, there is the issue of multiple conversational floors and the inherent difficulties that could place on the participants to make sense cogeneratively, that is, jointly contributing to the resolution of an issue. Of course there is the possibility that multiple conversational floors erupting might lead to a complete breakdown of the dialogue, but the open nature of the dialogue

and what that allows to come forward are key. If Maggie or one of the other participants had cut Lacie off or told her to stay on topic, the whole line of conversation she subsequently had with Maggie never might have occurred. With an open nature the cogenerative dialogue does allow for some potential problems, but a digression into various topics does allow for salient issues to arise in ways otherwise not possible. In the dinner conversation analysed by Erickson (1982) there was no stated goal for the discussion rather it was important to understand how the parallel conversations were co-constructing that social activity, as is the same here. Important, though, is that parallel talk in the context of cogenerative dialoguing is a real possibility and this complicated the roles of the participants.

This example is particularly interesting because both conversational floors can be seen positively on their own merit. The conversation between Bob, Mark, and I related directly to the teaching and learning taking place in the classroom as Bob noticed how much of the curriculum they had left to cover after Mark introduced the topic. The conversation between Lacie and Maggie can also be seen positively despite the fact that it was “off topic.” Generally the positive aspects of this exchange are based on the fact that Maggie could directly speak with Lacie about something personal and possibly stressful in her life as part of an open dialogue. From the perspective of Lacie the potentially positive aspects of this exchange could be enormous, as this is an opportunity for her to mention this topic to her teacher and have her teacher listen to her about it. The context of the cogenerative dialogue made it possible for the off-hand comment about Lacie’s sleeping arrangements to turn into a bonding time with Maggie. I do not claim that these two individuals have complete trust in each other or are close friends but rather that it is

positive for a student to be able to talk with her teacher about her home life without fear of rejection. Here, Lacie was able to take Maggie's attention for a moment and make her aware of what her life is like outside of school, it happened at her pace and was encouraged as Maggie asked further questions. Both Maggie and Lacie connected in a way not possible during class time or in a casual conversation. Further interactions might allow Lacie to develop trust in Maggie and to experience her as someone who can help if needed. Maggie in turn has a resource for relating differently to Lacie and this can translate to positive interactions during other moments of schooling. A teacher who understands what their students are going through is much better prepared to deal with potential conflicts elsewhere in their school lives. Thus, while their talk was off-topic in the sense that it did not cover classroom issues, it was productive for both individuals involved.

Transitioning to Grade Four and Middle School

Transitioning from one grade to another or moving to the another level school can be a particularly stressful time for students and teachers, who frequently spend time discussing what the new situation may bring. During this study, this topic came up in various ways; in regard to expectations teachers have, such as testing and bullying. Although these conversations generally are related to school and students' well being, they may or may not actually lead to any actionable plan for the class as intended for the purposes of cogenerative dialogues. A teacher may learn about topics they subsequently should bring up in class; but without some direction and goals, such conversations can easily turn into reminiscing about school for the teacher and students. This happened in

my study as I talked about my time as a student, going to high school and college, and the students told stories about bullies they had run into. At the time, the group had to decide if focusing these conversations on the actual teaching and learning that were taking place in the classroom was prudent or to let each conversation develop as it would. Based on my longtime classroom experiences and my review of existing research, I believe that there are potential positive benefits to continuing these discussions despite their apparent off-task attributes. In my case there was a great opportunity during these conversations for younger students to hear the advice and stories of the older students about moving up a grade. Likewise Maggie and I were able to hear directly from the students about what they expected to encounter in school in a unique, less restricted, environment than the classroom. Thus, Maggie heard first hand suggestions as to what to include in her subsequent whole-class discussions.

This topic came up in two ways during one particular cogenerative dialogue, first in reference to what the students remembered of their own move from grade three to grade four and in regard to the prospect of moving to middle school, which Lacie and Amy were to do at the end of the school year. Discussing issues such as these could play out in many ways but in this case the talk was made up mostly of recounts of their experiences. Therefore this dialogue does reflect one possible deterrent for its use in that the participants are generally just talking and there does not arise a time to apply these thoughts to anything related to class and so could be seen simply as a waste of time.

Specifically I classify this series as unfocused because of these previously mentioned reasons. The cogenerative dialogue was not intended to be time for the participants to just sit around and talk (“socialize”); rather the goal was to work towards some way of

improving things for all. But in this case that is exactly what happens as nothing is agreed upon during the exchange. This is not to say it would be impossible for a conversation like this to be refocused towards the practises of Maggie in regard to preparing students for their transition, but this does not happen here. Therefore, as the text unfolds it is important to notice the tone of the conversation in how they respond to each other. In addition consider how this conversation might have been different had it taken place during regular class time. Would Maggie be able to hear these anecdotes without need to cut them short, or would the students have the chance to ask Maggie directly about her own experiences?

Excerpt 8.2¹³

- 01 Maggie Grade Four is a big step though, from grade Three, it's huge, to intermediate, it's really hard, a really hard change, don't you think?
- 02 Lacie When I went from grade three to four]
- 03 Bob [When I!¹⁴]
- 04 Maggie [Let Lacie talk for a second.
- 05 Lacie When I went into grade four, I felt kind of nervous a little bit, cause I knew I was like getting bigger in the school and I knew that I would have to be more of a leader.
- 06 Maggie Yeah, it's kinda scary, you're getting older and more is expected of you, and more quantity, and quality, I think it's a lot of pressure there.
- 07 Bob It's not hard for me.

Excerpt 8.2 begins with Maggie's comment about the transition from grade three to four (line 01). This conversation takes place at the very beginning of the dialogue.

Maggie's comment demonstrates that it may not always be the students who direct the

¹³ Taken from 5/25/06

¹⁴ Transcript convention: "!" implies that the speaker ended the utterance abruptly

conversation away from topics directly related to the class. Maggie is speaking generally in line 01 and the students are able to hear her point of view before she asks for theirs. Lacie attempts to respond, but Bob interrupts her (lines 02 & 03), before being cut off by Maggie, who makes an attempt to get the talk at turn back to Lacie. Lacie then continues her statement (line 05) about her own experience moving to grade four. Lacie's comment demonstrates the variety of views students can form, even at her tender age. The idea of being a leader opens the door to the communal aspect of the school and topics to be explored by the adults present. Following this Maggie gives a sympathetic response in light of the higher expectations of a new grade (line 06). Bob on the other hand takes the opposite stance and comments that the new expectations are not hard for him (line 07). Bob's comment goes incomplete as I then slightly refocus the conversation on the practice of teachers (line 08).

- | | | |
|----|--------|---|
| 08 | Ian | Did some of your teachers talk about what it would be like in grade four, that it would be scary, like it would be like in grade five, I remember teacher's talking like that when I was a kid, or to going to middle school. |
| 09 | Lacie | There's like rumors, rumors that like you get thrown into a garbage can or your locker and locked in. |
| 10 | Maggie | That's social stuff though, that's not really school stuff. |

In line 08 I introduce the topic of middle school and how teachers prepare students. Lacie does not comment about the role of the teacher but instead focuses on the rumors about middle school (line 09). Lacie's comments set the stage for the next topic of discussion (not included here), a student who used to go to Blueberry Vale but has since gone to middle school. The students then articulate rumors of the trouble this student has caused, which in turn brings the group to discuss the topic of suspensions.

From this text it is clear that this discussion might be classified as unfocused given the reasons previously mentioned. How then can I claim that there are still positive aspects to a conversation such as this? Generally this dialogue exemplifies the opportunity for open sharing this praxis make possible. Specifically, in this case there is the opportunity for younger students to speak with older students. Because the group is made up of fifth- and two fourth-grade students, there is the space for conversations to emerge that could help the younger students as they transition to the next year. These kinds of conversations may not occur in the classroom or even in social discussions because in this space your opinion is encouraged and listening is expected. Similarly there is the opportunity for the teacher to hear directly from the students about their fears, concerns, or general comfort with grade transitions. In this case only two opinions come through while on this topic, Lacie's and Bob's, and only Lacie provides something that could be built on directly (line 05). Lacie seems to give an honest answer to the question and provides Maggie with a topic that she could explore as she helps students transition in the future, leadership. I do not claim that this *will* happen but that this portion of the dialogue can provide Maggie with some potentially useful information. Additionally, the students are able to hear Maggie's opinion directly (lines 01 & 06) which may help in their transition process. During regular class time it would not be likely that Maggie could find time to organize a discussion of this issue and feel comfortable giving her opinion in a manner that would not seem like a lecture. The give and take of the dialogue puts the expectation for response on the participants and encourages all to get involved.

Weather

One of the intriguing aspects of the cogenerative dialogue practice is that the participants may raise any topic and, in this way, unexpected topics may be covered. In my study, this includes times when students made jokes, quoted movies, or called out. From my perspective these moments proved to be most challenging as they went against the usual order of the school. Again, in the moment these comments and jokes made for some uncomfortable situations for the adults, as I never knew where they might lead. But that radical uncertainty of the outcome, also characteristic of scientific research and other life situations (Moroz, 2005), is one of the important aspects I came to appreciate as the study played out. Inspiration and connections between topics can be made during these moments to topics that may in fact prove beneficial to the class. A positive benefit may develop from the development of the group dynamic of the cogenerative dialogue over time. Getting to know each other is one way for the group involved to develop a trust in each other enough to feel free to comment openly. For example, in one instance the group began talking about the weather, which in turn lead to a different topic all together.

Although weather is a topic covered by many elementary school teachers in the following example it is clear that the introduction of weather into the cogenerative dialogue represent the most unfocused conversation provided here. (The school actually has its own weather station, provided by a grant that a world-renowned weather scientist had received. The scientist and his group also generated a curriculum and teacher guide for fourth-grade students and teachers.) This example is an ideal case of what a teacher or researcher may find annoying or unwanted during a cogenerative dialogue as Lacie comments about the weather forecast for that day though the previous talk had nothing to

do with this topic. As the episode shows, the dialogue remains unfocused as Mark subsequently reintroduces this topic. Excerpt 8.3 actually sets the stage for the conversation shown in excerpt 8.1 which has a different topic. This demonstrates how conversation happens in real time as one does not know where it will lead, just as Lacie here comments on the weather and in turn ends up talking with Maggie about her family, just as with any activity the outcome cannot be known before hand, including such in such consequential situation as dental surgery (Ardenghi, Roth, & Pozzer-Ardenghi, 2005).

Excerpt 8.3 was classified as an unfocused segment for two major reasons. First the topic was introduced in a manner that reflects a non sequitur from the previous conversation. In this case the group was discussing a previous lesson they had done involving dancing and randomly Lacie mentions the weather. At this point the conversation changes from one of relevance to the class to one of general interest. The conversation is focused on a topic I might consider, on heuristic grounds, unfocused, because the topic itself is not directly relevant to the course or immediately actionable. Discussing weather could in fact lead to a decision as to how the class could learn about it, but that does not happen here. Rather the group begins discussing whether the weatherman is a liar and the reasons for certain weather in the city. In the end there is nothing for the group to decide and the topic is not related to the class at all. As shown in excerpt 8.1 in fact the topic changes again and the group splits to talk about two different things. What is important to see here though is how Maggie and I respond to these topics, the students are not cut short, and Lacie's complaint about the weather is not followed by a reprimand, for example. Instead the conversation leads to a possible learning moment

for the participants about weather and a possible different kind of interaction than one would typically find in a classroom.

Excerpt 8.3¹⁵

- 01 Bob And it had you going in circles for like hours.
 02 Maggie Not much variety.
 03 Bob ((Shakes his head)) there was just march, move forward, lunge right, lunge left.
 04 Lacie It was supposed to be sunny today.
 05 Maggie I know, I was surprised by that too.
 06 Ian Think of anything Mark?
 07 Mark Yep, let's talk about how the weatherman is a liar.
 08 Maggie ((laughs))

Excerpt 8.3 starts as a conversation about dance lesson the class did ends. Bob and Maggie (lines 01 – 03) refer to this lesson by recalling what dance moves they had to do. With line 04 Lacie interjects a comment totally unrelated to the previous discussion. Maggie in turn picks up on this new tread and agrees with Lacie's insinuation (line 05). I then imply a change of subject as I ask Mark if he has thought of anything (line 06) this is in reference to earlier in the cogenerative dialogue (not included) when Mark mentioned he had something he wanted to talk about with the group. Mark had come to the meeting to bring up a certain topic, but when asked previously he had forgotten, at this point then I ignore the weather conversation and asked Mark about his classroom relevant comment. Instead of focusing the discussion, Mark then puts his own spin on the weather comments and calls the weatherman a liar (line 07), which in turn causes Maggie to laugh (line 08).

¹⁵ Taken from 6/10/06

At this point then the conversation has moved from a focused conversation of a dance lesson to an assessment of the weatherman, as is continued by the other participants.

- 09 Ian I don't think he would be a liar, but he wouldn't be very good, cause it's hard to predict the weather, particularly here.
- 10 Lacie Unless you own a weather machine.
- 11 Maggie I think it's so hard here because we're on a tiny little tip of land mass at the end of an island and so I think things are flying by so quick that they miss us or we're surprised by things too.
- 12 Ian Well compare to where I used to live, on the east coast where the weather comes down, like from Toronto, it is a lot more predictable.
- 13 Lacie That's where my Grand-mom lives; I mean that's where my Mom's from.
- 14 Ian I mean, it's not like the weatherman, he's still a liar there too Mark, but it doesn't change ever hour, like it does here.
- 15 Bob It can change every hour.
- 16 Ian It could.

After Mark reintroduces the weather topic and the inaccuracy of the weatherman, I comment with a defense of the weatherman's job (line 09). I do not constrain Mark to pick an issue relevant to the classroom; rather he continues the unfocused conversation with his own opinion. Lacie and Maggie do the same as they comment on the toughness of predicting weather (line 10 & 11). Maggie's comment provides some logical reasoning for why the city is an especially difficult place to predict the weather. This comment could serve as a learning moment for the students as they try to make sense of the real world. I then bring my own life history into the conversation with mention of my previous home and the weather that occurred there, and at the same time tie my comment back to Mark's original (line 12 & 14). With the mention of Toronto Lacie interjects with

reference to her family (line 13) and after Bob and I comment again about the weather (line 15 & 16) the conversation changes again as described previously.

The text shows that this period of the dialogue was particularly prone to random changes in direction and unfocused conversation. There is still much positive I can say about this cogenerative dialogue as long as I am open to take each comment as worthwhile. To begin with the openness that all the participants demonstrate during this cogenerative dialogue allows for topics of interest to come through. Just the random comment by Lacie leads to explanation by Maggie and the labeling of the weatherman by Mark. I cannot know if weather is of interest to any one participant here but what I do know is that there is the opportunity for those interests to come up because weather is a part of the fourth-grade curriculum and the school operates its own weather station. Furthermore those topics of interest can potentially be discussed one on one with the teacher in a manner unavailable in the classroom. This is not to say that the dialogue should turn into a space for additional curriculum but rather that as something naturally comes up in conversation learning can be more authentic.

During this dialogue there are also at least two examples of exposure of the group to the personal aspects of its participants. Mark (line 07) displays his sense of humor as he calls the weatherman a liar thus exposing a possible connection with other students or Maggie. I comment about the place where I used to live in reference its weather (line 12), giving the students a chance to relate to me on a more personal level. These moments are important as the group dynamic develops over time and the community of the dialogue is built. Finally this very unfocused conversation may hold its strongest benefit in that it leads to the positive aspect described in example 8.1. Specifically, if I had not mentioned

Toronto and Lacie connected that with her home life she may not have had the opportunity to talk with Maggie about it. This string of events cannot be stated as cause and effect but rather that the openness displayed here did in fact lead to an opportunity for personal connection later in the conversation.

Conclusion

In this study I use cogenerative dialogues as one of the possible ways of assisting a school that had made a commitment to change (in its science teaching programme) because of the apparent benefits this practice has shown to have in secondary classes. I was open to some potential points of concern in an elementary school class. For teachers dealing with students, particularly those in elementary school, there always exist the concerns that too much time will have to be spent disciplining or curtailing certain behaviour. Likewise, given the time commitment a series of cogenerative dialogues takes there is always the concern for wasted time. In this chapter I address one of these potential concerns elementary teachers might have with implementing this practice in their classroom. I provide insights into how a cogenerative dialogue might actually play out. With a teacher and students who had never had experience with cogenerative dialogues I was able to point to specific examples of interactions that might otherwise be considered unfocused or irrelevant to the goals of the cogenerative dialogue and found them to have potential benefit for the participants. This serves both as an indicator of what some inexperienced teachers may face and as an educational opportunity for others to begin cogenerative dialogues in their own classrooms.

First I concentrate on moments of disarray during the cogenerative dialogues, when two or more conversations started among the participants. In my example case Lacie and Maggie had a conversation about Lacie's home life and how she moved throughout the week. Although this conversation did not pertain to the teaching and learning of the class it did accomplish something unforeseeable. In this case Lacie and Maggie were able to connect in a way not possible given the regular structure of the school. This connection has the potential to help both of them in the future as they deal with conflict in the classroom, be it in regard to behaviour or homework. Having conversations such as these allows a student to have a place to talk about issues that may be weighing on her mind and for the teacher to play a role in the student's life. If these two had sat down specifically to talk about this I do not know what would have come of it, but in this case the topic arose on its own, through the conversation, with the understanding that it could end at any time of need.

Second, some of the example cogenerative dialogues allowed the topic of the transitions to new grades to come up between the students and the adults. Other studies have shown how the cogenerative dialogue allows for a free exchange of worldviews to develop (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000) and here this concept is combined with the potential concerns of novice cogenerative dialoguers. In this case again there was an opportunity that would be otherwise impossible in the classroom for the teacher to directly hear from the students about their experiences and for the students to hear about the lives of the adults. Making these connections are important for the teacher as the year progressed and they reflect a more complete picture of the class. In this case the teacher was able to hear about the fears the students had and could then help mediate some of

their concerns. Finally then, I discuss the most apparent case of an unfocused cogenerative dialogue, conversations of apparently completely unrelated topics. Despite its apparent lack of usefulness these conversation allowed the adults to hear about the interests of the students and provided a space for a one-on-one learning. This is not to say that teachers should set out to create lessons for use during the cogenerative dialogue but rather that as the conversation develops and interests come up so can learning. Furthermore, this last excerpt leads me to excerpt 8.1 and the associated potential positives discussed there. This aspect of the discussion allows me to understand its value, as I can never know what potentially beneficial interactions may occur further down the line.

In this chapter I report on one of the challenges that I faced as I introduced cogenerative dialogue praxis into an elementary school class, the time spent talking about things other than the class. I suggest that a significant amount of time may be spent “unfocused” throughout cogenerative dialogues but many of these moments can be contextualized positively. With this claim I encourage the continued use of the cogenerative dialogue by secondary teachers, the adoption of this praxis at the elementary level, and provide a more complete picture of how they may actually play out in real life.

Chapter 9

Expansive Learning From Questioning to Implementation

Chapter 9 – Thematic Introduction

Context of This Chapter's Creation

The stated goal of cogenerative dialogues is to improve the teaching and learning experienced by the participants and in my study this was no different. But, understanding how this takes place and what it may look like is difficult. During the first series of cogenerative dialogues the group talked through many problems, but it was always my feeling that I could have done more. During the second series of cogenerative dialogues it seemed that more was going on and that the students were taking a more active role in the process. Specifically, some of the students displayed a great deal of agency, numerous times a student reached out to Maggie, other teachers, and me for help and even began to meet on their own. The group began to work towards a model to positively affect the overall homework performance of the class and in doing so forced me to understand how we worked together. In this chapter I begin with the first mention of the homework issue and analyse how the group moved from this point to the actual implementation of a model in the classroom. This chapter stands out as I combine elements from many cogenerative dialogues along with my field-notes to point to some of the potential positive benefits of cogenerative dialogues in elementary schools.

Relation With the Overall Themes

This chapter focuses on the complex series of events and interactions that took place during the second series of cogenerative dialogues. In line with my first theme this analysis brings to the forefront one of the potential positive effects of cogenerative dialogues in elementary schools. Specifically I focus on how the group collectively

worked over time to improve the homework performance of the class. There is much to be learned from understanding how this was accomplished and how the cogenerative dialogue space encouraged the process. Particularly given the age of the students and the open nature of the study, it is important to display how the group came to focus on a problem, analyse it, and develop a model to address it. I did not set out to show that the group could achieve a certain goal or solve a particular problem, but rather the story that is told here developed in line with the collective format of cogenerative dialogue praxis.

Related to my second overall theme I analyse the story formed here in terms of both the individual agency some of the students displayed and how this was constructed by and in turn constructed the larger activity in which I participated. Overall, I want to avoid attributing success and failure to particular people and focus on how the outcome the group realized was collectively formed. For example, I mention a number of ideas suggested throughout the cogenerative dialogues that were not actually ever enacted in the classroom. These ideas then are not presented as failures, or dead-ends, but rather as part of a developing discussion of what would actually work in the class to accomplish the group's goals.

Expansive Learning From Questioning to Implementation

Abstract

Cogenerative dialogues are meetings of students, teachers, researchers, and others designed to facilitate the process of improving teaching and learning in educational settings. Previously this praxis has been used only at the secondary level. In this study I have practiced it with teachers and students at the elementary level, and in so doing these meetings came to focus, among others, on poor homework performance. Here I trace how the group developed and implemented a model to address this problem. To understand this process I used the concepts of *expansive learning*, which helped me make sense of the cyclic nature of negotiation and examination that took place, and *agency*, which helped me understand the role the individuals play in questioning their practises and instigating change to the system. Overall this study was open-ended and I therefore feel that there is great potential for cogenerative dialogue praxis at the elementary level.

This chapter documents my experience of assisting teachers to introduce *cogenerative dialogue* praxis into their elementary school setting. Originally used exclusively in secondary schools, cogenerative dialogues are meetings that involve all stakeholders in an educational setting; they are designed to improve teaching and learning (Roth *et al.* 2002, Roth & Tobin 2002). The focus of this study developed as evident issues arose in one participating class. As this occurred and issues such as class participation and homework became relevant, the teacher and I decided to hold regular cogenerative dialogues involving representative students. Therefore this study came to focus on investigating this process and how a series of cogenerative dialogues done in an elementary school would play out. In this case the topic of poor homework performance became one of the focal points of conversation within the group. After a number of meetings concerning this issue, during which multiple solutions were suggested and analysed, the group began to focus on one in particular, a reward system designed to support the changes that group was envisioning. This system was subsequently examined and analysed until its actual implementation in the classroom. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and explain what took place during this process, particularly in regard to learning and agency. To do this I use concepts from cultural-historical activity theory—*expansive learning* (Engeström, 1987)—and cultural sociology—*agency* (Sewell 1992)—to make sense and frame my account. In the process, I come to understand what occurred during the study, learn from it, and add to the discussion of the applicability of cogenerative dialogues to elementary school settings.

Cogenerative Dialogue Praxis

Cogenerative dialogues generally are meetings that take place outside of the normal classroom activity, but are still very much a part of the general school activity and countless other social systems the students and teachers exist within. The actors of the cogenerative dialogue are the general participants in any class: teachers, students, and other individual that may be involved, such as researchers. These actors equitably work together towards some actionable plan for the transformation of teaching and learning in the class. That is to say that the participants work together, discuss, and form a plan that they will enact during the regular class period with the intention of improving learning (Roth *et al.* 2000, Tobin *et al.* 2003). In this vein, specific rules are followed to allow each participant's voice to be heard, reduce social barriers, and encourage constructive criticism. Therefore it is important to differentiate this praxis from teacher–student interviews, meetings, or conferences, as the topics that arise do so at any participant's discretion with the intention to improve teaching and learning. The group makes the decisions during these meetings with the adults and students as participants who strive for equitable praxis.

Cogenerative dialogues arose as the dialectical partner of *coteaching* in the studies Wolff-Michael Roth and Ken Tobin conducted among new teachers in urban schools in the United States (e.g., Roth & Tobin 2004). At that time student teachers worked with each other and their partner teachers to coteach courses, which meant all teachers took responsibility for all aspects of the course. The cogenerative dialogue gradually transformed into a necessary dialectic pair with coteaching by allowing for a meeting of theory and practice. Cogenerative dialogues arose in this context as all involved,

including the supervising professors and researchers, met together to discuss issues that arose from any particular class. This then went a step further as students became involved, whose roles in terms of research changed (Elmesky and Tobin 2005), and concepts surrounding communal responsibility developed (Tobin *et al.* 2001). These developments came with concerns, though, as ethical considerations associated with students as researchers, for example, have become evident (Olitsky and Weathers, 2005). Furthermore, some practitioners have reformulated cogenerative dialogue praxis to include one-on-one cogenerative dialogues to allow for communication between coteachers who find themselves in situations where they experience major problems, especially serious in detention centres of inner-city school systems in metropolitan areas (Lehner, 2006).

This study fits with this changing horizon for cogenerative dialogues as it was introduced into a new setting, the elementary school classroom. I did not design this study as a test of this applicability; rather it developed out of the need to address concerns of the teacher and researchers involved. Therefore, I explore this new experience in light of how the group worked together to address a real problem they identified. Specifically, I focus on the learning that took place and the roles the students played in propelling the process forward.

Theoretical Framework

Expansive learning as I use it here is a concept associated with cultural-historical activity theory or CHAT (Engeström, 1987; Leont'ev, 1981). CHAT is framework for understanding and analyzing social interactions in daily life and has been used by

sociologists in both the work and learning place as such. In short CHAT takes *activity* to be the smallest unit of analysis in any system, meaning then that the internal aspects of that activity, the actions of people, the language used, identities formed, tools and subjectivities cannot be understood independently of the system as a whole. In other words, all of my actions do not stand-alone but rather simultaneously construct and are defined by the larger activity in which I am a part. For example, writing your name (signing) has a different meaning as part of the activity of buying a home as compared to sending a letter and yet the action may appear the same. In this study using CHAT to make sense of the activities I participated in allows me to avoid assuming reasons for actions and drawing connections based on observation. Rather I view each action as mediated by the elements that constitute the system.

Expansive learning is experienced when the subjects of human activities come to experience an expansion of the action possibilities at their hand: If I can do more today than I could do yesterday, I have learned. For example, students participating in cogenerative dialoguing may come to realize that their active participation leads to greater control over their learning environment with the ultimate outcome that they improve their school performance (Roth, Tobin, Zimmermann *et al.* 2002). But expansion of action possibilities is not likely to come without problems. Focusing on expansive learning therefore means focusing on the tension and driving forces in a social system that lead to change, conflict, and contradiction. There is always a conflict inherent in any social system created by participants between what was common throughout the system and how a new system is defined. This then implies a driving internal contradiction, the negotiation of which can be analysed in terms of cycles of *expansive*

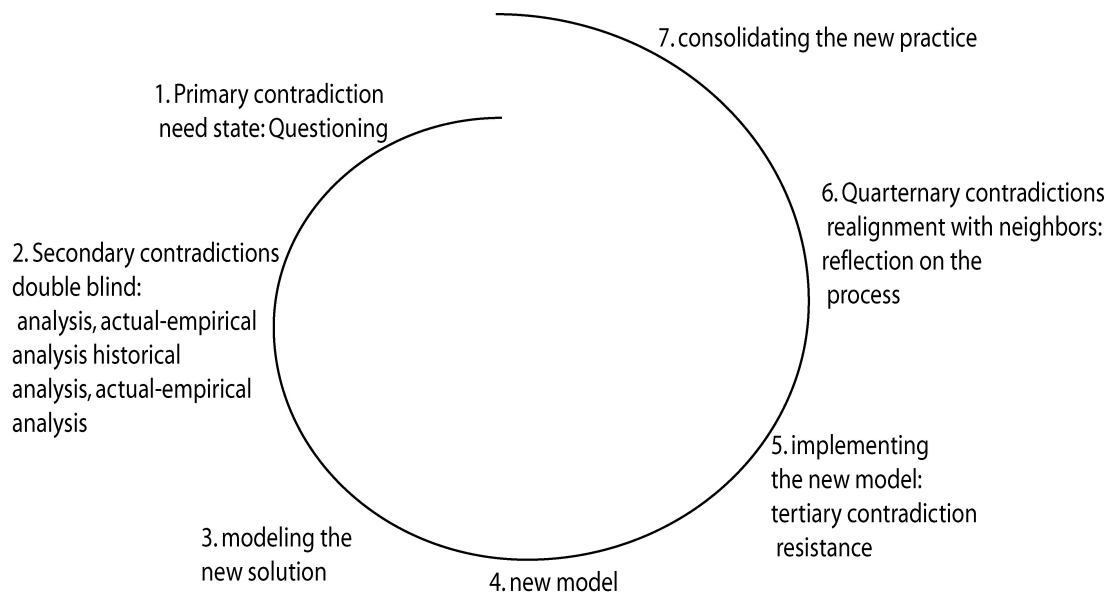


Figure 9.1 The expansive cycle of learning

learning (e.g., Engeström, 2001; Holzkamp, 1993).¹⁶ This process can be graphically represented as a continuing cycle of questioning, modeling, and implementation (Figure 9.1).

As disruptions and contradictions in the activity become more demanding, internalizations increasingly takes the form of critical self-reflection and externalization, the search for novel solutions, increases. (Engeström, 1993, p. 46)

In an everyday sense this process is evident in small cycles as people continually change their practises to reduce contradiction in the system in which they are participating. In a more overtly communal sense this process can be seen as corporations change advertising strategies as trends change. This process, though, is not guaranteed to produce a continually expansive outcome. Rather, it is dependant in part on the active participation of the individuals that constitute it. If questioning contradictions in the

¹⁶ Engeström and Holzkamp differ slightly in the way they understand the concept of *expansive learning*. For Holzkamp, it constitutes the expansion of agential room to maneuver, whereas Engeström, who built on Holzkamp's concept, also includes changes in the lifeworld, that is, in the socio-material resources that become available as individuals get together to work out problems collaboratively.

system slows or discontinues, positive change will as well. It is therefore not enough for contradiction to exist. It always does. Learning must be conceptualized as an active process. For my present purposes, expansive learning in the classroom may be associated with tensions that are exposed and discussed by the cogenerative dialogue participants. The articulation of tensions can then lead to attempts of resolving any conflicts. I look then at the classroom as ever changing as contradictions arise, are dealt with, and new ones developed. In this sense I do not view conflict and contradiction as inherently negative but rather as the potential for positive change in the system in the hands of the participants. CHAT does not structure human interaction such that the individual's role in the activity is assumed. Rather the subject's ability to instigate change, power to act, and *agency* are central to the changing activity.

The second theoretical concept that I found useful in this study was *agency*. Agency is "the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of *resources* in terms of cultural *schemas* other than those that initially constituted the array" (Sewell 1992: 19). In the case of the teacher this could be thought of as the capacity to use a technique or method from one area and apply it to another. For example, a teacher using reading techniques in a math lesson demonstrates the use of a resource in a context it is not normally associated with. Agency is conceptualized as dialectically related to the structures relevant to an activity, including the schema and socio-material resources. In other words the subject influences how the activity is structured, which in turn affects the agency of the subject, these two entities presuppose each other and are inseparable. Structures can be thought of as "sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action"

(Sewell 1992: 19). Schemas are the “generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life” (Sewell 1992: 8). To summarize: CHAT and cultural sociology conceptualize human activity as structured by dialectically related moments that change over time given internal contradictions or agential subjects. In this study I focus on the relationship specifically in regard to the cogenerative dialogue. Looking at the cogenerative dialogue as an activity I articulate how elementary school students can make change happen, in other words the agency to change their own experiences.

Research and Development Context

This study was designed as generally ethnographic in that I described what took place during the classes and the cogenerative dialogues. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of the cogenerative dialogue I worked as a part of the class and was able to discuss common experiences with the other participants (Roth *et al.* 1999). In this way and by focusing on what actually took place and what was said I aimed to avoid getting in the heads of the participants. It is not my intention to make specific claims as to why certain people made certain decision or draw relations between events; rather I discuss what took place, as explained by participants, and the potential implications of this to instructional design. I did not start with an assumed outcome for the study imposed from the outside as in traditional research, as there was no way of knowing what might happen once teachers, students, and I engaged in the study whose intent was to provide resources for change. Rather, my role was to assist students and teachers in attempting to realize cogenerative dialogue praxis in their setting to address real problems that *they* identified.

In the process, each implementation turned out to be different such that in the past the events unfolded in their own way each time. Particularly given the lack of any cogenerative dialogues previously being done in elementary schools I was interested in seeing whether the promises of the praxis would also hold at the elementary school level. What I did assume, though, was that I would be able to build solid relationships with teachers and students such that the cogenerative dialogues could be productive meetings. I assumed then too that teachers would be supportive of my efforts with this praxis and in the logistical sense of getting things done. I could not assume that the students would want to talk during the discussions or stay on task but I did try to encourage this as much as possible.

I learned the praxis of cogenerative dialoguing as a new (student) teacher under the supervision of Ken Tobin, one of the leading scholars of cogenerative dialogue praxis. At that time, I cotaught a physics class with another new teacher with whom I also conducted research. This combination of teaching and researching continued, as I became a regular teacher while working with other academics. Now on the academic side of the relationship, I attempted to build the same quality relationship with the teacher, in this case at Blueberry Vale Elementary School. Blueberry Vale Elementary School is a small school in suburban western Canada and served as a lighthouse school for a research centre concerned with the development of scientific literacy. This school became a lighthouse school for various reasons including a previous research relationship with the university where the centre was housed. Two individuals at Blueberry Vale were associated with other studies conducted at the centre, the vice-principal and a teacher (Mr. Reed), and these served as the points of contact as I developed a relationship with

the staff. After observing and informally working with a several teachers at the school I was encouraged to talk with Mrs. Stone (Maggie) as she was a teacher generally open to working with academics and was a graduate student of one of the co-investigators at my centre. At this point the research had not developed any particular focus but rather I meant to become, as much as was possible, a part of Maggie's class and the school. Therefore I spent time participating in the class in various capacities, tutoring at lunch, working one on one with students during class, and so on. In total there were fifteen visits to the classroom prior to beginning any formal research. In this way I gained considerable experience with and in the class, coming to know the students, Maggie, and the school.

This process of first hand participation was in line with Guba and Lincoln's (1989) authenticity criteria that guided my work I tried to account for and avoid any potential negative outcomes for the study. Especially given that my study involved young children it was vital that I considered the potential long-term effects. Guba and Lincoln (1994) stipulate that the study be judged if it is fair, ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical. Generally the aim is that there be open negotiations of the study, the participants come to understand themselves and others better, are empowered to act, and that how this action is stimulated and facilitated is questioned. That is, these stipulations for the conduct of qualitative research fit well with my theoretical framework designed for changing human practises to develop room to maneuver, greater control over the teaching-learning setting, and an increase in agency. I attempted to address these criteria as I made different decisions and struggled with conflicts as they arose. Because this study began without any particular focus, it seemed fair to allow a problem to arise out of the context for me to study. Throughout the initial period of participation Maggie and I discussed what could

be done with the class and how best to design a study. Eventually it was decided that we would organize a group of students to regularly meet for cogenerative dialogues, in this case called “students in action.” Every attempt was made for Maggie and I to discuss the study openly throughout, starting with this primary choice and continuing as the student participants were selected. That being said it would be impossible for me to account for every want and need of all the students I worked with in addition to Maggie’s and my own, but by experiencing the class as it happened, and as a part of it, their problems became my own. From the onset and as the study continued I tried to make myself available to any concerns the participants had. In addition to the cogenerative dialogues I also held interviews with some students and Maggie in order to provide additional time for comment.

With a general plan for enacting cogenerative dialogues Maggie and I next chose the representative students who would form the group. The student participants were chosen based on a number of factors. First, only the students who were given permission by their parent or guardian were considered. Second, there were logistical issues to consider such as music lessons, sport team practice, and so on during lunch period, which ruled out some students. Third, Maggie and I wanted to have an equitable mix of female and male students to try and get a range of views. Fourth, some students were not interested when asked. Fifth, the number of students was intentionally small as to allow maximum time for each to speak and to minimize the resemblance to the regular class ethos. Finally, Maggie and I discussed who they thought would be willing to speak up and articulate views about the class in general. During the first series of cogenerative dialogues four students primarily were involved (Bob, Mark, Amy, and Lacie). During the second series,

on which I will focus here, the participants changed throughout as eventually it expanded to a maximum of seven female students at one meeting. Gender was one issue that came up in discussion during the first series of cogenerative dialogues so Maggie and I intentionally set up a female only group after the second meeting in the second series. Over the course of the year, nine students participated in at least one cogenerative dialogue: Mary, Molly, Rachel, Amanda, Alice, Lisa, Katie, Sarah, and Mark (same student as first series). Additionally the group included, when was possible, Jen, a student teacher working with Maggie.

The second series of cogenerative dialogue meetings began in September of 2006 and continued until the mid-year break. In addition to videotaping the cogenerative dialogues, field notes were taken during class, interviews were conducted at various times, and other group functions were taped. The videos recorded were available for use during the cogenerative dialogues to add to the cogenerative dialogues.

In general, Maggie and I were facilitators of the dialogues, suggesting new topics if the conversation trailed off and reminding the students of their goals for each meeting. In the context of the cogenerative dialogue each participant is seen as equal and so it was not a time only for the students to speak but rather for *any* participant to introduce a topic of concern with regard to the class. Therefore, as will be evident in the examples, students and participating adults introduced new topics that the group subsequently discussed. Generally the cogenerative dialogue form was introduced to the students as an opportunity to voice understandings about the class and discuss these directly with the adults. During both series the meetings usually took place once a week during lunch hour.

The Homework Contradiction

The purpose of this study is to provide an account of my experience of doing cogenerative dialogues with elementary school students. It is important that I tell this story in the order that it happened to reflect how a particular issue emerged as a topic of discussion during the cogenerative dialogues, how it was analysed, the solutions that were suggested, and eventually how a plan emerged that subsequently was enacted in the classroom. The story I tell here is about the process of improving students' homework performance that centrally involved them in the decision-making. I tell this story because it became a focal point of the cogenerative dialogues. We began talking about homework regularly and how to encourage more students to do it as early as the third meeting and this remained a topic of discussion throughout the study as a plan was finalized and eventually enacted by the participants. Homework represents one of the possible topics of interest during the cogenerative dialogues as it is was immediately relevant to the students' learning and Maggie's practises. Additionally it is a topic that can be potentially practically addressed by Maggie and the students working together to form a plan. In this class and subsequently during the cogenerative dialogues it became a focal point as Maggie became concerned with the class' general performance. Generally, homework is a topic of interest given the widespread debate about effectiveness and how it fits pedagogically. My study relates to this general discussion as the group debated what should be given for homework, how much is reasonable, and why it is important or not. Furthermore, here I provide a real example of students and teachers effectively working together to generate a plan to address their concerns.

Homework is an activity that crosses the boundaries associated with home and school life and therefore contradictions and conflicts may occur at various levels. Contradictions always exist, yet they may not be noticed, or questioned, or analysed explicitly. Likewise, contradictions, once articulated, have the potential to lead to change, sometimes resulting in a more productive activity and sometimes slowing or stopping the cycle of expansive learning (Engeström, 1987). For example, a contradiction may exist with regard to the necessary resources for a homework assignment and those available to an individual student. This does not imply that the teacher and student will together question and analysis the problem towards some positive end; rather only the student may try to address the problem with limited results. But again there is the potential for this contradiction, coupled with the agency to question and analyse it, to lead to an expansive cycle of learning. In that case, those involved would collectively work to develop models to address the problem on a continual basis. In my study a contradiction arose, as homework was not being done on a regular basis by a majority of the students.

Homework was meant to be as it sounds, work done at home, but when this did not occur a contradiction existed between the systems. This was a contradiction because tension existed between homework as an object as acted on by Maggie and as an object acted on by the students. I understood the activity in which Maggie assigned the homework as necessarily interacting with the activity of the students doing the homework, at home, on the bus, or wherever because the outcome of one was tied to the other. In that case then, homework not completed contradicted homework as objectified as Maggie assigned it. That tension then, questioned with the agency of the participants led to a series of expansions, some incomplete for reasons of collaboration and

participant reflection, and a larger cycle developing parallel and intertwined with the others but eventually stopping as well. I show the potential of cogenerative dialogue praxis in elementary schools by analyzing this story with a focus on the learning that took place and the agency that propelled this development forward.

Questioning Practises

I begin this story with a description of the day of the third cogenerative dialogue. The first mention of homework to me came from one of the students, Katie. As I arrived one morning, as class was proceeding, Katie motioned me over and whispered to me, an event captured in my field notes:

Interestingly, before the meeting Katie told me she had a new topic for discussion. During class she told me that we should talk about homework at our meeting, because Maggie didn't like how it was going. Apparently the students are not completing homework regularly and Maggie has been trying to figure out why and how to motivate them. It's funny that Katie brought this up, at first I assumed she had her own reasons for talking about homework, so when it turned out she brought it up because of Maggie's behaviour in class I was surprised.

–Field notes (10/12/06)

This episode occurred on a day when there was to be a cogenerative dialogue at lunch period with the students and the teachers; my first reaction was that this comment reflected the agency of the group. Katie approached me, the facilitator of the cogenerative dialogue team, and in so doing she altered the direction of that activity. What I see here is a questioning of the system itself, Maggie has questioned the practises of the students explicitly to the class, and she has been questioning her practice in regard to homework as well. The cogenerative dialogue is a specific context for this questioning process to take place and as such there is the agency for Katie to introduce this topic. Questioning

the practises of the participants in the system is the beginning of a potentially expansive cycle of learning. An apparent inner contradiction exists such that the participants feel the tension in real time and are trying to make sense of it.

Reflection on Implementation

As it turned out Maggie and Jen tried to address the homework issue on their own, and decided to set up a board that marked each time a student turned in their homework with a star sticker. Maggie and Jen had analysed the practises of the participants of the class and decided to implement a model to address the perceived contradiction. This process of analysis, collaboration, and implementation cannot be described as an expansive cycle of learning because it was not collective, as the students were left out. But the students were involved in part of the reflection process and the further questioning of the system. Maggie and the students described the star model during the next cogenerative dialogue:

Excerpt 9.1¹⁷

- | | | |
|----|--------|---|
| 01 | Ian | How do the stars work? |
| 02 | Katie | You bring in your homework and you get a star. |
| 03 | Ian | So how did that change things? |
| 04 | Mary | They're just like stickers. |
| 05 | Maggie | But then what happens if you get three stars in a row? |
| 06 | Katie | You get a reward. |
| 07 | Maggie | You get free time, or something, a reward, right? |
| 08 | Ian | So do you think having the chart has made everybody want to turn their homework in? |
| 09 | All | Yes |

¹⁷ From cogenerative dialogue on 10/18/06

- 10 Mary Especially cause we get a party if the whole class turns their homework in.

Here Katie, Mary, and Maggie articulate to me the specifics of the model Maggie and Jen had implemented. Previous to this the cogenerative dialogue started with me asking for topics of concern from the students, basically opening up the floor to comments, in other words asking for the questioning of the class system. After nobody answered, I asked Katie about her comment to me the last week and reminded her of the concern. After Katie had articulated the issue again, the group began to, question homework, talk about homework in general, its usefulness, the amount teachers should give, and why it sometimes is hard to get it all done. Maggie's comment at the time was that she was concerned with a student's poor homework performance because she did not want the student to be ill prepared down the road. She said that homework may not be particularly important now, in fifth grade, but learning to get work done on a schedule was important to get accustomed to. Maggie analysed the activity there as she started to compare the different activities the students may become a part of. In light of this Maggie and Jen had organized the board as described above, and according to the group it was working so far. Here I see the beginnings of the reflection process as the students recapitulate what had been actually going on in the class after the implementation of the star board model. This excerpt reflects the familiarity the students have with the praxis discussed, they give an evaluation of the model's effectiveness, and cite a reason, class party, for motivation.

One concern the group had though was whether the motivation of receiving a star and maybe a reward would be effective during the course of the entire school year. This is part of the reflection process, as the model had been implemented and now was being discussed as a means to address the homework contradiction. The group then started

talking about alternative means to encourage students to do and turn in their homework on time.

Excerpt 9.2¹⁸

- 01 Ian So let's say that after Christmas everyone is getting sick of it (the star board) what could we do then?
- 02 Alice I know, um, like, I don't know, I think it was Ms. Wynn's class, and she used to, um, we had like groups, I think Mr. Reed did it too, you get to pick a name for your group and then you, like, when they are quiet or good then you give them points, and maybe if, like, if they get two thousand points, in a month or something, then you'd give them something.
- 03 Katie And then they're the special group for that month or something.
- 04 Mary In Mrs. Rabson's class she had the groups too, and they would get points for their homework or something, and then at the end of the month you add up all the points and if it gets to one hundred and fifty you get a party or something.

At this point, the reflection on the implemented model had led back to further analysis of the original contradiction. Given the consolidated outcome that star board would not be effective over the long term more analysis of the contradiction was needed. At this point then a more collaborative process began as the students, teachers, and I were involved. Alice's mention of her previous class and the group reward system started an examination of the model as Maggie expressed concern with a group reward because of a potential unfairness. For example, she noted that it could be damaging if one student always were blamed for a lack of group success. Alice also commented that it would be unfair if one person in the group were always earning the points while the rest of the group did not help. In regard to Mary's comment there was concern that only one group

¹⁸ From cogenerative dialogue on 10/18/06

could get a party that way, but Mary later clarified that the point total and the party were for the whole class.

The examination process continued as how the group could potentially earn points was negotiated as was noted that everyone performs better at different things and grades should not be considered alone. This also related well to something Maggie had started before the beginning of this study, giving tickets for certain acts during class to be redeemed for prizes later. Katie noted this connection as she compared the guidelines for earning points. Given this reward system everyone involved in the discussion had heard what types of things had previously been rewarded and that this was an additional model.

Overall the group did not decide upon a new model, but the collaborative examination allowed new ideas to be generated and analysed within the group of participants. One consolidated outcome was that something new would have to be generated because the students commented that they would become annoyed with the star board at some point. Alice, Lisa, and Maggie later commented to this point during the next cogenerative dialogue, where I learned that at this point a month later the star board was no longer being used:

Excerpt 9.3¹⁹

- | | | |
|----|--------|--|
| 01 | Alice | I think, like the stickers on the board thing, um, where you put the stickers on the board] |
| 02 | Maggie | [We stopped doing that] |
| 03 | Alice | [People were bored with, um, I think people didn't want to do it, cause the prize was a little bit!] |
| 04 | Lisa | [there just like, oh who cares I can just go outside. |
| 05 | Maggie | oh, I don't know. |
| 06 | Alice | like, that was with me, cause I didn't get to do my homework cause |

¹⁹ From cogenerative dialogue on 11/10/06

I had like a lot of stuff to do that night, so I just like stayed inside, but it wasn't bad]

07 Maggie [not too motivated]

08 Alice [Yeah, I didn't feel pressure, I was just like, who cares

I did not hear exactly why the board was not being used anymore, as Maggie ultimately made that decision, but I did hear some of the reflection of the students. Alice mentions that it got boring after a while, and that the prizes and punishment did not motivate her very much. This reflection and discontinuation of the star board model sets the stage for continued analysis and collaboration of how to improve homework production.

Examination and Negotiation

During this cogenerative dialogue the homework topic arose after Maggie and I both said we wanted to open the floor up to any issues. Mary then mentioned an idea she said Katie had about a puzzle as a potential new model to address the homework issue. I learned then that questioning and analysis of this contradiction had continued and occurred during class and that one model generated was a type of puzzle. This also shows that the participants were instigating this discussion as someone had explicated the contradiction. After the model was mentioned a collaborative examination of it began and continued as the group negotiated the specifics of how the model could be implemented.

Excerpt 9.4²⁰

01 Katie Every time you finish your homework you get a little piece of the puzzle and when you put the whole puzzle together you get something, like a prize.

02 Ian I think I missed that.

²⁰ From cogenerative dialogue on 11/10/06

- 03 Maggie Yeah, we did that in class.
- 04 Lisa Yeah, maybe, like Katie's idea, maybe like whole class does it on a big board and everybody gets a piece and when you finish it we get something.
- 05 Katie That would be, every two days, we all get a party.

In this exchange Katie summarized the puzzle idea and after Maggie and I exchanged comments, Lisa negotiated the model, and introduced a more class-oriented design. This is a common theme throughout this cogenerative dialogue as there is much examination in terms of fairness for the group and the individual. Similar to the fourth meeting, Alice mentioned that she is concerned that one individual could be earning all the puzzle pieces by bringing in their homework and this would lead to a party for the class. I continued the examination as I later asked about the fairness of having parties given the assumption that it is a lot of work for Maggie. This concern was discussed as the students negotiated the tasks associated with the model. They described how groups of students could organize different parts of the party, like games or food, and so the work would be distributed. Eventually, though, the conversation came back to examination of the puzzle idea and Maggie asked if the students thought it would really be motivating for the rest of the class. This refers to both the collaborative nature of the expansive cycle and cogenerative dialogue praxis. At this point only a few students represented the rest for logistical reasons, but it was as inclusive as possible. This again brings up the fairness issue as Maggie stated a concern for putting too much social pressure on some students to perform given that some factors are out of their control. This led to the first excerpt from this cogenerative dialogue, where the motivation of the stickers was discussed, and further analysis of the contradiction occurred. Subsequently, Lisa introduced another

possible model, a card for each person to keep track of their homework totals on their own, to keep it private. Maggie examined this model with reference to the puzzle model, which she liked because it is unique. The proposed card model was then passed over as the group started to examine and negotiate some of the logistical issues with the puzzle idea, as in should the puzzle be pre-made or made in class. One suggestion made was for the process of making a puzzle for each student could be an art project. This suggestion built over time as Katie first mentioned the art aspect of the potential project when Maggie spoke about buying a puzzle.

Excerpt 9.5²¹

- 01 Ian The only thing I was scared of is, um, I guess how would you put it all together? Would you have to give them to them in order or something?
- 02 Maggie No you would do the outside edge]
- 03 Katie [No, Mrs. Stone would like take them, and we could like make them or something, like an art project]
- 04 Maggie I'd have to buy a big one, like maybe a thousand-piece puzzle or something
- 05 Ian Yeah, and then once you get them all, in a big file!
- 06 Mary Or a 3-D one
- 07 Maggie oh yeah, a 3-D one that would be cool
- 08 Katie you could get like a whole bunch of cardboard or something, and then like cut it out and colour on it or something
- 09 Maggie you see, when you first brought up the idea of a puzzle, I first thought of making my own.
- 10 Katie Yeah, that's what I was thinking
- 11 Maggie But then when you talked today, I was thinking]
- 12 Lisa [But then you don't show us]
- 13 Maggie [well no maybe I could just buy a five hundred piece puzzle or a thousand piece puzzle.

²¹ From cogenerative dialogue on 11/10/06

- 14 Lisa But then people might know what the puzzle is
- 15 Maggie But I wouldn't tell you what it was of, and I would just give you these little tiny pieces and I wouldn't tell you what it was going to make.
- 16 Katie No, it could be an art project, and then you put them in envelopes and write on them and then you'd pass them all out so everyone gets somebody else's.

Maggie suggested she could buy a giant puzzle, while Lisa had concern with that, and Katie suggested the students make the puzzles. This was part of the process and was encouraged in the setting of the cogenerative dialogue to occur in equal and open format. Eventually the group started to talk about other issues in the class, as some of the members said outright that they were sick of talking about homework, and Maggie asked about other concerns. But with the next cogenerative dialogue, homework again became a focal point.

Eventually a different model arose, which Alice compares to a model used in a club she is a member of, a picture of a thermometer that temperature increases as people bring in homework. Alice used a giant picture of a thermometer that happened to be in the room as a resource to explain the model. Similar to the individual card model, this model was examined and eventually dismissed. This model was examined in terms of it as a class monitoring system and an individual meter, with some of the previously mentioned concerns for privacy and equal work. Katie and Lisa spoke specifically about the privacy concern after I compared the idea of a class thermometer to the star board previously used:

Excerpt 9.6²²

- 01 Ian So that would be a similar thing to the stars, right?

²² From cogenerative dialogue on 11/17/06

- 02 Lisa I don't think anybody likes seeing, seeing, um, everybody's name filled in with stickers, except for theirs.
- 03 Katie Yeah, that's sort of personal, if you brought it in, cause if you can't get it in and then you finally brought it in, that's sort of embarrassing, right, when you've only brought it in one day and some of the other kids have brought it in twelve.

From these personal privacy concerns the conversation then focused back to negotiating the puzzle idea as to make it very private. The group started to examine how logistically the puzzles could be created, stored, and used in an every day sense. Specifically there was the problem of how the pieces could be given out easily and how people could keep track of their own puzzle. The group summed this up later in the discussion:

Excerpt 9.7²³

- 01 Katie Somebody else has made a puzzle out of cardboard, and they've drawn on it and stuff, and then they cut it out weird, right, and then, um, you exchange it with people until you get your final one, and then you write your name on the envelope]
- 02 Lisa [You have to switch with people?
- 03 Katie Yeah
- 04 Lisa Why?
- 05 Katie So you don't know what it's going to be, um, and each of them have to be a certain amount of pieces, cause, if like, pretend, if a person who doesn't bring theirs in, and they've got twenty-four pieces and a really good persons only got like six-teen, right, it should be like all the same amount, right, and then each day you exchange it at your time, for you puzzle piece, and if you didn't do it you've got to stay in at your time and work on it.
- 06 Ian So each person would have a puzzle and then when they]
- 07 Katie [Mrs. Stone would keep the puzzles and she would give you a piece when you needed a piece, so there would be, like, two folders, a folder that you've gotten and a folder that you need to get, that Mrs. Stone will hand out to you.

²³ From cogenerative dialogue on 11/17/06

This description was still criticized afterwards for being too complicated, given the need for a place to store the folders and time to hand the pieces out. The group, to this point had been collectively examining and negotiating the puzzle model, but they had yet to implement the model in the class. As it happened this would not occur until another new component was added to the model.

Similar to Alice's earlier use of an existing giant thermometer in the room as a resource to explain a monitoring system, Mary later was inspired, as she commented, by a spinning wheel that was in the room. The wheel had been made by a different class and was being stored in the spare room in which the cogenerative dialogues took place, but became a resource appropriated by the group to develop their model. It had been made with different pieces referring to different methods to help the environment, but here a model developed to set up a wheel as a fun way to reward good homework participation with a chance to win prizes.

Excerpt 9.8²⁴

- | | | |
|----|-------|---|
| 01 | Mary | When I was playing with this wheel over here I got an idea, like, if someone brought in their homework they would spin it for something, and then the whole class would get it, or they would just get it |
| 02 | Ian | So if you got enough homework turned in for yourself, then you get to spin the wheel?] |
| 03 | Mary | [yeah, you get to spin the wheel.] |
| 04 | Katie | [No, its like you spin the wheel and then it says maybe, four ticket, five tickets, seven tickets] |
| 05 | Mary | [or party] |
| 06 | Katie | [Yeah, party] |
| 07 | Mary | [or free prize |
| 08 | Ian | That's a good idea |

²⁴ From cogenerative dialogue on 11/17/06

With this episode as a starting point, a “growth point” for the expansion of agency (Vygotsky 1978), the group began a long examination of this model and the students eventually reached out to Maggie to give a report. Here is another example of agency as Maggie was used as a human resource to move the process forward, for without her implementation was impossible. All the students took their turn spinning the wheel and negotiating what should be on the wheel in terms of prizes, such as different amounts of tickets, parties, or gifts. The wheel was collectively examined first in terms of how someone would get the chance to actually spin it. It was suggested that maybe the puzzle model and the wheel model could be combined such that when a person completes their puzzle, in other words brings in a certain number of homework assignments, they get to spin the wheel. This in turn led to a negotiation of how many pieces, assignments, was a reasonable amount and that the number must be equal for all the puzzles. Generally it was agreed that ten to sixteen pieces makes sense. The negotiation then turned to naming the wheel; suggestions included, the “wealthy wheel,” the “homework wheel,” and the “award wheel.” Next came the question of how to actually make a wheel. One potential option discussed was using the wheel already made as a resource to appropriate for their needs. This was later negotiated with Maggie as Mr. Reed had the wheel made so changing it would require his permission. How the wheel would be divided up was also negotiated, as some said that the “party slice” should be small and that a “no win slice” should exist. This was examined in terms of the expectations a student may have after completing their puzzle; is one ticket enough, or is it fair to get nothing at that point? The students decided to go get Maggie at this point, as she had been absent for another meeting at the beginning of the cogenerative dialogue. Maggie entered the conversation

and the students proceeded to explain the idea to her and continue the communal examination and negotiation. This included more negotiation of what the prizes should be, why some students didn't like the tickets, why some students just collected tickets, the fact that Maggie must buy the prizes from her own pocket, and how to put the plan into action. The meeting ended with the students agreeing to work on the wheel and a puzzle template during the next recess period to prepare for implementation.

The next cogenerative dialogue occurred two weeks later and in the time between students did not work on the wheel project. At this point a new student, Molly, joined the group at the request of the students and so the beginning of the cogenerative dialogue consisted of explaining to her what the meeting was all about and how it worked. The agency to include new members is encouraged by the open format and communal decision-making that define cogenerative dialogue praxis. After this discussion I asked why nothing had happened since the last meeting. Without giving specific reasons the group began to negotiate how best to get things done. Much of the conversation revolved around the question of whether the students wanted to and could work on their own to make the wheel and puzzle design. It was decided that the students would work on their own with reminders and resources supplied by Maggie. This then led to a negotiation of the logistics of doing the work, when to meet, how to talk with each other, and how to remember to meet. It was decided that the students would meet during recess the next week and work on the wheel with final approval for the design resting with Maggie.

During the following week the group met three times on its own and decided to include another two students, Rachel and Amanda. Rachel came for the first meeting and was invited because, according to Katie, "she has good ideas." Amanda came to the

second meeting after Lisa invited her, based on my observations they were very good friends and worked together often. In both cases the students initiated the process of bringing more students into the group and the adults accepted this at the time. Their first meeting began with accessing the appropriate resources, collecting materials such as rulers, markers, and paper. Mr. Reed was accessed as well as, upon asking, he gave the students a pattern to follow for cutting out pie pieces for the wheel. Next, the students negotiated the work, each person making one slice. As this occurred there was much negotiation of how many tickets each piece should represent to avoid duplication and outrageous amounts. Generally ten tickets were decided to be the maximum amount given the prizes available. Also the students worked together to make the wheel physically function. At one point it was noticed that the wheel was too thick resulting in it rubbing one side and tearing the paper. Earlier the group had decided to put their pie pieces over the existing ones as to not change the wheel for Mr. Reed's future use. Another consideration negotiated was how the tickets would be delivered; Katie suggested they be taped to the back of the wheel so the student could take them off immediately. Colour was negotiated as well, along with what kinds of pictures should be drawn. Each piece was worked on independently but the group negotiated many of the decisions. Towards the end of the period the students decided that they should come back during lunch to finish the wheel, as a cogenerative dialogue was scheduled for the next day. They indicated that they were already late making it and that they needed more time. After lunch the students continued to work focusing this time on how to make the wheel stop in a reasonable amount of time. The wheel was not originally built to be a game, but rather to point to different topics so some modifications were necessary. It was decided

that an eraser taped between the wheel and the stand would slow the wheel at a good pace.

The next day was scheduled to feature a cogenerative dialogue; the students again decided to work during recess. Maggie was absent so a substitute was working with the class and allowed the students to work at that time. Amanda was invited for this meeting and Rachel came back as well. The students continued to finish the pie pieces, keeping track of how many they needed and negotiating who would do what. As the wheel was completed the student began testing and examining it, seeing where it landed, and some trying to rig it such that it always landed on “party.” At the regular cogenerative dialogue time we watched the video of them working instead of talking, at the students’ request. This meeting was totally informal as the students chose to work when they did.

Implementation

At this point I left the research site but stayed in contact with Maggie, she reported that the students meet again without any adults and asked her multiple times to meet with them to negotiate the logistics of presenting the wheel to the class. Eventually the students and teacher implemented the wheel model and, over the weeks that followed, continued to question and analyse it. One immediate question arose as six students won a class party and some individuals considered this to be too many. Maggie and the students met to talk about this. It was decided that some of the pie pieces would be changed to alter the ration away from so many parties. Eventually, Maggie reported that using the wheel became less frequent as it physically fell apart and was not fixed regularly.

How Did This Process Occur?

Agency

Before any change could happen in the practises of the participants, and before anything could be accomplished during any of the cogenerative dialogues, we needed to question something. The story begins with my record of Katie calling me over during class to suggest a topic for that day's cogenerative dialogue. I began there because this is where the questioning of homework began for the participants, something was not working, they noticed, and began to question. This moment is also a moment of agency, as Katie reached out to me as a resource to help facilitate this questioning and analysis. The agency the students displayed throughout this study was noticeable in real time and evident as the story is told again, with moments such as this, or when the students met on their own to work on the wheel. This study began without a specific focus question in need of answering other to see what would happen, and one of the major outcomes were the many instances of student agency to change the teaching and learning of their classroom.

In this study I find evidence of agential behaviour during cogenerative dialogues and as the models created there were carried out. This study taught me that elementary students could initiate and carry through plans to change their own learning environment without constant supervision. Additionally these students exhibited agency as they accessed resources when they felt the need for them, specifically they went to Mr. Reed for help with the wheel, found tools, and added other students to the group as they saw fit. Particular moments stood out in real time; when the students decided to get Maggie and explain their model to her, when they organized their own meeting times, and when

they planned how their model could fit in with the structure of the class. I see this agency among the students as part of a building argument for cogenerative dialogue praxis in elementary schools. In this case it was the students who pushed the model forward with their analysis and negotiation and this encourages me to continue to position students in central learning roles despite their age and/or inexperience.

Expansive Learning

Looking at this story in its entirety, I see a group of young students and their teachers working *collectively* to address a contradiction they are experiencing in their lives. That is, the agency had changed from a teacher controlling every aspect of the teaching–learning setting to the collective, as a whole, taking responsibility for what was happening and how it was happening. Homework performance was identified as such as Maggie questioned her own practises of encouraging homework to be done and those of the students in regard to getting the work done. From this questioning the participants analysed the contradiction during class time, during the cogenerative dialogues, and on their own. The first model to address the contradiction was negotiated between Maggie and Jen and implemented in the class: a board where each completed homework assignment was marked with a star sticker. The students subsequently reflected upon this model while cogenerative dialoguing, which in turn led to further analysis of the identified contradiction. The cycle of reflection and implementation of the star board ended as Maggie discontinued its use in the class. This was important, though, as part of the larger building cycle to develop more models to address the contradiction. The star board was a focal object and an eventual resource to be used as the participants further

examined the new models they developed. I see the story as developing simultaneously along with these incomplete cycles as they build off each other encouraging deeper examination.

During class time Maggie again introduced the contradiction for analysis by the students. At this time a new model, a puzzle, was introduced to address the contradiction. During the next cogenerative dialogue this model began a long cycle of collective examination and negotiation of its practicality in the classroom, feasibility to be put into practice, and actual design. Along with the development of this model others were suggested and examined as well, adding more resources for comparison and changing the activity as they did. Specifically, the puzzle model was examined and negotiated with regard to who would make the puzzles or would they be bought, how they would be stored, how large they should be, if they should be individual and private or a group project. This cycle continued without proceeding to implementation but along with another, potentially complementary model developed, a prize wheel. Using a cardboard wheel in the room as a resource the group developed the model to motivate students to do homework based on spinning the wheel to earn prizes. This model was coupled with the puzzle model and its specifics further negotiated as the group built the wheel, assigned prizes, and developed a plan for implementation. Once the model was implemented the cycle continued to expand as reflection and analysis of the wheel went on. As a new part of the activity system of the classroom the wheel was questioned as further contradictions arose. The group met to make changes to the model as they saw fit, but this process ended as the regular cogenerative dialogues ended, the study concluded, and people did not instigate further change.

By analyzing this story in terms of an expansive learning cycle I was able to understand what was actually taking place better, particularly in regard to cogenerative dialogue praxis. Throughout this study I saw how the cogenerative dialogues served to facilitate the expansive cycle the group was developing. Specifically, the open nature of cogenerative dialogues allowed the group to continue to discuss one topic or change when they saw fit. As told in this story, homework was a focal point, but it was not all that was discussed and it was not forcibly discussed at the request of Maggie or I. Rather, as is evident from Katie's first mention of homework to me the group was able to negotiate and analyse a real problem they were encountering and develop an appropriate model to address it. These cogenerative dialogues facilitated this process in that the goals and foundations of cogenerative dialoguing seem to coincide well with those of an expansive cycle. In this case the collaborative nature of both praxis is reflected as the students negotiated the work for a potential party and the creation of the wheel. Likewise the intent of improving the activity in question was reflected in a model that was actually implemented in the class with the hope of improving teaching and learning. Essentially, cogenerative dialogue praxis allowed for the cycle to develop, as it would without strict guidelines, open to change, and with a practical model as the intended outcome and this is reflected throughout this story.

A Different Perspective

As discussed above there is evidence of expansive learning and student agency as the group periodically focused on homework performance, but what about the more fundamental question of homework as policy? Taking a hegemonic perspective (Gramsci,

1971), the entire episode discussed here could be critiqued as coercion of the students to take the basic premise of the work they are doing for granted in favor of only a surface analysis. In other words, one may ask whether cogenerative dialogue praxis allows for deeper discussion of schooling or is limited to issues existing within the traditionally defined boundaries of a classroom. In this series of cogenerative dialogues the broader question of homework did not arise, instead homework was introduced in regard to the class's overall performance. Neither the students, Maggie, nor I introduced a questioning of homework, but that is not to imply that it was taboo. Beginning first with the students, it may have been that over time they would start to question some of the more fundamental issues surrounding schooling, but we don't know. The students did bring to the forefront some questions concerning school and classroom policy over the course of the study. For example we discussed the importance of the school play and the effect practise had on learning for the students and planning for Maggie. The discussion did not proceed to the point that the group decided to try and stop the play all together but this could have occurred. If this had happened it would have been appropriate to get other stakeholders involved, such as the principal and music director. Also, some students questioned the use of the computer room, as they felt they didn't get enough time to use it. In this case the student were able to hear from Maggie the school-wide issues that made it difficult for her to schedule the room on a regular basis. This is an example of an issue extending from the classroom to the whole school and at the very least the students got to hear a logical reason for something that was troubling them. What is important though, is that these questions developed as part of an open discussion and were not forced or dismissed by the adults present. If I, for example, had introduced the topic of

homework and started questioning its foundations as part of schooling it would very different than if the students introduced the topic. Particularly because I was working as a researcher in the group and so I would not deal with the same repercussions if something negative were to come from the discussion. For example, if I began questioning the use of homework and the students eventually decided to refuse to participate, their grades, relationship with parents, and learning could be affected, whereas I would be able to leave the situation at my own discretion. This example relates also to the question of whether an adult, in an attempt to avoid coercion, should introduce more fundamental questions as part of regular cogenerative dialogue praxis. As the example demonstrates, even with good intentions we cannot know the outcome of an activity before hand and so the job of the facilitator is not pressure a particular point but rather encourage the open format and work with the other participants. Overall there is the general intention to collectively improve the teaching and learning taking place during cogenerative dialogues, and as such if the group begins to feel some larger issues need to be address the process should continue. What would impede this growth would be the logistics of including the other people effected in such a way that the open format continues and collective plans can be made.

Conclusion

In this chapter I tell a story of my experience doing cogenerative dialogues in an elementary school. I did not set out to prove that cogenerative dialogue praxis will “work” with elementary school students but rather to see whether the praxis seemed appropriate as issues developed in this type of context. This story developed out of a long

process of working as a member of the class, identifying areas of need, and opening up the floor to the comments of the students and teacher. After a few sessions of cogenerative dialogues the topic of homework performance became the focal point as something the group could develop a model to address. After much analysis, examination, and negotiation the group collectively finalized and implemented the model in the class.

I made sense of this process using the concepts of expansive learning cycles and agency. I used these concepts because of their applicability to the complex activity that is school. Expansive learning implies a series of collective questionings and analyses that is also encouraged during cogenerative dialogues. In this case the group actually decided on and implemented a plan to change their experiences and so I felt that it was important to describe and understand how that occurred in as rich a way as possible. Likewise I experienced and observed numerous instances of students reaching out to people and resources in ways that changed over the course of the study, which could best be explained in terms of agency. I stress the roles the students played in the overall process and agency because they allowed me to both focus on the individual but remember the social activity that was simultaneously influencing that agency.

This study provides evidence of both expansive learning and increased agency, particularly as reflected in the actions of the students. Furthermore, given this, I conclude that the applicability of cogenerative dialogue praxis to elementary schools has much potential. In this case the group was able to work together to address a real contradiction they experienced in the classroom. Despite the students' young age and relative inexperience (compared to the high school students participating in other studies of

cogenerative dialoguing) they exhibited capabilities to organize meeting on their own, examine potential models, and negotiate the specifics of those models. I do not claim that the implementation of the wheel model was as direct result of the series of cogenerative dialogues, but rather that an expansive cycle was evident from the group's interactions during those meetings. In addition I do see a connection between the collaborative nature of cogenerative dialogue praxis and the process of expansive learning such that one encourages the other. During our meetings the students were capable of demonstrating agency in various ways as they reached out to teachers and continued to analyse their own practises. This process was facilitated, as the cogenerative dialogues were open and encouraging of practical solutions to improve teaching and learning. With this study the door is now open for cogenerative dialogue praxis to transition from isolation at the secondary level to the elementary level.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

With this dissertation I tell the story of my experience doing cogenerative dialogues in an elementary school. I did not set out to prove that cogenerative dialogue praxis will “work” with elementary school students, rather the praxis seemed appropriate as issues developed. This story developed out of a long process of working as a member of the class, identifying areas of need, and opening up the floor to the comments of the students and teacher. The questions I identify and discuss here arose in this way as I first analysed cogenerative dialogue praxis in terms of research and ethics and then focused on the role of the teacher in the process. As the study took shape then, more specific questions arose in real time and needed to be address. I analysed some of these questions here; specifically the development of the teacher involved, the openness of the discussion, the moments of “unfocused” conversation, and the formation of a plan over time. This analysis has led me to make specific claims, summarized below.

- Cogenerative dialogue praxis is an authentic research tool which, when conducted properly, can address some of the ethical issues inherent in classroom research.
- Cogenerative dialogue praxis facilitates the discussion of the ethical issues that are part of the research setting (e.g., class).
- Cogenerative dialogue praxis is one viable solution for teachers to ethically mediate the various activity systems that constitute a class.
- I learned from Maggie how teachers work with researchers, as researchers, evaluate their own work, and can direct research studies in new directions.
- Cogenerative dialogue praxis contains internal contradictions such that there is the potential for its openness to collapse by its openness to any comment.

- A significant amount of time may be spent “unfocused,” during cogenerative dialogues but many of these moments can be contextualized positively in terms of building relationships, introducing new teaching topics, and so on.
- During cogenerative dialogues the group developed and implemented a model to address the problem of poor homework performance through cycles of expansive learning.

This list of claims may appear disjointed from the text but given the themes that run throughout this dissertation and the manner in which they developed this is not the case. These claims and the questions they address developed in real time as the study took shape and was en-acted. The first and second claims, as addressed in chapter 4, arose as I first began working with Maggie’s class and she and I started to consider using cogenerative dialogues with her class. With this consideration I began to explore a variety of questions dealing with what actually takes place during cogenerative dialogues, particularly in regard to ethics. This questioning continued as I considered the role Maggie would play in this process and her larger role in the school. I wanted to try and understand teachers’ praxis in regard to the potentially conflicting activities they mediate on a daily basis. Additionally I saw a connection between this mediation and the ethical issues I had previously considered in chapter 4. This chapter and claim do not deal with Maggie case directly, as this was written at the initial stages of the study, but with the next chapter Maggie’s experiences are the focal point. In line with my authentic approach to conducting this study I tried to provide ample time for Maggie to formally introduce topics of concern, be they in direct relation with the study or not. In doing this I found that there was much I could learn from Maggie as a professional teacher, student, and

study co-participant. Although the data analysed here and the claims formed may not directly tie in with cogenerative dialogue praxis explicitly they do add to the authenticity of the study. I chose to analyse one particular aspect of what Maggie and I talked about as I thought it was relevant to both researchers working with teachers and teachers in the field.

Two of the many challenges we (the study participants) faced in real time were those moments when the open nature of the discussion seemed to collapse and when “unfocused” talk occurred. To understand the occasions when the open nature seemed to dissolve I referred to a similar analysis of “the democracy to come” (Derrida, 2005). Democracy and cogenerative dialogues, as I have experienced them, encourage a free exchange of ideas among the participants, but this did not always seem to hold true as participants were excluded or dominated the conversation. These moments imply, I claim, internal contradictions of cogenerative dialogues in that openness allows for openness to cease. Those times that the conversations became “unfocused” also presented me with a real challenge. “Unfocused” can mean different things to different people, but I felt it was important to explore these moments, as they were relevant in real time. Additionally, understanding the potential value of this kind of talk is important to people as they try to conduct cogenerative dialogues in the future. I cannot know what will happen during these meetings so I tried here to look at one aspect that seemed at first a great annoyance.

The final aspect of this study I explored was more longitudinal in that I looked at how the group worked collectively through the majority of the second series of cogenerative dialogues. Throughout the first series of meetings the group did not implement a plan for

improving teaching and learning during regular class time but this changed during the next year. This group was able to analyse their own experiences, negotiate a model, and actually implement it with the other students. This process seemed to work in a cyclic manner, as ideas were suggested, discussed, and either developed further or abandoned. Telling this part of the story is important because it illustrates the positive encouragement cogenerative dialogues can provide for students and teachers trying to improve their situation.

This study and dissertation are additionally tied together by two overall themes running throughout: new frontiers for cogenerative dialogue praxis and understanding the roles of people in social processes. These two themes reflect both the methods I employed in conducting this study and my own interests in current educational studies. In regard to the methods used, the second theme is particularly pertinent as I learned and implemented theoretical foundations that focused on mediated actions and authentic interactions. Specifically, CHAT allowed me to focus on the activity occurring and avoid “getting in the heads” of the participants and making assumptions about their behaviour. In terms of my daily interactions with the participants I made every effort to try and understand their lives and work with them in a mutually beneficial manner.

The first theme ties the analysis chapters together as each is a part of gradual discussion of the new context for cogenerative dialogue praxis, the elementary school. I started this study by opening up to the classroom and trying to understand how improvements could be made. In that way cogenerative dialogues became the focus, but my open intention did not change and continued to define what questions needed to be

asked. This study is just part of the development of cogenerative dialogue praxis but it points to very real concerns I faced in a new field.

The implications of this study range from teacher education, to elementary education, to research methodology. I focused here mostly on the challenges that became evident throughout this study and that was intentional. By exposing some of the potential issues for teachers, researchers, or administrators I both tried to paint a complete picture of my experience and open the discussion of how these issues could be understood.

Working with Maggie I was privy to a teacher who wanted to improve her own praxis by being open to different praxis and criticism. Through working with her I began to see the implications cogenerative dialogues can have for teachers at every level. From this study I think incorporating cogenerative dialogue praxis as part of teacher education can better prepare teachers for the challenges they will face. As I discussed, teachers are mediators of the various activities that overlap in the school and classroom and as such they should be prepared to handle this role. Maggie also touched on this issue during our conversations as she referred to her view of research. Maggie is a teacher who is only now, after years of work in the field starting to understand how complex her role really is because research was not part of her training. It is not fair for a teacher like Maggie to be in the position to now have to search out that which could have been part of her praxis from the beginning.

In regard to elementary education this study implies there is great potential for cogenerative dialogues in that new setting. Although it was not my intention to use this study as a means to develop a universally applicable guideline for the implementation of cogenerative dialogues in elementary schools it is appropriate for me to comment in

regard to the issues discussed here. In other words, this study and dissertation have addressed some of the issues related to the implementation of cogenerative dialogues in elementary school to such a degree that some practical suggestions can be made. I see this study as of great use to those that would choose to try cogenerative dialogues in their elementary school. To begin with were the issues related to choosing which students to involve. As stated Maggie and I went through a series of stipulations to form our group of students, but this does not imply a mandatory procedure. In my experience as a teacher and researcher it is impossible to predict which students will easily become active participants during the meetings therefore it important to give every student a chance if logistically possible. In terms of numbers of students, at this elementary school we began with four students and eventually included seven at once. In my experience it would be ideal to include the whole class in the discussions but this would require each student becoming a part of the group slowly over time. Cogenerative dialogues are not simply meetings and as such it is vital that those individuals involved learn how to work in the group. Therefore, from my experiences with this class, I recommend beginning with about four students and over time participate in expanding the group. In my case the students took it upon themselves to do this, which reflects the agency associated with cogenerative dialogue praxis. Also it may seem relevant to include other people in the cogenerative dialogues, as said earlier, administrators, professors, and others have been involved in cogenerative dialogues in other studies, but one group I see as inappropriate to include are parents. Although they do have a stake in the class they are not a part of it or the school in the same way the other people mentioned are. A parent coming to school to participate in a cogenerative dialogue ignores the fact that discussions during

cogenerative dialogues are intended to focus on shared experiences. Someone not involved with the class cannot contribute to the sense making going on during a cogenerative dialogue because they simply are not there as an individual participant.

It is evident for this study that challenges will arise periodically throughout the cogenerative dialogue, be they related to arguments developing or the conversation losing focus, but that they do in turn start a process of change. For example, I felt very uncomfortable during the exchange focused on Lacie being a “tomboy,” but this and other similar conversations did lead Maggie and I to reevaluate the group. In situations such as these I suggest to those facilitating the discussion to keep in mind both the need to let the conversation build on its own and the long-term goals of the praxis. We can’t know what will come of a conversation, good or bad, and as such it is not up to the facilitator to halt it as such, but rather look to these moments as part of the development process. Likewise, I suggest that facilitators avoid focusing on short term accomplishments. There is no list of predictable interactions to guarantee successful cogenerative dialogues, just as cogenerative dialogues cannot be instituted to “solve” particular issues in the class. It is inappropriate to present an open discussion to the students if only to focus on a specific issue of interest for the teacher. For example, the problem of homework performance discussed in chapter nine may have been something Maggie wanted to address during the cogenerative dialogues but by being introduced by the students it took on a different connotation. Here I am able to show that the group of inexperienced elementary school students was able to organize meeting on their own, examine potential models, and negotiate the specifics of those models to address a real problem related to their learning. The intention of cogenerative dialogues is to

collectively develop a plan for en-action in the class and these students were able to do exactly this. This of course does not imply a flawless, straight line of analysis on the part of the group, but rather the group cycled through the development process as any group would.

Finally, I think this study adds to the growing argument for cogenerative dialogues to be part of educational research methods. My experiences conducting this study have reinforced my understanding of how educational research can be done in an authentic manner. This study was constructed by those affected, beginning first with decision to implement cogenerative dialogues. As opposed to setting up an evaluation of the effectiveness of cogenerative dialogues in elementary schools, the specific questions I addressed arose out of real challenges I faced and the agency of the participants. The cogenerative dialogues provided an opportunity, away from the rules and divisions of labor associated with the class, to explore issues the participants were dealing with. For example, when Lacie talks with Maggie about her home life something different from the traditional school activity was taking place, and although I did not pursue that particular area of study it came through in an authentic manner.

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