Co-Creating a Culture of Belonging through the Relational Co-Teaching Framework: A Critical, Transformative Auto|Ethnography

Elizabeth L. Stein

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Co-Creating a Culture of Belonging through the Relational Co-Teaching Framework:

A Critical, Transformative Auto|Ethnography

Elizabeth L. Stein

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Molloy College
in partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Abstract

Co-Creating a Culture of Belonging through the Relational Co-Teaching Framework:

A Critical, Transformative Auto|Ethnography
by Elizabeth L. Stein

Adviser: Dr. Tricia Kress

This critical, transformative auto|ethnography highlights power relations and culture as it documents my four-month collaborative journey with co-teachers and their students in their fifth-grade suburban school in Northeastern New York. This study describes how Ms. K., a general educator, and Ms. D., a special educator, negotiated power and reimagined a culture of belonging through the shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The co-teachers’ interactions were analyzed on macro, meso, and micro levels with data sources, including transcripts from cogenerative dialogues and semi-structured interviews, written reflections through student journaling, researcher’s journal, and other artifacts. A theoretical bricolage guided my descriptions of internal and external communications that resulted in each co-teacher distributing personal forms of power. I developed a Story in Story (SiS) approach to organize and analyze data across multiple perspectives. I also developed the Relational Co-Teaching Framework to explain interactions that empowered each co-teacher to belong to and with one another as a precondition for cultivating a culture of belonging that permeated through their environment and praxis. This study implies a structure for guiding equitable co-teaching experiences that may change educators’ views of students with disabilities from deficit model toward strengths-based perspective. My study also raises the important idea about how we think about culture. Although culture was no longer connected to the physical classroom, it was
recreated through Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s relationship as a new virtual way of applying
cogenerative dialogues was applied resulting in the co-creation of their culture of belonging.

*Keywords:* power relations, co-teaching, virtual cogenerative dialogues, culture of
belonging, remote learning, Relational Co-teaching Framework
Dedicated to:

My husband, my family, and my colleagues around the world.
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Over the course of this five-year journey, the depths of my gratitude have grown deep, with a far-reaching awareness for all those in my past and present who inspired, influenced, and supported me. A note of appreciation must be made to all the past great minds in education—like Lev Vygotsky, Paulo Freire, and Pierre Bourdieu—who moved theory into practical places, allowing me to do the work that I do. Next, I must thank past teachers, colleagues, and every co-teacher I worked with—our experiences shaped my dispositions and tenacious mindset. I am grateful for Ms. K and Ms. D for being willing to welcome me within their classroom culture that allowed for this study to happen.

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To my family—my husband and my daughters, you serve as the roots, the sun, and the life that feeds into the ongoing process of my love of learning. Through your love and support, I felt the stability of my roots that allowed for me to sway, like the pendulant branches of the willow tree, with the freedom and flexibility needed to complete this doctoral journey. Michael, thank you for being as interested as I was to talk about theories and data. Your immeasurable and unconditional love and patience provided great power in producing this work.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract......................................................................................................................................................... iv

Acknowledgments........................................................................................................................................... vii

Chapter I........................................................................................................................................................ 1

Committing to the Process of Co-Teaching: Connecting Each Piece of the Puzzle............... 1

and Illuminating the Spaces in Between ......................................................................................................... 1

  Researcher Positionality ................................................................................................................................. 2

  The story of negotiating power between Ms. D and Ms. K begins ......................................................... 3

  Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................................................. 5

  Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................................................. 7

  Site Location and Participants ................................................................................................................... 8

  Research Questions .................................................................................................................................. 9

  Theoretical Bricolage ................................................................................................................................ 9

  Overview of Methodology and Methods ................................................................................................. 10

  Significance of the Study ............................................................................................................................ 11

  Overview of the Dissertation ..................................................................................................................... 12

  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 13

Chapter II ...................................................................................................................................................... 18

Literature Review ......................................................................................................................................... 18

Connecting Research and Theories to Images of Existing Co-Teaching Puzzles .............. 18

  Theoretical Bricolage ................................................................................................................................. 20

  Bricolage in Motion .................................................................................................................................. 21

  Collaboration and Power Dynamics in Co-Teaching ............................................................................... 25
RELATIONAL CO-TEACHING FRAMEWORK

Challenges and Benefits of Co-Teaching ................................................................. 26
Collaboration and co-teaching through a socio-cultural lens .................................... 27
Power Dynamics Between Co-Teachers .................................................................... 28
Shifting from the physical classroom space to unfamiliar remote classroom space .......... 30
Sense of Belonging ............................................................................................... 31
Cogenerative Dialogues: Co-Creating Inclusive Classroom Experiences .................. 39
Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 41

Chapter III ........................................................................................................... 44
Becoming Critically and Mutually Aware Co-Teachers ........................................... 44
How to Assemble the Puzzle ................................................................................. 44

Methodology ......................................................................................................... 44

Research Questions .............................................................................................. 47
Critical Auto|Ethnography for Transformation ........................................................ 48
Site Selection and Participants .............................................................................. 49
Research Methods/Data Sources .......................................................................... 50
Timetable .............................................................................................................. 54
Table 1: Research Phases and Interval Dates ............................................................ 54

Data Analysis ......................................................................................................... 55

Example of Process Coding ................................................................................... 56
Story in Story (SiS) Approach ................................................................................. 57

Overview of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework ............................................. 61

General Description of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework ............................. 62
Connecting, Disconnecting, and Reconnecting ...................................................... 63
Reciprocity ................................................................. 64
Impact on Praxis ............................................................. 65
Impact on Environment .................................................. 66

Ethical Considerations .................................................. 67
Research Quality ............................................................ 69
Parallel Criteria .............................................................. 69
Authenticity Criteria ......................................................... 72
Role of the Researcher ...................................................... 73
Conclusion ................................................................. 75

Chapter IV ................................................................. 76

Connecting Curiosity and Epistemology: Forming the Inclusive Image through the
Relational Co-Teaching Framework in the Physical Classroom ......................... 76

The Story Begins: Illuminating the Image of Ms. K’s and Ms. D’s Co-Teaching Puzzle .... 78

Reciprocity ................................................................. 79

Forming the puzzle frame: Mutuality and shared habitus ................................. 79
“We are two pieces to a puzzle.” Reciprocity between teachers and teachers and students .... 81
“We just clicked”: Connecting with schemas, structures, and resources .................. 83

Impact on Praxis ............................................................. 85

Disconnecting and reconnecting with agency and Diary of a Wimpy Kid .................. 86
Dialogic practice through cogenerative dialogue with students ............................ 88
Dialogic practices: “…would like to, but often we run out of time…” ......................... 90
Critical Theory, Structures, Schemas, and Reflexive Praxis in Action ..................... 92

Impact on Environment .................................................. 95
RELATIONAL CO-TEACHING FRAMEWORK

Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s Relationship Ignites Multiple Fields, Duality of Structures, and Agency ................................................................. 95

Duality of Structure, Schemas, and Resources ................................................................. 98

Co-Creating and Negotiating Power Spaces ................................................................. 101

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 103

Chapter V ..................................................................................................................... 110

Connecting and Disconnecting the Known with the Unfamiliar: .................................. 110

Reimagining the Image of the Co-Teaching Puzzle ....................................................... 110

Shifting and Being within Historical Spaces ................................................................. 110

Transforming Culture through Virtual Cogenerative Dialogues ................................. 113

Reciprocity .................................................................................................................. 114

Transforming and Evolving through Habitus, Structure and Agency ........................... 114

Critical disability theory, cultural and social capital, and newly constructed view of students’ abilities .................................................................................................................. 117

Multiplicity of structures, transposability of schemas, and Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s evolving shared habitus ................................................................................................................. 120

Historical Reciprocal Forces of Habitus and Fields in Ms. K’s and Ms. D’s Virtual Classroom ................................................................................................................................. 121

Impact on Praxis .......................................................................................................... 123

Universal design for learning and a new socially constructed notion of disability .......... 123

Dialogic Practices: Inviting student voice within the practice of production and reproduction ......................................................................................................................... 125
Student voice and dialogic practices: A new way of thinking about this new virtual social reality .......................................................................................................................... 127

**Impact on Environment** .................................................................................................................. 130

**Humanizing virtual inclusive spaces and structures through habitus** ......................... 130

Emerging cultural structure through an evolving shared habitus.................................................. 132

“Naming the World” a Freirean approach in creating experiential learning environments .... 134

Habitus, field, and agency: A dialectic between the internal/external and external/internal .. 135

**Cogenerative Dialogues and Reciprocal Reflections** ................................................................. 137

**Co-Creating and Negotiating Power Spaces** .............................................................................. 140

**Conclusion** .................................................................................................................................. 141

**Chapter VI** .................................................................................................................................. 144

A Transformed Cogenerated Culture of Belonging: Summary, Findings, Implications, &
Conclusions ........................................................................................................................................ 144

**Summary of the Study** .................................................................................................................. 146

**Major Findings: Dialoguing with the Research Questions** ....................................................... 148

Research Question #1: What specific interactions contributed to the ways that Ms. D and Ms. K co-created their classroom culture? ........................................................................................................ 149

Research Question #2. How did Ms. D and Ms. K maintain a culture of belonging when their familiar physical classroom was unexpectedly replaced with unfamiliar remote learning spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic? ........................................................................................................ 151

Research Question #2a: In what ways did the remote environment compel the teachers to begin and not to begin transforming culture in ways that supported a sense of belonging in their classroom? ........................................................................................................ 154
Research Questions #2b: How did cogenerative dialogues contribute and not contribute to their ability to transform a culture of inclusion in their unfamiliar, unexpected virtual learning space? .................................................................................................................................................................................. 155

Co-Created Spaces for Negotiating Power and Transformation ........................................ 156

Benefits from the limitations: Even when missing puzzle pieces, Ms. K’s and Ms. D’s reconstructed image is complete ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 158

Implications and Recommendations for Further Study .................................................. 159

Conclusions ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 161

References ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 165

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol .............................................................. 180

Appendix B: Cogenerative Dialogue Protocol with Co-Teachers .................................... 181

Appendix C: Observation Protocol ................................................................................... 182

Appendix D: Cogenerative Dialogue Protocol with Students .......................................... 183

Appendix E: Story in Story #1: Baseline Data ................................................................. 184

Interval #1: March 3, 2020, through March 10, 2020 ....................................................... 184

Appendix F: Story in Story #2 .......................................................................................... 185

Interval #3: March 20, 2020, to April 29, 2020 ............................................................... 185

Appendix G: Story in Story #3 .......................................................................................... 186

Interval #4: April 30, 2020- May 11, 2020 .................................................................... 186

Appendix H: Story in Story #4 .......................................................................................... 187

Interval #5: May 18, 2020-June 4, 2020 ....................................................................... 187

Appendix I: Story in Story #5 .......................................................................................... 188

Interval #6: June 5, 2020-June 19, 2020 ....................................................................... 188
Appendix O: Parent Consent Form ........................................................................................................195

Appendix P: Student Assent Form .......................................................................................................198
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Research Phases and Interval Dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Example of Process Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Theoretical Bricolage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Story in Story: Beginning the Remote Learning Shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Three Interconnected Experiences of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

Committing to the Process of Co-Teaching: Connecting Each Piece of the Puzzle and Illuminating the Spaces in Between

We are like two pieces of a puzzle that fit perfectly together.

Everyone is always telling us, and we know it. It is just so nice how everyone sees it. It is just so amazing to work with someone and for it to be like that. We just clicked and everyone can see that. (Ms. K, personal communication, March 3, 2020)

The metaphor of two puzzle pieces that seamlessly fit together is often used to describe the satisfaction of successful co-teaching relationships. Yet, two puzzle pieces alone do not reveal the full co-teaching image. Throughout this study, I documented what happened when one special educator and one general educator (Ms. D and Ms. K) worked together to create their classroom culture with their students in their fifth-grade suburban classroom. Through the process of a transformative, critical auto-ethnography using cogenerative dialogues, the process of this study provided opportunities for two co-teachers to reflect, collaborate, and co-create a culture of belonging with their students. We started our work in the physical classroom and shifted to remote learning as we all unexpectedly responded to the COVID pandemic. Multiple perspectives and rich descriptions of teachers’ and students’ experiences were documented to reveal actions toward transforming teaching and learning in their physical classroom and through their shift to remote learning. My own reflective practices were documented through journaling and analyzed for deeper understandings of how my perceptions about co-teaching practices changed alongside the participants in this study.
This study extends the current literature on co-teaching practices by illuminating what it means for co-teachers to collaboratively create a classroom culture where each teacher, along with their students, experiences a sense of belonging. The collaborative interactions between Ms. K and Ms. D uncovered the benefits of co-creating opportunities for each teacher to contribute specific forms of power. Through their work together, Ms. D distributed her specific form of power as a special education teacher, while Ms. K rescinded some of her power as a general education, which resulted in blending their individual expertise into a collective expression of partnership. Ms. K and Ms. D co-created equitable co-teaching experiences that valued and blended the active involvement and expertise of each co-teacher throughout all intervals of the instructional process. In the next sections, I provide an overview of the background of the problem and the purpose along with the framework and methods of this study. To launch the context and overview of this study, the next section shares a brief introduction to explain my positionality as well as to introduce the co-teachers in this study.

**Researcher Positionality**

I was situated as researcher and participant. An auto|ethnography was an ideal approach that allowed me to blend my *self* (auto) into the analysis and interpretation of the classroom culture under study. Throughout this study a Sheffer stroke, rather than a slash, was applied to accentuate the natural learning process between myself and participants. We engaged in ongoing dialogue that encouraged learning with (indicated by the Sheffer stroke) rather than an either/or relationship (as a slash would indicate). Auto|ethnography focuses on the relationship between the *self* and the other as well the relationship between the *self* and practice (Ellis, 1999). By entering the co-teachers’ and students’ experiences as a member of their classroom culture, I gathered valuable inside information that would be missing if I chose a traditional ethnography
(Holman Jones et al., 2013). Revisiting and analyzing my past co-teaching experiences provided deeper insights into the present. I was observant of how my past experiences allowed me to understand and learn alongside the participants in this study more deeply.

**The story of negotiating power between Ms. D and Ms. K begins…**

“I am just so grateful to be working with [Ms. K]. We just clicked immediately.” Ms. D continued, “It is just so amazing to work with her. And you know what I mean, I do not take this for granted because you know it doesn’t always work out that way.” In a separate, individual interview, Ms. K shared, “It is just so amazing to work with [Ms. D]. I always loved co-teaching, but based on grade-level needs, I have not co-taught that much.”

Ms. K expressed this was her first experience co-teaching with Ms. D, and it was also her first experience co-teaching in the district’s full day model. Her past experiences with co-teaching were when the district implemented a half-day model where the special education teacher and general education teacher co-taught for part of the day—with a classroom aide in the room with the general education teacher the other half of the day. “That model just didn’t work,” Ms. K added. We tried, but it was difficult. In a separate individual interview, Ms. D also brought up her history with other co-teachers during the half-day model. “I just never felt like an equal partner.” She continued, “Even now in the full day model, you know, sometimes that happens where it doesn’t always work, so I am so grateful.” During one of the early cogenerative dialogue sessions between the co-teachers and me, Ms. K shared, “We are two pieces of a puzzle.”

Both teachers smiled broadly as Ms. D added, “It’s true.”

Ms. K continued, “Everyone sees it.”
Like completing a puzzle, sometimes it is enjoyable, and sometimes the challenge to connect the many pieces needed to form a unified image is a daunting experience. Puzzle users make a commitment to move through various steps of sorting, envisioning, and connecting pieces to form the completed image. This commitment inevitably involves attempting to connect pieces, only to find they do not connect. The puzzle user then disconnects the pieces and continues to find the match. Piece by piece, from that first placement that connects two pieces of the many—to the final piece that completes the whole image—the process is one of commitment. In addition, it is one that celebrates each piece that matches with another, knowing that the two pieces are part of a larger image that shares the satisfaction of hard work.

Ms. K and Ms. D’s story is one of commitment to working together, piece by piece, to make sure that their co-teaching image illustrated harmony and equity, as they almost unconsciously allowed for the space for differences in their roles. At times, the space between each of their puzzle pieces represented the possibilities of ways they could connect. Other times, the spaces in between their puzzle pieces represented time where one or both teachers needed their personal time and space to grow personally and professionally. Through this specific process of collaboration, their two pieces of the puzzle shared the desire and motivation to continue finding connections—through the necessary disconnections—to resolutely work together to create the entire image of their co-teaching experience. Ms. D and Ms. K, like any co-teaching pair, met with situational constraints that emerged from personal experiences and social norms within their school setting. Moreover, the shift to remote learning was an unprecedented situation they needed to contend with along their co-teaching journey. Their story became one that described how they came together to negotiate power that valued the role and the perspectives of each co-teacher. Their co-created power spaces permeated through their
relationship with each other and their students, their instructional decisions, their praxis, and their classroom environment in ways that provided participants (teachers and students) with a sense of belonging in their classroom community. Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s co-teaching experience responds to the necessity for co-teaching collaborations to be structured within a process of acknowledging individual expertise that blend into authentic interactions in partnership.

Statement of the Problem

The Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 outlines the necessity to expand appropriate educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2016). Co-teaching supports the interpretation of the act that the least restrictive environment for most students with disabilities is the general education setting (Alquraini, 2013). Co-teaching requires a shift from a general education teacher working independently to working collaboratively with a special education teacher. The aim of co-teaching promises a shared approach in which the two teachers work together to meet the strengths and needs of all students. Yet, according to Friend et al. (2010), classroom realities unfold with a dual approach in which the roles of each teacher are separate. The special education teacher often struggles to “fit” into the general education process as the social norm and dominant culture. Co-teaching experiences result in special education teachers feeling like a teaching assistant rather than feeling valued as an equitable part of a teaching team (Eisenman et al., 2011). In a meta-synthesis qualitative study, special education teachers were found to take a subordinate role in assisting the general education teacher (Scruggs et al., 2007).

Cornelius and Herrenkohl (2004) reported that the notion of power is inherent in the process of inclusion in the classroom. Often, students who struggle are expected to meet the average expectations of the dominant culture (general education) and are left feeling isolated or
separate from peers. Furthermore, if power dynamics are not addressed, the special education co-teacher struggles to feel effective and valued with a culture that values normalizing general education practices. Moreover, Bessette (2008) shared students’ perspective that from their experiences, general education teachers are the lead teacher and special education teachers are viewed as teachers who help when students need more support. A necessity to harmonize possible power imbalances is needed to create more inclusive co-taught classrooms. Mensah (2011) recommended co-teachers spend time discussing their perspectives as they delineate their individual and collective roles as they learn from one another. Bangou and Austin (2011) shared the value of dialogue between the co-teachers to increase each feeling valued and active throughout the instructional process.

Currently, the view of co-teaching and inclusive classrooms is seen through the lens of special education. This lens perpetuates a duality that may adversely affect the relationships of the two teachers, as well as their students. Although the benefits of feeling a sense of belonging have been documented, the understanding of how teachers may cultivate a sense of belonging with all learners in the room (teachers and students) is limited (Slaten et al., 2016). Berman (1997) called for a pedagogy of belonging that espoused cooperative learning and ongoing interactions that cultivate relationships throughout daily activities. According to Iyer (2013), when cooperative learning is implemented effectively, the classroom becomes an equitable process in promoting belonging between teachers and students within the fabric and culture of their classroom.

Studies reveal collaboration as a key component for effective co-teaching (Bacharach et al., 2007; Cook & Friend, 1991; Meizlish & Anderson, 2018). Other studies report that collaboration and the application of co-teaching practices continue to be a source of struggle for
co-teachers (Pugach & Winn, 2011; Scruggs et al., 2007). The challenges of co-teaching, such as unclear role delineation and unfamiliarity with content, continue to adversely impact co-teaching relationships (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008). The benefits of co-teaching also show that co-teaching has the potential to increase social, personal, and professional growth as co-teachers share their expertise between themselves and with their students (Bacharach & Heck, 2007; Davis & Florian, 2004). There is a gap in knowledge for how co-teachers may negotiate their power to co-create a culture of belonging with one another and their students. This study contributes a framework that explains how the co-teachers in this study collaborated and distributed power between them, which enabled them to push back on ableist discourses that create barriers toward inclusion and belonging.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this critical, transformative auto|ethnography was to describe the contributions between one general educator and one special educator and their impact on co-creating a classroom culture of belonging within their fifth-grade, suburban, co-taught, inclusive classroom. There is abundant evidence demonstrating collaboration as a necessity for effective co-teaching. Yet, if power relations are not addressed, collaborative practices easily become compromised, and the special educator often struggles to actively participate and contribute within the traditional normalizing general education practices. I aimed to understand critical influences that affected collaboration, power relations, and the creation of the classroom culture in the classroom under study. Although this study applied cogenerative dialogues in the traditional way—in the physical classroom with students contributing their ideas—this study was unique in that I adapted and applied cogenerative dialogues in a way that has not yet been done. This study introduces the process of virtual cogenerative dialogues to understand how the two
teachers and students experienced teaching and learning in this classroom—and how they co-created their classroom culture. Through this study, I aimed to describe how the process of co-creating a culture of belonging in their classroom was experienced and understood as an evolving process by all learners (teachers, students, and me). In addition to cogenerative dialogues, this study included classroom observations, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews with the two co-teachers, Ms. K and Ms. D.

**Site Location and Participants**

This study took place at a suburban elementary school in the Northeast region of the United States. Total enrollment in the elementary school was around 540 students. Male students made up 51%, which was comparable to the 49% female population. Most of the student population was White (85%), with a percentage of Hispanic or Latino (8%) and Asian (4%) students. Students with disabilities (17%) and economically disadvantaged (9%) are included in the total population. English-language learners attend other elementary sites within the district. The average student-teacher ratio is 13:1, and the inclusive classroom setting under study comprised 9 students with disabilities and 10 students without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The site was selected following the superintendent’s interest to expand inclusive practices in this school district.

The classroom under study was selected following my release of an informative flyer. Ms. K and Ms. D were the first to respond via email with their interest to participate. Ms. D was the special educator in this classroom. Her career includes a background of being a general educator for nine years and a special educator for the past five years. This was her first experience teaching in a fifth-grade classroom. Ms. K, also tenured, was the general education teacher with 14 years experiences. This was her fifth-year teaching fifth grade. Both teachers had
past experiences co-teaching; however, this was their first-time co-teaching together. Their class comprised 19 students between the ages of 9 and 10. Although there were 9 students classified as a student with a disability, all students experienced learning alongside one another within the process of co-teaching.

**Research Questions**

During this four-month study, I documented the actions and interactions between the two co-teachers as they collaborated in creating a culture of belonging in their classroom. The following overarching questions guided my focus:

1) What specific interactions contributed to the ways that Ms. K and Ms. D co-created a culture of belonging in their classroom?

2) How did they maintain a culture of belonging when their familiar physical classroom was unexpectedly replaced with unfamiliar remote learning spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

   2a) In what ways did the remote environment compel the teachers to transform culture to support a sense of belonging in their classroom?

   2b) How did cogenerative dialogues contribute to the co-teachers’ ability to transform a culture of belonging in their unfamiliar virtual learning space?

**Theoretical Bricolage**

To study co-teaching and the co-creation of a culture of belonging, I applied a theoretical framework comprised of lenses that humanize and value all participants. My framework afforded an iterative, theory-to-practice research process that increased my level as well as participants’ levels of awareness and encouraged reflective action steps toward improving interactions within the classroom culture. As the overarching theory for this study, critical pedagogy seeks to humanize and empower learners (Freire, 1970), which is at the center of co-creating a culture of
belonging within an inclusive classroom. While critical pedagogy was comprehensive and grounded my work, it was not fine grained enough on its own. Due to the complexity of naturalistic inquiry, I needed other theories to allow for the interpretation of unique multiple perspectives as I collected and analyzed data culled from the lived day-to-day interactions of participants in the classroom. A theoretical bricolage (Kincheloe, 2005) approach provided the additional movement and flexibility for thinking and analyzing specific data over time and across micro, meso, and macro levels as well as between the internal/personal and external/social communication practices between participants. This approach allowed for an in-depth, rigorous interpretation of participants’ understandings and actions about co-teaching and inclusion through the lens of various theories. To do a multi-level analysis, I combined structure and agency (Sewell, 2005); habitus, cultural capital, and fields (Bourdieu, 1977); relational cultural theory (Miller, 1976); critical disability theory (Hosking, 2008); and Foucault’s (1982) notion of power and knowledge. This theoretical bricolage is discussed in detail in Chapter II.

**Overview of Methodology and Methods**

This critical transformative autoethnography incorporated dialogic methods, including cogenerative dialogues, semi-structured interviews, and student journaling activities. Over the four months, participants were invited to experience co-teaching and inclusion through reflective and collaborative processes. The autoethnographic design allowed me to reflect on how my own beliefs and actions transformed as I learned alongside participants. The Sheffer stroke indicates a dialectical relationship between myself and my participants. The critical transformative lens allowed for the movement of reflections and interactions as a way of learning more about how co-teaching and inclusion was experienced and how it changed over the course of the study.
Cogenerative dialogues (cogens) were a crucial component of my study because they were both a data source and a means of cultural transformation in the classroom. Cogens are dynamic interactions of cultural, social, and symbolic capital that addresses how these features mediate understandings as participants examine their context for improving teaching and learning through dialectic pedagogy (Bourdieu, 1986; Roth et al., 2002). As my research shifted to remote learning, I adapted the traditional process of cogenerative dialogues into virtual spaces. More details are provided in Chapter III.

**Significance of the Study**

Currently, literature supports co-teaching as a process of collaboration and ongoing connections between co-teachers. My study sheds new light on the value of creating space for each co-teacher to practice their individual forms of power in the process of creating a culture of belonging. As teachers experience space to negotiate power relations, they provide the freedom of thinking and acting in unique ways that strengthen personal growth as well as professional co-teaching practices. My study adds to the literature by providing new ways of thinking about the process of collaboration between co-teachers. In addition, my research contributes the use of cogenerative dialogues as a valuable method for strengthening co-teaching relationships and overall culture of belonging in physical or virtual inclusive classrooms. I merge bodies of literature that are not yet speaking to one another—specifically cogenerative dialogues, special education, general education, and co-teaching. My study provides new ways of considering the process of creating a culture of belonging in inclusive settings through a framework for relational co-teaching practices.

The data analysis for this study included a process I created as I intentionally sought to understand the multiple perspectives throughout the process. The Story in Story (SiS) approach
may be applied by other researchers as they strive to embrace the process of describing knowledge and truth derived from multiple viewpoints. Moreover, the results of the study provide a framework for understanding the process of collaboration in co-teaching. Chapter III explains the framework in detail. This study also contributes to the literature on cogenerative dialogues by illustrating the possibilities of virtual cogns.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

In Chapter I, I provided a rationale for the need to understand the specific interactions that shaped meaningful collaboration for authentic co-teaching partnerships between general educators and special educators. I explained how the issue of power relations and equitable co-teaching experiences must be intentionally addressed to co-create a culture of belonging within inclusive classroom settings. To guide the description of my varied data sources, I shared the framework and accompanying micro, meso, and macro theories that allowed me to honor the individual views expressed to form the collective throughout the study. I shared the research questions, methods, and significance of the study for improving co-teaching practices.

In Chapter II, I positioned myself as a researcher by providing a detailed description of the theories I used to support my research design and methods that include critical auto|ethnography, culture, and cogenerative dialogues. I discussed relevant research to create an image for what the literature says about co-teaching and collaboration between special educators and general educators. I demonstrated the gap in the literature and the contribution my study makes in filling the gap. Creating a sense of belonging as well as cogenerative dialogues as a tool for co-creating classroom culture was also included.

In Chapter III, I outlined the site and participants. I provided greater detail to discuss my methodology, research methods, and data sources. I outlined the timetable of this four-month
study. A detailed summary of my data analysis approach was provided along with a framework to explain the data. Ethical considerations were included as well as research quality.

Chapter IV focused on the already established classroom culture created by the co-teachers (Ms. K and Ms. D) and their students. Using Bourdieu’s notion of habitus and Sewell’s theory of structure and agency, I described the components to the co-teachers’ relationship that provided a grounding effect in co-creating their culture of belonging in the physical classroom. I applied the relational cultural theory to explain specific co-teaching interactions. I created and shared the relational co-teaching framework to explain how their relationship was a precondition for the way their partnership and belonging with one another permeated through their praxis and environment. Moreover, I illuminated the notion of negotiated power between the co-teachers as explained through the lens of Foucault and his theory of power and knowledge. In addition, I applied critical disability theory to explain the way Ms. D and Ms. K created space to negotiate power to value the other and to challenge ableist thinking.

Chapter V continued to analyze the data sets as the teachers and students shifted to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. I continued to use the theoretical bricolage and relational co-teaching framework to explain the ways Ms. D and Ms. K used their specific forms of power to challenge ableist thinking and to co-create their culture of belonging.

In Chapter VI, I revisited the research questions and provided implications of the study. The limitations of the study were outlined as well as some of the possible benefits that the limitations uncovered.

Conclusion

Through the lens of critical pedagogy, this transformative autoethnography aimed to construct new understandings and to see how teachers and students collaborated and co-created a
culture of belonging in their inclusive classroom using cogenerative dialogues. Through the cogen process, along with the dialectical nature of an auto|ethnography, I learned how participants acted individually and in partnership to co-create co-taught inclusive experiences in their classroom. As a result, I learned that each co-teacher and their students felt valued as part of their classroom community. I uncovered themes that guided me to develop the relational co-teaching framework to explain the specific collaborative actions and interactions that served to guide an effective co-teaching experience. My findings explain that the nature of co-teaching is situational and contextual. Ms. D and Ms. K engaged in a mutual relationship that permeated through their praxis and environment. Their specific collaborative actions included valuing time to disconnect so they each could grow personally and professionally and then reconnect to continue to learn with one another during class time. As I remained open to how the data unfolded, my findings and self-reflective processes built new theoretical knowledge and understandings of pedagogical processes as my research on co-teaching, inclusion, and cogenerative dialogues came together to increase collaboration and a culture of belonging with teachers and students in the inclusive setting under study. The next chapter reviews the literature that structures current knowledge and beliefs around co-teaching, cogenerative dialogues, and creating a sense of belonging within classroom cultures.

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Ableism:** Discrimination against people with disabilities in favor of able-bodied individuals (Hehir, 2002).

**Bricolage:** Research that is considered a critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical, and multi-methodological approach to inquiry (Berry, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 1999; Kincheloe, 2011). Bricoleurs are researchers who apply this approach through a process of constructing knowledge through materials available (Levi-Strauss, 1966). The bricolage approach allows researchers to
embrace a multiplicity of epistemological and political components through their inquiry process (Berry, 2004).

Cogenerative Dialogue: Group discussions in which a small number of students and the co-teachers review evidence from a recent class and cogenerate resolutions toward new ideas, new rules, and new understandings for actions that may take place to make changes in teacher and student roles and responsibilities for accomplishing desired changes (Tobin, 2006).

Co-teaching: For purposes of this study, co-teaching is a service delivery option for providing specialized services to students with disabilities or other special needs while they remain in their general education classes: “Co-teaching occurs when two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, blended group of students, primarily in a single physical space” (Friend & Cook, 2017, p. 163).

Critical Pedagogy: According to Freire (1970), critical pedagogy explores dialogic relationships between teaching and learning. It is a progressive teaching philosophy and framework that exposes the dynamics of power relations and patterns of oppression and inequality within group social structures. By questioning authority, students may take part in the process of co-creating their learning within a community and to critically evaluate the knowledge and opinions they have been taught to embrace.

Cultural Capital: The knowledge an individual gains over time in association with being a part of social groups (Bourdieu, 1977).

Culture of Belonging: For the purposes of this study, a culture of belonging refers to the belief that to meet the needs of all learners, it is imperative to create the space within the daily instructional process to value the perspective and experiences of each co-teacher as well as each student in the room.
Dialogic Practices: Freire (1970) believed that through the natural process of communication, teachers and students may engage in a continuous journey of learning through dialogue as a means of creating and recreating ourselves and our culture.

Deficit Model: Deficit perspectives view academic failure in terms of cultural, linguistic, intellectual, moral, and social differences within communities (Gorski, 2008). Although general education teachers may present with the best of intentions, the deficit model still prevails when perceiving students with disabilities in general education settings (Armstrong, 2012).

Habitus: Refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital and the ingrained skills and dispositions we possess due to our life experiences (Bourdieu, 1977).

Inclusion: For the purposes of this study, inclusion is the practice of educating students with and without disabilities together in general education classrooms (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011).

Learners: This term embraces that learning is a life-long journey. Teachers and their students are learners together. The term learner indicates there is no age limit to the term student.

Power: According to Foucault (1998), power can be a necessary, productive, and positive force.

Praxis: The actions and interventions that teachers and students may take as a result from becoming critically aware of their current experiences within a situation. Through this critically conscious awareness, they may act upon their deeper understandings to transform exposed oppressive practices toward an education of freedom (Freire, 1970).

Students with disabilities: For the purposes of this study, this term refers to students who are eligible for special education services through the eligibility of one of the 13 disability categories according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004.

Transformative process: Freire believed in an ongoing learning process that was iterative and ever-changing. The way things are in the present moment is not static and must be challenged
through dialogue, reflection, and praxis to change life for the better (Giroux, Freire, & McLaren, 1988).

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** This is a way of teaching and learning that guides all learners to access and meaningfully connect with the curriculum. This approach to designing and implementing instruction offers multiple ways for learners to be engaged, to access and perceive the content, and express what they know and understand (Meyer et al., 2014).

**Variable Learners:** Based on neuroscience, all individuals vary in the way they become engaged, perceive, and express their knowledge and understanding. As educators plan for the natural variability that occurs in all populations of learners, they meet the strengths and needs of every learner in their classroom through a strengths-based lens (Meyer et al., 2014).
Chapter II

Literature Review

Connecting Research and Theories to Images of Existing Co-Teaching Puzzles

We don’t know what makes this work. We really just have a unique relationship as co-teachers. Since the beginning of the year, parents explained it as two pieces to a puzzle that just fit perfectly together. People just recognize it. I just feel so good about it because it doesn’t always happen with many co-teachers, right, [Ms. D]? Yes, it is so true. It just works, replied Ms. D.

(Ms. K and Ms. D, personal communication, April 3, 2020)

It was now four weeks into remote learning. Ms. D and Ms. K were already on our Google Meet as I arrived on time. I entered a lively conversation filled with chatter and laughter. They welcomed me into their personal conversation about balancing their schoolwork with their home life. The conversation naturally flowed into how they were doing in the classroom. They both agreed the process of remote co-teaching and learning was improving.

Ms. D and Ms. K often referred to themselves as two pieces of a puzzle that fit perfectly together. They acknowledged the image of their collaboration being visible to others. It was evident by the simple but thoughtful way Ms. K concluded her collaborative gesture of asking Ms. D, her co-teaching partner, what she thought. Ms. D and Ms. K tell the story of two co-teachers who created a culture of belonging through collaboration that valued the role of the other. Their relationship allowed for a sense of belonging to unfold as they negotiated power within the context of their daily routines.
According to Cornelius and Herrenkohl (2004), the notion of power is inherent in the process of inclusion in the classroom. Often, the culture defers to a process where students who struggle are outside the group of students who meet the average expectations of the dominant culture. In addition, if power dynamics are not addressed, the special education co-teacher struggles to feel effective and valued with a culture that values normalizing practices. Pugach and Winn (2011) called for a renewed focus on co-teaching that supports inclusion but also counteracts the historic isolation of special education teachers and students that construct barriers in creating a culture of shared responsibility and inclusivity. Moreover, Sayed (2002) argued that educators must be aware to embrace an understanding of what inclusion looks like. Specifically, educators must ask themselves: “Who’s in and who’s out, and, equally important, who decides?” (Slee, 2001, p. 116). As co-teaching continues to be more common in public schools across the United States, the power differentials within co-teaching teams must be illuminated to guide the co-creation of a culture of belonging between the co-teachers and within their classroom environment. My study adds to the current literature by using cogenerative dialogue to understand specific co-teaching interactions that serve to create a classroom culture where both co-teachers feel valued as they share their expertise throughout daily classroom routines. In addition, managing power imbalances between co-teachers is a common source of conflict that is not well addressed in the literature; my study will begin to fill this gap. This chapter also considers the other pieces that surround the two pieces of the puzzle that symbolize the two co-teachers within the complex construction of any co-taught, inclusive classroom. The next section shares my theoretical bricolage I used to frame my study. The subsequent sections share the story of the literature that describes co-teacher dynamics and inclusive classroom cultures. Specifically, I discuss how the literature explains collaboration and power dynamics between
special educators and general educators. I then move on to discuss the notion of a sense of belonging as teachers and students with and without disabilities come together to teach and learn in one classroom. Finally, I bring the discussion to the topic of cogenerative dialogues as a possibility to improve co-teaching and create a culture of belonging.

**Theoretical Bricolage**

This study was informed by a theoretical bricolage, with critical pedagogy as the framework that provided the context of interconnected levels of experiences that moved within macro, meso, and micro levels of social reality. Although critical pedagogy frames my overall study, by itself, it is insufficient for a fine-grained multi-level analysis. Therefore, additional theories were intentionally selected based on emerging themes that resulted from the varied data sources.

Denzin and Lincoln (1999) conceptualized and influenced bricolage as a research process to move beyond monological approaches to constructing knowledge. The etymological foundation of bricolage comes from a traditional French expression, which denotes people creatively using materials left over from other projects to construct new artifacts. To fashion their bricolage projects, bricoleurs use only the tools and materials they have available (Levi-Strauss, 1966). Kincheloe and Berry’s (2004) description is worth quoting at length:

What the bricolage is dealing with in this context is a double ontology of complexity: first, the complexity of objects of inquiry and their being-in-the world; second, the nature of the social construction of human subjectivity, the production of human being. Such an understanding opens a new era of social research where the process of becoming human agents is appreciated to a new level of sophistication. The complex feedback loop between an unstable social structure and the individual can be charted in a way that
grants human beings insight into the means by which power operates and the democratic process is subverted. In this complex ontological view, bricoleurs understand that social structures do not determine individual subjectivity but constrain it in remarkably intricate ways. The bricolage is acutely interested in developing and employing a variety of strategies to help specify the ways subjectivity is shaped. (p. 74)

A theoretical bricolage allowed me to embrace the complexity of thinking about a culture of belonging and the power dynamics between Ms. K and Ms. D. In addition, it allowed me to analyze a dynamic and shifting cultural process.

**Bricolage in Motion**

Through the bricolage approach, I was immersed in the “complex feedback loop” between the co-teachers, their students, and their structure in the physical and virtual classroom settings. As a collection, my theories created an image of an ongoing, flexible inward and outward motion of freedom. The image of a willow tree’s downward arching pendent branches can explain my collection of theories. The strong roots—nourished by sunlight and water—provided the stability to allow the flexible branches to move freely. My own knowledge of co-teaching and vast experiences moved from the base and the roots of this framework and fed into the willow tree through the process of internal and external communications alongside the actions of my participants. Micro and meso theories of structure, agency, and habitus were like the sun and water that supported the growth of the individual tree. Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s habitus were nourished as they internalized their external experiences. Each teacher acted upon her own personal knowledge and expertise that served to co-create the structures they formed together. The way each individual tree brings shade and joy to members of the community depicts the meso theory used to explain the relationship between Ms. D and Ms. K and how they guided the
way their students would experience the culture in their classroom. Finally, the external wind that sets all the tree’s branches—as a whole—in motion depicts the macro and meso theories needed to explain the way Ms. D and Ms. K worked together to challenge ableist views that has a long history of affecting the movement of educators. The freedom of motion experienced by the tree’s branches is made possible by the internal absorption of the external sources of sun and water. The tree internalizes the external that leads to strong roots and the ability to be moved by the wind. As a collection, these theories allowed me to be like the flexible branches as I moved in and out and in the directions of the data as a result of individual and collective structures provided by participants. Furthermore, the stability of the bricolage provided a sense of clarity and structure throughout the process of shifting into the uncertainty of remote learning experiences. My researcher’s journal allowed me to become more deeply aware and connected with my data as it unfolded. I connected with theories that supported micro and meso levels through structure, agency, and habitus. I was able to further understand Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s relationship at a meso level by noticing how the co-teachers’ interactions supported their relationship and cultivation of classroom culture. Finally, I connected with macro and meso theories to explain how the co-teachers responded to macro-level discourses around the notion of ability, disability, power relations, and discourses about policies and regulations (see Figure 1). Figure 1 depicts my theoretical bricolage in motion. This framework allowed me to move in and out between internal and external dialogue along with participants. The arching arrows at the sides of the figure symbolize the flexibility in movement between the theories across the layers of understanding. As my overarching framework, critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) provided levels of experiences and analysis at the micro, meso, and macro levels.
Critical pedagogy aims to humanize and empower both students and teachers through ongoing interactions, resulting in all learners feeling a sense of freedom to actively participate and co-create a classroom culture. As Ms. D and Ms. K engaged in personal reflexivity, I swayed toward micro and meso theories: structure/agency (Sewell, 2005) and habitus, cultural capital, and fields (Bourdieu, 1977) to explain how their internal/personal communications served as the stability they needed to then share their thoughts with the other. Through their transparent communication, they demonstrated an increased awareness of social relations at the macro community level as they challenged ableist views. This increased awareness guided me to move toward critical disability theory to explain how their knowledge guided their decisions at the
meso classroom level. The deliberate selection of critical disability theory illuminated new ways of thinking about the nature of disability and participatory citizenship within the classroom. At the meso level, Ms. K and Ms. D cultivated a relationship that resulted in each teacher feeling valued by the other. Each teacher co-created space for one another to contribute their specific form of power. As the theme of power relations emerged, I moved within my bricolage framework to apply Foucault’s (1982) notion of power and knowledge. Foucault’s view on power illuminated the ways Ms. D and Ms. K transcended possible views on co-teaching, where the general education teacher is the lead, and the special education teacher is in an assisting role. The relational cultural theory explained the relationship between Ms. K and Ms. D. According to Miller (1976), individuals constantly grow through relationships throughout this lifetime. Interpersonal connections are formed by mutual empathy with zest, clarity, worth, and creativity that leads to a desire for more connection. Moreover, disconnecting can be an opportunity for growth that strengthens relationships; however, chronic disconnections may create disempowering isolation. This theory explained the natural process of interactions among Ms. K, Ms. D, and their students as voluntary and involuntary situations of disconnection emerged throughout the process of teaching and learning together. Critical pedagogy was the framework that afforded a deeper analysis into the macro, meso, and micro layers of understanding through other interlocking theories. Like the willow branches, I was moved by the external wind of the data to guide my selection of theories. The next section begins the story of the literature by discussing the notion of co-teaching, with collaboration as a key component in cultivating equitable co-teaching relationships.
Collaboration and Power Dynamics in Co-Teaching

The Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 was passed to expand appropriate and meaningful educational experiences for students with disabilities (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2016). Although co-teaching is not a specified service along the continuum of services provided under federal law, it has become a common arrangement to educate students with special needs alongside their same-aged peers in the general education classroom (Friend, 2014). Co-teaching supports the interpretation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act that the least restrictive environment for most students with disabilities is the general education setting (Alquraini, 2013). Co-teaching provides access to the general education curriculum as well as opportunities to learn alongside students without disabilities (Theoharis & Causton, 2014). For co-teaching to work successfully, collaboration has been identified as a key component in effective co-teaching practices (Cook & Friend, 2010; DuFour, 2004). According to Friend and Bauman (2016), collaboration has become a widely desired construct in the literature since the 1980s with the aim of transforming school culture. Yet, the role of collaboration amongst special educators dates back before the historic 1975 special education legislation. Friend and Cook (2017) defined collaboration as: “…a style for direct instruction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal” (p. 6). This definition sheds light on any need to collaborate within a school setting as well as the specific collaboration needed to educate students with and without disabilities in the same classroom. When co-teachers experience reciprocal collaboration, the benefits of co-teaching unfold (Blanton & Pugach, 2007; Sledge & Pazey, 2013; Sokal & Sharma, 2014). However, conflicts also occur due to differences in values, beliefs, and practices.
The following section reviews some of the challenges and benefits that affect power relations between co-teachers.

**Challenges and Benefits of Co-Teaching**

Research continues to share the unique challenges produced by co-teaching. Lack of common planning time, administrative support, and differing teaching styles may interfere with effective co-teaching experiences (Carter et al., 2009). Furthermore, unclear delineation of roles and responsibilities and unfamiliarity with content curriculum continue to undermine effective co-teaching experiences (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Pugach & Winn, 2011; Scruggs et al., 2007). Co-teaching may also release positive results. Power-DeFur and Orelove (1997) found increased social and communication skills in students with disabilities as well as increased scores on standardized tests. Students with and without disabilities enjoyed peer interactions and felt prepared for post-schoolwork experiences. Examples of the benefits of co-teaching also include students being exposed to teachers with varying expertise (Bacharach & Heck, 2007), smaller teacher-student ratio (Yanamandram & Noble, 2006), and increased opportunities for teachers to learn from and with one another (Sandholtz, 2000).

Co-teaching is an inclusive educational approach that embraces a general educator and a special educator being physically present in the same classroom on a daily basis in a manner that ideally includes collaboration and shared responsibilities for all students in the class (Cook & Friend, 1991). Meizlish and Anderson (2018) posited that co-teaching is a collaborative professional relationship in which the two teachers collaborate on all areas of instruction, including planning the content, grading, and providing feedback. Moreover, according to Bacharach et al. (2003), co-teachers must work collaboratively to design class activities. Although co-teaching is an increasingly common practice in general education classrooms, co-
RELATIONAL CO-TEACHING FRAMEWORK

teachers continue to struggle with the implementation of co-teaching practices that involve collaboration and applying co-teaching models of instruction (Pugach & Winn, 2011; Scruggs et al., 2007). When co-teaching is experienced through the lens of equity, each co-teacher is valued for the individual as well as collective contributions to the creation of their classroom culture. The participants in my study experienced a professional relationship that was fostered through their strong interest to learn from and with the other. Even through the challenge of shifting to remote learning, they continued to value the role and expertise of one another.

Collaboration and co-teaching through a socio-cultural lens

At the heart of co-teaching and inclusive education are classrooms with students learning together within heterogenous groups. To achieve success within this process, both teachers must share their individual knowledge and skills to support learning outcomes and overall co-teaching success (Davis & Florian, 2004). Through collaboration, co-teaching holds great promise for teachers’ personal and professional learning (McDuffie et al., 2009). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) posited that teachers’ professional learning must be based on active learning, reflective thinking, and collective participation. Co-teaching relationships may be viewed, in part, as an ongoing peer-learning relationship that shifts between contexts of daily in-class activities as well as beyond the classroom (Desimone et al., 2001). According to Cook and Friend (1995), co-teaching calls for active involvement and the sharing the responsibilities between both teachers throughout all phases of instruction. However, in practice, this collaboration can be a challenge resulting in many co-teachers struggling in conflict (Scruggs et al., 2007). Inequalities between general educators and special educators due to conflicts between varied teaching styles, structural barriers in setting up consistent co-planning time, as well as making time to share ideas and resources are some examples that begin to explain the complex
power dynamics between co-teachers. When collaboration breaks down, the challenges of co-teaching overpower the benefits. Yet, when power relations are addressed, a unique collaborative relationship is revealed as the co-creation of classroom culture unfolds. More research is needed to illuminate the value of attending to power relations in co-teaching relationships. Ms. D and Ms. K demonstrated differences in styles, yet each shared the desire to learn from and with the other.

**Power Dynamics Between Co-Teachers**

One area that is not well addressed in the literature is how co-teachers manage various imbalances of power between them. Although the research makes it clear that collaboration is at the heart of a successful co-teaching relationship, what happens when this idea to work together in collaboration falls apart due to imbalances of power? Co-teaching requires a shift from the general educator teaching independently as sole decision maker to two teachers becoming interdependent who compromise. When co-teachers move into these collaborative spaces, both teachers feel empowered. Yet, when the shift leaves gaps in collaboration and communication, feelings of dominance and subordination will adversely affect the co-teaching relationship (Fredman & Doughney, 2012).

Theoretically, co-teaching promises a blended approach; however, in practice, a dual approach often becomes the classroom reality (Friend et al., 2010). This dual approach often places the special education teacher’s role as separate from the general educator’s role where the special education teacher struggles to “fit into” the general education dominant culture. Research on the roles of co-teachers indicate that special education teachers often feel like teaching assistants to the general educator’s lead role (Bessette, 2008; Eisenman et al., 2011). Most effective co-teaching experiences occur when the special education teacher’s knowledge and
expertise are utilized alongside the general education teacher’s skills (Scruggs et al., 2007; Stein, 2016). In a mixed-method study, Austin (2001) surveyed 139 teachers’ perceptions about co-teaching. The results showed that both general education and special education teachers believed the general education teacher was more active in planning and teaching within co-taught classrooms. In a meta-synthesis of qualitative research on co-teaching, Scruggs et al. (2007) found that special education teachers predominantly took a subordinate role assisting while the general education teacher taught the curriculum. In addition, Bessette (2008) collected student drawings from 40 middle school students and 45 elementary students across the district. Students reported the general education teacher to be the lead teacher, with the special education teacher being in a support rather than lead role. General education and special education teachers reflected on the drawings and agreed to the unequal roles they shared in their co-teaching relationships.

In order for power imbalances to become harmonized, Mensah (2011) recommended that co-teaching experiences be designed around raising co-teachers’ critical consciousness. In this way, the dynamics of co-teaching blend each co-teacher’s perspective into developing their role and actions. Through this focus, teachers may become enriched by creating spaces for divergent thinking as they learn together in dialogue (Bangou & Austin, 2011). As power dynamics are brought to light, teachers’ individual sense of value and partnership opens the space to consider the sense of belonging that permeates through their actions and filters into their relationships with their students, their environment, and their instructional decisions. Especially due to the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to consider our understanding of the classroom environment. We must now consider and learn more about co-teaching in virtual
classroom spaces as we continue to improve co-teaching in the familiar physical classroom spaces.

**Shifting from the physical classroom space to unfamiliar remote classroom space**

According to Korthagen (2010), in general, the responsibilities of co-teachers are classroom based. Their roles center around what happens in the actual learning time in the classroom. The complexities of classroom experiences require both teachers to combine their knowledge, their experiences, and their skills within daily classroom activities. My research adds to this understanding of the complexities of classroom life by beginning to answer the question of how co-teachers may continue to work together in remote-learning experiences. Honigsfeld and Nordmeyer (2021) shared ways that co-teaching collaboration may continue across remote classrooms. They argued that physical distancing should not mean professional isolation. Through digital platforms, teachers continue to have opportunities to share ideas and resources.

They illuminated collaboration in online spaces does not happen in the same way as in the physical space; however, connecting with each other is critical in navigating remote learning spaces. More research is needed in this area. My study adds to the literature by sharing a framework to describe how the co-teachers negotiated power to create their culture of belonging in the physical and virtual classroom spaces.

For inclusive classroom cultures to provide a sense of belonging, teachers must be willing to participate in systematic and reflective transformative changes that promote social justice actions and beliefs that all learners have the potential to meet with positive learning outcomes (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2016). Social learning theories support the search to understand how social contexts guide learning. Vygotsky (1962) posited that individuals learn through interactions and communications with others. Moreover, he claimed that the culture of the
learning environment is the primary determining factor for knowledge construction. According to Vygotsky (1978), individuals learn through a cultural lens by interacting with others, following the rules, and applying skills that are shaped by others who are a part of this culture. Furthermore, through these interactions, individuals collectively shape the culture through the development of creating a sense of community where teachers and students experience a sense of belonging. The next section discusses the literature on how a sense of belonging is experienced in inclusive classrooms.

**Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging has been described in the literature as the extent to which individuals feel included, accepted, and supported by others in a variety of social contexts (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Maslow (1971) believed that a sense of belonging was one of the basic needs learners require to attend to higher level cognitive tasks. Maslow et al. (2005) stated human beings have an innate psychological drive to belong to groups, concluding that belongingness can be almost as compelling a need as food and that human culture is significantly conditioned by the pressure to provide belongingness. In addition, Goodenow and Grady (1993) posited, feeling accepted and cared for because of belonging with a group is a basic psychological need within the context of the school and classroom environment. Goodenow (1993) found that when children felt they belonged, they were more motivated, had higher expectations for their success, and believed in the value of their academic work. The benefits of belonging and feeling engaged within the school community for learners’ well-being are well documented, yet how teachers may foster a sense of belonging is less understood (Slaten et al., 2016).

Moreover, Glasser (1986) asserted that the need for belonging is one of the five basic needs in the human genetic structure. He observed that most pedagogy uses externally applied
stimulus response methods and techniques to ensure that students absorb the maximum amount of knowledge in the minimum amount of time: “Hungry students think of food—lonely students look for friends” (p. 20). A student who feels disconnected will exert more energy on seeking a sense of belonging than in learning the content area materials. Glasser developed the learning team model that supported cooperative learning as an effective way to guide learners to gain a sense of belonging. Cooperative learning activities, according to Glasser, provides initial motivation for them to work toward academic success. Extending the notion of cooperative learning, Glasser’s control theory—also known as choice theory—supports the concept of sense of belonging in that it focuses on a student’s choice to internalize elements of cooperative learning such as shared goals and responsibility for achieving tasks, with the focus of one’s self as the key motivation to learning within a social process. Glasser posited that all behavior and learning is motivated by an individual’s need to satisfy his or her sense of security and survival, belonging, freedom, power, and fun. Furthermore, Glasser theorized that when teachers work together and include students in the process of learning rather than being a recipient of teacher-directed experiences, students increase their sense of belonging along with other basic human needs (Glasser, 1988). Kagan (1990) agreed that a sense of belonging was a natural desire within human development. He noted that students who were failing within the mainstream of general education settings would seek their own sense of belonging by engaging in more antisocial behaviors to fulfill the need to belong somewhere.

According to Beck and Malley (2003), the changing demographics of our U.S. society has resulted in the breaking down of traditional nuclear and extended family experiences as a source of belonging. In addition, with both parents working long hours as well as a rise in single parenting households, the school setting has become a critical source of developing learners’
sense of belonging. Current research perpetuates the notion of inclusion through the lens of special education—thus focusing on providing additional supports for students with disabilities to meet the same expectations of students without disabilities (Jenkins, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Wiebe-Berry, 2006; Wiebe-Berry & Kim, 2008). This understanding of inclusion not only perpetuates a binary view of the learners in the room, but it may also adversely affect the relationships between the learners in the room. A sense of belonging, however, is a basic human need. All learners must feel included to work toward academic achievements. The concept of *sense of belonging* has received little attention in connection with including all learners in the process of creating a classroom culture of inclusion. Studies that have focused on belonging identify two key ideas for guiding a sense of belonging with all learners. The first is the student-teacher relationship and the second is the application of cooperative learning strategies to encourage relationships with individuals and the learning process as well as peer interactions to strengthen learners’ sense of belonging within the classroom.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified the teacher-student relationship as the primary vessel for learning and human development. Moreover, he posited that before children may feel a sense of belonging within the larger classroom and school community, they must develop a connectivity with the teacher. Berman (1997) called for a pedagogy of belonging that emphasizes the importance of teacher-student relationship and actively involves all students in the life of the classroom and community. He found that cooperative learning classroom communities “create a bond among people that moves democratic decision making from negotiations around competing self-interests to a consideration of the common good” (p. 136). Berman found that cooperative learning communities cultivate an environment where all learners care about the welfare of one another, increase individual social competence, apply problem-solving skills, and show an
increased commitment to democratic values toward co-creating a classroom culture. Berman’s vision of pedagogy of belonging emphasizes a classroom culture, consistent with critical pedagogy, where learners are critically aware of how their personal consciousness translates into actions that are connected to the well-being of others and to the world around them. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of research to support a pedagogy of belonging within inclusive classrooms. As mentioned earlier, current research on belonging in inclusive classrooms maintains a binary view of inclusion through a special education lens.

One study (Wiebe-Berry, 2006) examined the social context and interactions observed in an urban elementary inclusive classroom. The aim was to define and understand the ethos of the classroom community, determine student participation patterns, and peer interactions of students with and without disabilities in whole class and small group experiences. Through a discourse analysis, patterns of language and participant behaviors were examined to reveal power relationships in the classroom as well as how the connections between classroom practices and dominant or competing discourses influenced teacher and student behaviors and relationships.

Teacher participants included one special education teacher and one general education teacher. Student participants included 29 students, with 12 of the 29 identified as a student with a disability. This nine-month study applied classroom observations and two semi-structured teacher interviews. Classroom observations were video recorded for analysis of teacher and peer interactions, discursive practices, and whole class and small group dynamics. Findings suggested that inclusion depends on classroom climate and effective instructional strategies. During whole class instruction, students with disabilities were marginalized in small peer group interactions where a teacher was not present. The discourse and actions of one student marginalized another. This revealed the possible societal influences toward creating a culture of inclusion. In addition,
data analysis revealed that student participation occurred only when there were supports for rich contexts for learning. In addition, the study revealed the need for teachers to be aware of their own assumptions about difference and disability to challenge prior conceptions about their values, beliefs, and experiences with teaching and learning in inclusive settings. The teachers in this study became more aware of the ways they unintentionally perpetuated students with disabilities being excluded during whole class learning. Equally important is the teacher(s) careful planning and implementation of direct and explicit instruction. As a result of this study, the teachers had to re-examine their views on participation in general education curriculum learning. They needed to take an additional step and think about how the students with disabilities would access the content to construct meaning.

Another study (Wiebe-Berry & Kim, 2008) found that students with disabilities experienced barriers in learning math in this first-grade inclusive classroom. The discourse patterns indicated that teachers were not specific enough in their academic and strategic language, thereby excluding some participants with disabilities from accessing the lesson with understanding. Implications suggested teachers must think about their communication skills as they speak with students during the teaching and learning process so that students of all abilities will have the opportunity to learn. Furthermore, specific strategies such as peer mediation and cooperative learning have been proven to increase students’ sense of belonging as learners of all abilities work together (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

According to Johnson and Johnson (2009), some types of learning groups facilitate student learning and increase the quality of life and sense of belonging within the classroom. Other types of learning groups hinder learning and create disharmony and a sense of dissatisfaction. Like Freire’s (1970) banking model, in the traditional classroom, according to
Johnson and Johnson (1999), learners are assigned to work together and complete structured, teacher-centered tasks. Students are aware that the teacher will evaluate their performance, thereby leaving limited space for students to personally connect with as well as socially interact with one another within student-centered, authentic ways. In fact, some group members may feel exploited while others feel discriminated against based on an imbalance of power within the group based on perceived students’ abilities. Like Freire’s (1970) problem posing model, cooperative learning embraces students’ active participation, critical thinking, and valued perspective toward accomplishing shared goals. Students have the opportunity to experience a sense of belonging through working cooperatively, rather than competitively. Each learner meaningfully contributes toward a shared goal. Furthermore, students understand that the best way to achieve learning goals is by each contributing toward accomplishing goals. The teacher facilitates learning by checking in to ensure that each learner is actively involved in the learning. An emphasis on continuous improvement in the quality of the teamwork process naturally unfolds through dialogue and active participation of all learners (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

According to Slavin (1989), cooperative learning usually has a positive effect on student achievement, which indicates an increased sense of belonging in the classroom. Slavin identified two essential features for cooperative learning to be effective at the elementary and secondary levels. First is the value of shared goals, known as positive interdependence. The cooperative group must work together toward the recognition of learning outcomes. Simply having students work together is not enough in the same way that simply placing students in the same classroom does not promote inclusive practices. The second essential feature is individual accountability. The group’s success depends on the individual efforts and contributions of each learner. According to Slavin (1985), cooperative learning also improves social acceptance of students
with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Research on cooperative learning and inclusive classrooms continue to provide a binary view of inclusion.

O’Connor and Jenkins (2010) studied cooperative learning experiences over a two-year span in grades three through six in different schools. During the first year, this qualitative study observed 12 students with disabilities and 12 students without disabilities during reading lessons who were placed in the same inclusive classroom. During the second year, 10 students with disabilities were observed in another school. The quality of participation was assessed by documenting the types of participation (for example, reading, writing, sharing thoughts), as well as the amount of help received. Consistently, across the school year, students with disabilities received more help from peers and teachers and contributed less than students without disabilities. These findings link to the notion that teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and ability to design inclusive practices are central in cultivating an environment where all learners experience a sense of belonging. Gasser et al. (2018) found that inclusive environments may be promoted as teachers consciously embed ethics of care, cooperation, and fairness in relating with students. Rather than leaving social and emotional learning to the hidden curriculum, teachers who explicitly and intentionally support students’ social and emotional development promote increased positive peer interactions and improved classroom culture. Roseth et al. (2008) studied the teacher’s role using cooperative learning strategies and found that when teachers model cooperation and provide explicit instructions and specific feedback on how to deal with student diversity during group work, students learned to solve social and academic problems collaboratively within peer groups. For example, as teachers explicitly explained behavioral markers of active listening, students were able to support students with attention difficulties and encourage students’ contributions and belonging toward achieving shared goals. According to
Mikami and Normand (2015), teachers may intentionally build strong relationships and model positive interactions with all learners as a way to shape peers’ attitudes toward accepting and valuing the perspectives and abilities of their peers. When cooperative learning is instituted effectively, the classroom becomes a microcosm of equity in promoting belonging and engagement in the classroom culture (Iyer, 2013).

Creating a culture of belonging within inclusive settings provides socially just ways of organizing teaching and learning to include learners of all abilities (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010) to be responsive to the educational needs of all learners (Nind, 2014). Research suggests that critical pedagogy and inclusion share common goals (Nevin et al., 2009). For example, teachers who embrace critical pedagogy intentionally organize the learning environment by opposing isolation and by holding high expectations for all students as active learners. In addition, these teachers promote a sense of belonging and engagement by creating the space to reflect on personal practice, as well as embedding the principles of dialogue and praxis to create the space for student voice and participation. These principles speak to the evolution of special education practices that support moving from segregated perspectives to inclusive perspectives that serve to empower students as active learners in inclusive learning environments (Thousand & Villa, 1995). Research continues to suggest that examining the interactions between teachers and students is valuable to the process of co-creating a classroom culture where all learners experience a sense of belonging. My study adds to the research by discussing a framework I developed to explain how the co-teachers in my study co-created a culture of belonging in their physical and virtual classroom. The next section explores the literature on cogenerative dialogues as a way of creating the space for teachers and students to join in dialogue to improve co-teaching and learning.
Cogenerative Dialogues: Co-Creating Inclusive Classroom Experiences

The work of becoming inclusive within a school and classroom setting involves embracing a performative culture that values creating space for multiple perspectives, voices, and actions (Ball, 2003; Labaree, 2014). However, due to a focus on standardization and accountability in our current school system, there is little space for “autonomous or collective ethical self” (Ball, 2003, p. 226). In response to this, researchers have been using cogenerative dialogues for encouraging teachers to create the space to value individual perspectives and collectively transform classroom culture. To my knowledge, the literature on cogens does not discuss inclusion explicitly; however, the principles and practices of cogen applications has great potential to generate balanced co-teaching relationships and an inclusive classroom culture where teachers and students experience a sense of belonging.

Research about cogenerative dialogues (also referred to as cogens) has roots in urban public school science classrooms (Tobin & Roth, 2006). Cogens have been proven to create classrooms where diverse backgrounds of students are valued and incorporated, resulting in more equitable environments where students feel involved and engaged. Cogen research was initiated in response to educational reforms that promoted national standards that challenged the complexities of race, ethnicities, gender, socioeconomics, and political concerns found in the process of teaching and learning of science in public schools (Elmesky & Tobin, 2005). Roth et al. (2002) began researching with cogens in urban science classrooms to examine how the facets of social life could become integrated into the culture and practices of classroom life. Research supports cogenerative dialogues as a valuable tool for embracing students as an active part of the learning process and creation of the classroom culture. Specifically, in teacher-preparation science classrooms at the higher education level, cogens were found effective in providing the
physical, social, and temporal space for students to reflect and apply individual actions and interactions with one another. Preservice teachers were found to effectively utilize student-centered instruction and scaffold learning through social interactions (Roth et al., 2008).

Researchers also agree that science teachers play a significant role in guiding students to learn science by facilitating classroom discussions to develop students’ conceptual understanding and by offering ongoing assessment of student ideas through constructive feedback (Duschl et al., 2007). Cogenerative dialogues are active conversations in which groups of students with their teacher(s) review thoughts, ideas, and evidence from a recent class or lesson and co-create collective resolutions toward producing and reproducing updated class procedures, routines, and instructional practices. In principle,

Cogenerative dialogue is based on the understanding and ideology that one needs to articulate and explain personal experiences through collective understanding and activities and identify and review practices that are intended and unconscious, while discussing the power relationships and roles of the participants. (Gallo-Fox et al., 2005, p. 27).

In practice, these conversations may expose perceived roles of teachers and students within the classroom-learning environment, which could lead to changes in the dynamics of power between teachers and students (Tobin, 2006). These democratic discussions ensure that every participant is given the opportunity to share ideas (LaVan & Beer, 2005). Moreover, participating in cogenerative discussion provides the opportunity for teachers to become aware of explicit and implicit aspects of their own attitudes and instructional decisions and how they affect others (Tobin et al., 2003). Cogenerative dialogues may allow teachers to apply different methods of
teaching and learning that are guided by the students’ input, which has been shown to encourage student motivation and engagement (Emdin, 2010).

Additional research applied cogens within a synchronous virtual higher education classroom and co-teaching experiences. In one study, cogenerative dialogues were applied to allow students and instructors to reflect on class events and work collaboratively throughout the course. In one study, cogens were found to be a tool for enhancing connections amongst graduate students in the class, leading to a reported increase of motivation and engagement. Cogenerative dialogues were essential in shifting responsibilities so that students took a more active role in their own learning while supporting one another (Bondi et al., 2016).

The literature on cogenerative dialogues has demonstrated cogens as a valuable tool for co-creating culture where all learners—including the teachers—are actively involved, engaged, and valued as members of the classroom community. My study expands the current research by applying virtual cogens to understand how co-teacher interactions serve to co-create a classroom culture that results in an increased sense of belonging in the physical and virtual classroom.

Conclusion

The literature shares an existing image of the value of collaboration for equitable and harmonious co-teaching relationships. Current research illuminates my theoretical bricolage by acknowledging that action is needed at the micro, meso, and macro levels of experiences to shine a light on the potential for powerful co-teaching partnerships. Currently, the research on collaboration discusses meso-level actions by describing collaboration as connecting two teachers in visible actions. My study adds to the literature by explaining the value for co-teachers to disconnect, as a part of the collaboration process, to grow personally and professionally. The opportunity to disconnect at the micro level is ignited by reciprocity that brings the two teachers
back together to continue in external collaborative actions at the meso and macro levels. In general, a sense of belonging is revered as a basic human need. When the need is met, students become more motivated to participate. Strong teacher-student relationships and cooperative-peer learning are two identified factors for increasing a culture of belonging in the classroom. Moreover, if power relations are not addressed, special educators often struggle with a sense of belonging as they adapt to the actions of the general education process. My study adds to the literature by providing a framework that supports co-teachers in belonging to and with one another as a precondition for permeating their sense of belonging through their praxis and environment. Finally, the literature on cogenerative dialogues asserts increased belonging and engagement when students are a part of cogenerating the classroom culture. My study provides a new way of thinking about and applying cogens within virtual classroom structures. Moreover, to my knowledge, my study is the first to bring the field of special education and cogenerative dialogues together as a possible way of improving co-teaching experiences for all learners in physical and virtual classrooms.

My study aimed to break through societal constraints such as normalizing practices and deficit-model thinking and to describe how a culture of belonging between co-teachers may be created through creating spaces for power negotiation. Ms. K shared, “I always enjoyed helping kids who need additional supports… It is just so great to work with someone who can help figure out the best ways to do that together.”

Ms. D and Ms. K consistently valued the role of the other. They steadily co-created space for the other to reflect on the ways they could distribute their specific forms of power between one another and through their practices and environment. The motion of my study opened spaces and allowed for me to move freely within internal and external spaces and along micro, meso,
and macro layers of knowledge as the co-teachers constructed and reconstructed their classroom culture. The next chapter reviews the methodology and describes the specific processes that grounded and activated my bricolage framework as I focused on answering my research questions.
Chapter III

Becoming Critically and Mutually Aware Co-Teachers:

How to Assemble the Puzzle

Methodology

The children have been so engaged. They are all doing the work and they are all really enjoying the journaling activities. They are getting more comfortable communicating with us through the private messages in our Google Classroom, too. It is amazing how much more interactive they are becoming (Ms. D, personal communication, May 14, 2020)

Not knowing what was behind the door, I pushed it open slowly. The door creaked as it moved forward until the door met with a barrier creating a gentle “thud.” My immediate response to stop pushing forward and peek behind the door revealed a rectangular-shaped table that filled the space of the small room. With a more purposeful push, the table moved forward as I opened the door to full swing, allowing me to enter the room. This was the room I was meeting in to interview each co-teacher. I strategically stepped over and between small chairs that were haphazardly placed around the small area. I made my way to the two windows that formed the entire side wall and opened them to allow some fresh air in to replace the musty smell that seemed to move from the stained carpeting beneath the windows. I moved some chairs around to organize and prepare for the interviews. With a few quick changes, this space felt ready—I used the resources available and immediately felt connected with the task ahead of me. As the cool outside air began to make its way into the room, Ms. D entered with a rushed pace and a big smile.

“Oh, good, this is perfect, I’m glad you found us a space.”
“Yes, we are all set.”

The thought and preparation I put into setting up the room for Ms. D and me to collaborate reminded me of the work co-teachers must consider as they strive to weave in flexibility and the impromptu decisions needed to set up their classrooms. The context of each lesson, the role of each co-teacher, and the performance of each student becomes this naturally unknown aspect that needs attention and gentle, but consistent, prodding forward through shared resources. The setup of the co-taught classroom may be viewed in the same way as puzzle users set up their assembly space. They create a reliable, secure area that will maintain the connection of the many pieces that form the desired image. After my 40-minute conversation with Ms. D, Ms. K entered the room with the similar ebullient energy as Ms. D. During separate interviews, both teachers expressed shared dispositions and beliefs that although this was their first time co-teaching together, they “instantly clicked.” Their awareness of feeling like “two puzzle pieces that fit perfectly together” illuminated the fact that many more pieces are involved in the complex process of connecting a desired co-teaching image.

Cook and Friend (2004) explained co-teaching as two or more educators delivering instruction to a group of students in the same physical space. Research on co-teaching at the K–12 level has revealed that successful co-teaching experiences depend upon partners’ ongoing relationships with one another (Scruggs et al., 2007). The practice of co-teaching is relatively common in K–12 educational settings, particularly to facilitate the inclusion of special education students in general education environments (Friend et al., 2010). As co-teachers share the responsibilities of teaching and learning in co-taught classrooms, it is sometimes challenging to connect the aspects of teaching needed to ignite the process of learning for all members in the classroom—including the two teachers. Like completing a jigsaw puzzle, the right pieces must
be identified before attempting to connect them. When completing a puzzle, the puzzle users’ curiosity generally begins by glancing over the image and then moves on with a deepened awareness to notice the detail in the colors and patterns of each piece to see if there is a possibility to connect the pieces. As seen through the co-teaching experiences with Ms. D and Ms. K, the methods for finding and joining the pieces evolve into an ongoing process of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting within the daily routines, responsibilities, and the overall process of learning within the classroom environment. This critical transformative auto|ethnography used cogenerative dialogues to reveal a process of how these teachers experienced teaching and learning together in their familiar physical classroom and through their unexpected shift to an unfamiliar remote learning space. The process of cogenerative dialogues served to explain how specific co-teaching interactions increased both teachers’ sense of belonging while dismantling a binary view of special and general education and blurring the socially constructed line between the two. The co-teachers’ interactions in turn increased a sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities.

The overall design of critical transformative auto|ethnography was intentionally selected to bring together the search and analysis for multiple ways of knowing and co-constructing a culture of belonging. An ethnography allows for both process and product to unfold, which aligns with the aim for this study to be flexible and organic in co-creating a culture of belonging in this inclusive classroom. In tradition with critical research, the data were critiqued and challenged as power relations between co-teachers and students were revealed and analyzed throughout the process of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a critical auto|ethnography, this study attempted to interpret culture and expose cultural systems that were driven by specific interactions between the co-teachers to their classroom culture. Furthermore, my decision to
extend the design through the transformative auto\textsc{\textemdash}ethnography lens allowed me to address
imbalances within the research process through cogenerative dialogues and ongoing reflections
and collaboration. It was my aim for the implementation of cogenerative dialogues with co-
teachers to increase the teachers’ awareness of how their interactions impacted the culture of
belonging.

This critical transformative auto\textsc{\textemdash}ethnography used cogenerative dialogues to reveal what
happened when co-teachers worked to maintain their classroom culture when forced to shift from
co-teaching in the physical classroom to an unfamiliar virtual remote-learning experience.
Specifically, through this study, I aimed to identify specific co-teaching interactions that served
to co-create their culture of belonging in the familiar physical classroom and how the co-teachers
maintained their classroom culture as they shifted and adapted into unfamiliar remote learning
spaces.

Research Questions

During this four-month study, I documented the actions and interactions between the two
coteachers as they collaborated in a culture of belonging in their classroom. The following
overarching questions guided my focus:
1) What specific interactions contributed to the ways that Ms. K and Ms. D co-created a culture
of belonging in their classroom?
2) How did they maintain a culture of belonging when their familiar physical classroom was
unexpectedly replaced with unfamiliar remote learning spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
   2a) In what ways did the remote environment compel the teachers to transform culture to
   support a sense of belonging in their classroom?
2b) How did cogenerative dialogues contribute to the co-teachers’ ability to transform a culture of belonging in their unfamiliar virtual learning space?

Critical Auto|Ethnography for Transformation

Constructionism holds that truth is not discovered but rather constructed as people engage in social interactions (Crotty, 1998). It is a dynamic and active process in which both the researcher and the participants mutually engage in knowledge construction. In addition, a constructionist approach suggests that taking a critical stance is a necessary step in understanding the world. In this paradigm, the understandings that are constructed are through a general shared knowledge through community participation and human relationships. Throughout my auto/ethnographic process, along with cogens, interviews, and classroom observations, the participants and I focused on how they were experiencing a culture of belonging with one another through the shift to remote learning. This constructionist view informed my end goal of transformation via critical pedagogy in the form of cogenerative dialogues and the focus of process and product of an auto|ethnography.

All forms of ethnography have a focus on the study of culture within members of a social group. Ethnography requires spending time with the group being studied and describing—through rich descriptions—the language, beliefs, values, and attitudes that embody the behavior patterns of a group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A critical and transformative auto|ethnography extends this tradition by not just describing what is as a way of raising awareness. Rather, through a critical and transformative process, the ethical responsibility is to address any equity concerns that may arise along with steps toward improving possible injustices that may be revealed by the group (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Traditionally, a critical ethnography examines the power dynamics within a specific phenomenon. By placing a transformative lens at
the center of this study, I described the discourse and focused on the ways that interactions between the co-teachers filtered through their interactions with students, their praxis, and their environment that resulted in their classroom culture. Through this transformative process, participants had the opportunity to identify the possible ways that the dynamics of power may have created barriers during the learning process. Through my study, I aimed to co-create an iterative process of participants’ and researcher’s awareness and reflections that informed our understanding of what a culture of belonging is and could be within this inclusive setting.

The unique timing of the school building closing due to the COVID-19 pandemic increased participants’ and my epistemological curiosity of how their classroom culture was maintained as well as noticing how their culture may have changed during this time. Through the process of cogenerative dialogues, the co-teachers considered their ideas along with students’ ideas for designing classroom structures, routines, and instruction. Through the remote process, the teachers also considered the district’s guidelines as well as the parents’ perspectives for reassembling their remote classroom culture. The co-teachers’ increased awareness transformed some of their actions toward creating a culture of belonging as they adapted to remote learning spaces. Furthermore, this iterative reflective process affected the students’ individual and collective sense of belonging as they became a part of co-creating the culture of belonging between individual students and their teachers.

**Site Selection and Participants**

This suburban elementary school was selected following the superintendent’s interest to expand inclusive practices in his school district. Total enrollment in the elementary school was around 540 students. Male students made up 51%, which was comparable to the 49% female population. The majority of the student population was White (85%), with a percentage of
Hispanic or Latino (8%) and Asian (4%) students. Students with disabilities (17%) and economically disadvantaged (9%) were included in the total population. English language learners attended other elementary sites within the district. The average student–teacher ratio was 13:1, and the inclusive classroom setting under study comprised 9 students with disabilities and 10 students without disabilities (NYSED, 2018).

The class under study was selected in response to my sending out an informative flyer to all fourth grade and fifth-grade tenured general and special education co-teaching pairings. Ms. K and Ms. D were the first to respond via email with their interest to participate. They both had past co-teaching experience, and this was their first time working together. Ms. D was an educator for 14 years with a background as a general education teacher and a special education teacher. For the past four years, she had worked as a special education teacher in her role as a co-teacher mainly in second grade. This was her first year co-teaching in a fifth-grade classroom. Ms. K was a general education teacher for 14 years. She has been teaching fifth grade for the past five years. Although she co-taught when the district followed a half-day co-teaching model, this was her first experience working in a full-day model where both teachers were together all day long.

**Research Methods/Data Sources**

This four-month auto|ethnographic study included interviewing, observing, and engaging in cogenerative dialogues to gain a deeper understanding of and contribute to enhancing a culture of belonging between co-teachers and between co-teachers and students. The methods for this study were selected to allow for active participation and ongoing reflection of multiple perspectives throughout the research process. The various sources allowed for the production and reproduction of culture that evolved through the teachers’ actions in adapting to remote learning.
Informed by Denzin’s (1978) various types of triangulation, I included multiple methods, multiple data sources, and multiple theories to establish the trustworthiness of my data. The depth of this triangulation process allowed me to “re-cognize in order to know better” through gaining insights from multiple perspectives (Freire, 1994, p. 12).

1. **Cogenerative dialogues** (6 total @ 30-45 minutes each, audio-recorded, transcribed): The goal of cogenerative dialogues was to optimize teaching and learning through dialogic practices about what was happening in class through participants’ perspectives (Tobin et al., 2005). This approach embraced learning as a social process and guided Ms. D and Ms. K to be a part of shaping the learning process by mediating with one another about the objective for learning together in the classroom environment. The aim was that the cogen sessions would serve to identify current perspectives and procedures in place that exposed any oppressive or exclusionary practices. Through the cogen process, these uncovered realities would possibly be transformed by the co-creation of a new culture that aimed to embrace more emancipatory practices.

The first cogenerative dialogue was an introduction with students. The day and time were selected by Ms. K and Ms. D and embedded within the school day. This session was scheduled in the afternoon during their regular station teaching rotation times. Each co-teacher facilitated a lesson, while I facilitated the cogenerative dialogue. There were six to seven students in each group. Chairs were placed in a circle to provide the feeling of balance between the students and me. I used open-ended questions (see Appendix D) to get a general feel for how the students were experiencing learning in their classroom. As the emergency closing of school buildings disrupted the hopes for ongoing cogens with students, the remaining cogenerative dialogues were virtual cogens between the co-teachers and me during Google Meets. The purpose of the
cogenerative dialogues with both teachers provided space for Ms. D and Ms. K to share their feelings about the teaching and learning process through the shift to remote learning. The cogen sessions were organic in the sense that I asked very general questions, as needed, to invite the two teachers to share their perspectives (see Appendix B) and plan to apply what we learned through the cogenerative dialogues into their instructional practices. These cogen sessions also served as a way for me to check in with myself as researcher to ensure that the process was naturally embedded within the classroom culture.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews (2 interviews x 2 teachers @ 30-45 minutes, audio recorded, transcribed): These interviews captured the teachers’ perceptions of the culture of belonging as they reflected on their experiences within the classroom (see Appendix A). Interviews took place at the beginning of the research and at the conclusion of the research. The first interview allowed me to get to know Ms. D and Ms. K and increase their awareness and sense of belonging as valued members of the classroom learning community. The final interview served as a reflective tool that illuminated the ways each teacher experienced the transformative process of co-creating a culture of belonging in their familiar physical classroom and their experiences adapting to the unfamiliar process of remote learning.

In ethnographic studies, interviews have great potential for yielding rich data to inform the researcher about the meaning that daily experiences hold for people (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The semi-structured interviews provided the space for me to exercise critical listening skills that guided my flexibility in shaping the cogen process to meet the needs of the participants. The coding and interpretative process that immediately followed the interviews shaped my decisions for question framing and the degree of gentle probing that was needed for co-creating dialogic experiences.
3. Classroom Observations (biweekly 40-minute sessions; see Appendix C):

I was a participant-observer in the classroom during the first and only in-person observation at the beginning of the study. Following the emergency school building closing, remote observations of the co-teachers’ Google Classroom continued alternating weeks with cogenerative dialogues. The observations in the Google Classroom yielded more static interactions from in-person classroom learning. The awareness became one of the ongoing themes during our cogenerative dialogues. Ms. D, Ms. K, and I engaged in problem-posing conversations to identify the possibilities for movement toward reciprocity between teachers, students, and the process of learning in general (Freire, 1970).

4. Artifacts: Throughout the research process, I collected classroom artifacts as additional evidence demonstrating how participants perceived the teaching and learning process within this classroom. For example, bulletin boards and other classroom decorations provided information on the values and ideas that contribute to the classroom culture. In addition, student work samples, district memos, and teachers’ Google Classroom posts provided insights into participants’ ideas for designing and progressing with the remote teaching and learning process. All artifacts were analyzed by highlighting themes that contributed to designing an inclusive environment that supported every learner’s (the co-teachers and students) sense of belonging within the learning process.

5. Student Journal Entries: The intended student journaling opportunities in the physical classroom quickly shifted to bi-weekly opportunities to offer opportunities for students to engage in virtual journaling through Google Forms, Padlet, and private commenting with teachers on Google Classroom. These journaling activities were opportunities to provide interactive
communication between the students and teachers, and between the students and students to contribute to a more humanizing remote classroom culture.

6. **Researcher Journal**: I also kept a journal to reflect on my own experiences being a part of the cogenerative dialogic process with co-teachers in connection with their daily routines of teaching and learning.

**Timetable**

This research was designed in three phases, which is shown in Table 1. Each phase was intended to create a space in which participants contributed in co-creating a culture of belonging within this classroom setting and document the process and perspectives of participants.

**Table 1: Research Phases and Interval Dates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase #1: March 3rd to March 10th</th>
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</table>
| Focus: Getting to know one another in the Physical Space | ● Semi-structured interview with each co-teacher  
● 2 classroom visits to learn about the classroom culture.  
● 1 cogen introducing the process and getting to know the students, the teachers, and their goals.  
● One 30-minute dialogic interview with both co-teachers to follow up after the first cogen session. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase #2: March 11th – March 30th</th>
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</table>
| ● Emergency School Building Closure  
● Redesigning the study to embrace the remote-learning process | |

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<tr>
<th>Phase #3: March 20th – June 15th</th>
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</table>
| Focus: Perspective and Praxis | ● 1-2 cogens with two teachers each month –6 total  
● 7 classroom observations between cogen sessions  
● Artifact collection  
● 4 journal entries via Google Form, Padlet, Google Doc from students; personal researcher journaling |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phase #4: June 5th -June 22nd</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Focus: Reflection | ● Final interview with each co-teacher  
● 1 cogenerative dialogue session (final reflection) with two teachers  
● Final artifacts  
● Journal entries |
Data Analysis

To organize my data, I created digital folders for each phase of the research process. Within each phase, I created folders to gather specific types of data. For example, in Phase #1, I created an interview folder, classroom observation folder, cogenerative dialogue folder, and artifact folder. Within each folder, I placed my transcriptions and artifacts collected that pertained to each source. Folders were stored in Dropbox for safe keeping. My researcher’s journal was mostly handwritten reflections that filled three notebooks that contained 200 pages each.

After each cogen session, I submitted the recording to www.rev.com for transcription. Within one day, I received and reviewed the transcription for emerging themes. The process of data analysis began by my highlighting data within descriptive themes such as: co-teaching partnership and communication, instructional routines and structures, and teacher agency and praxis. These themes continued to describe and organize my data as the months evolved. In addition, in vivo codes emerged from the data during data collection. Although I noticed static and predicted codes through the in vivo codes, I looked for movement and participants’ freedom of thinking and contributions to answering the research questions. At the end of August, I was feeling as though my data had more to tell me. I read and reread the data along with my themed charts, and themes remained static within more descriptive parameters.

It was early September when I recoded the data using process coding (Table 2: Example of Process Coding). Through process coding, I began to see the data through the dynamics of the stories shared by the teachers’ experiences. Moreover, as I recoded through process coding, the themes became “more suggestive of a trajectory of action and analysis” (Saldana, 2016, p. 78). Process coding was the connection I needed between my data and me to provide that feeling of
being all set up and organized to identify the image of this co-teaching puzzle. This coding process provided the thinking space to see my data through a deeper analysis as I searched for possible transformative actions as Ms. D and Ms. K maintained and reimagined their classroom culture throughout the study.

**Table 2**

**Example of Process Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(i) Data/Source</th>
<th>(ii) In Vivo Code</th>
<th>(iii) Process Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ms. D: First cogenerative dialogue session (April 3, 2020)                     | Tough week managing time—very time consuming—moving lessons to the digital platform—not sure how to create access for all students; some kids are having a hard time accessing the work on the computer. | ● Managing time  
● Recreating lessons from the physical to the digital classroom  
● Searching accessible ways to post work  
● getting easier  
● communicating with parents to support students  
● assigning manageable workload and flexible due dates |
| Ms. K: second cogenerative dialogue session (April 14, 2020)                   | It’s getting a little easier; on the phone with parents helping them, so they can help their kids access the work; Have a better feel for what is an appropriate amount of work to give; giving flexible due dates |                                                                                   |
According to Saldana (2016), process codes tell “much more about the human condition [through] gerunds and the participant’s own words” (p. 78). The information revealed through process coding tells a dynamic transformative story from the perspective of two teachers who were learning together alongside their students about how to re/construct their classroom culture through the shift to remote learning. Alongside my interactions with the class under study, I continued to write in my researcher’s journal well beyond the conclusion of the study at the end of June. My journaling in the summer of 2020 served to guide my dialogue with my data. A bricolage approach also provided the flexibility I needed to make meaning and to consider the varied perspectives of participants. I triangulated my data as I sought to answer the research questions by looking for patterns across multiple data sources. I have four months of data that reveal a transformation in the way participants think and experience a culture of belonging within their classroom.

**Story in Story (SiS) Approach**

Following the first two cogenerative dialogues with Ms. D and Ms. K, I was struck by the many perspectives they needed to consider as they created their learning space during the shift to remote learning. These perspectives carried over from their experiences in the physical classroom; however, with the unfamiliar shift to remote learning, they needed to spend more time gaining insights and applying the varied sources. For example, parent communication was a strong influence in the physical classroom as the co-teachers consistently communicated through weekly newsletters, emails, and occasional phone calls. In addition, they maintained additional communication with individual parents as needed. As the shift to remote was in motion, Ms. D and Ms. K noted they were in constant communication with parents via phone calls and emails within and outside of the typical school day hours. Parents needed support with guiding their
children to navigate the Google Classroom as well as adapting to remote-learning procedures. In addition, the physical classroom space required the co-teachers to maintain a connection with district policies around co-teaching—such as occasional professional development and department meetings for special education teachers. Yet, the remote process required more consistent considerations as the teachers waited for district memos to inform them of the policies to follow for remote learning. Once the district memos were released, the teachers reviewed and considered how to apply their knowledge of co-teaching to the remote-learning policies. Within each day, Ms. D and Ms. K were influenced by a variety of perspectives—or stories—that were happening within the same time frame. They needed to blend these multiple stories as they considered their co-teaching plans with their students. I began to understand these individual perspectives within an “at a glance” view. I termed this view the *Story in Story approach* to guide me to make sense of the teachers’ actions and instructional decisions. Figure 2 describes examples of the various perspectives that blended to explain how individual perspectives folded together to share one collective message of community in this physical classroom.

As of March 16, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school building abruptly closed. Like all teachers across the state, Ms. D and Ms. K waited to receive guidance from the district. District memos were eagerly received for guidance through the unfamiliar shift to remote learning. Figure 2 shared examples of data that emerged during that time. At the start of shifting to remote learning, the data supported the ebb and flow process of curiosity that was needed for participants and me to experience (Freire, 1998). For example, at the beginning, the district directed families to engage in a provided list of websites for optional “remote learning links.” At this time, I noticed occasions when the teachers needed to pause and wait for further
direction from the district before designing class activities. Other times, they needed to engage in “methodological rigor” characterized by epistemological curiosity.

**Figure 2**

Story in Story: Beginning the Remote Learning Shift (March 20, 2020-April 30, 2020)

Teachers
- Using familiar Google tools in very unfamiliar routine
- “It helped that we already had our Google Classroom in place”
- “We’re not used to teaching this way—there is a lot of independence on “[the students’] part”

Students (reported by Ms. D and Ms. K)
- “We are working with parents”
- “We are trying to simplify things, so it is manageable for the students and families”
- “We are privately messaging with each student.”
- “One kid shared a picture of a trip they went on a few years ago—so he felt like sharing a memory.”

District Memos
- Shared wishes and steps taken for health and safety
- Provided learning links for opportunities for remote learning
- Committed to ongoing communication and accessibility for shared feeling of safety and wellness in community.

Parents (reported by Teachers)
- “Parents have been great—they just need a lot of additional support, so we are on the phone and emailing constantly”
- Call parents together

Teachers at that time were waiting to hear the next steps. In time, teachers were directed by the district to share asynchronous assignments, and eventually, synchronous live instruction. As the district guidance increased, teachers needed to engage in more critical planning and preparing to redesign their physical classroom into remote-learning experiences in their virtual classrooms.
I think it’s flowing nicely. The district is offering supports, and we have the children doing the work we post. And now it is moving along nicely. We really have a very unique relationship that is making this transition smooth. It doesn’t always go that way. We really have an excellent working relationship. It just works—even through this transition. (Ms. D and Ms. K, personal communication, April 3, 2020)

As the process unfolded, I began to feel the strong connection between my data sets. The organization of my data collected from the cogens with teachers, class observations, student journaling, district memos, and my own researcher journal began to take a consistent, organic process. I noticed how my journaling was providing space for me to think freely, and to see what was happening without judgment, while maintaining an ingenuous curiosity. I was attempting to write memos but found this approach took me away from the reflexive process I was experiencing with my journaling. I began to stop forcing myself to write memos that seemed to make the data fit from the outside, and I continued with my paper-based journaling where I annotated in the margins—making notes to myself—which became a more organic form of memoing that kept me closely connected with the data. The memoing happened organically through my journaling because I was immersed in the data. I continued to annotate my own reflections.

This meta-cognitive process allowed me to look back on my reflections in the moments as well as across time. I continued with my Story in Story approach to analyze my data throughout all intervals in my research process (see Appendices E through I for the description of my process coding through the lens of multiple perspectives). As themes emerged, I began to sort the data into categories that I developed into a framework for explaining the data. The
relational co-teaching framework is described in the next section. It is the structure I used to illuminate the data in the next two data analysis chapters.

**Overview of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework**

To describe the shared power between co-teachers and students, I organized my data into what I have termed the *Relational Co-teaching Framework*. This framework (see Figure 3) illustrates how creating a culture of belonging in the classroom involves a dynamic interplay between teachers, their students, and their environment. Ms. K and Ms. D exemplified the necessity for their relationship to be at the center of three evolving experiences that all came together as they worked in tandem to create their classroom culture. I created the framework to illuminate the ways the co-teachers’ actions and interactions came together, moved apart, and came back together again to create a culture of belonging.

Akin to my movement between ingenuous to epistemic curiosity, Ms. D and Ms. K were enmeshed within a dynamic process of the three interconnected experiences that allowed them to move into more epistemic spaces. Ms. D and Ms. K shared the presence of reciprocity that allowed opportunities for connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting together, which fortified their relationship and served as a precondition for creating a culture of belonging with their students. These teachers, first and foremost, cultivated a relationship that afforded mutual growth-fostering interactions (Miller, 1976). Their relationship allowed them to move together through the three experiences, resulting in the culture of belonging within their classroom that began with them belonging to themselves and one another in a manner much like the purpose of the frame of a puzzle. The complexities of cultivating their co-teaching experiences unfolded within a process that resembled placing many pieces of a puzzle together. Connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting became the frame of their puzzle—it served as the foundation
that was interlaced to allow all the other pieces to fit together into a completed puzzle image that was their classroom culture.

**Figure 3**

*Three Interconnected Experiences of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework*

![Diagram of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework]

**General Description of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework**

This section shares the general overview of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework. It is through the development of this framework that I was able to understand the interactions between Ms. D and Ms. K. Furthermore, I was able to see how their interactions, when viewed through the lens of this framework, illuminated a shared, connected power between them that included an ebb and flow of them connecting,
disconnecting, and reconnecting. Following the general description of the framework, I use the framework to analyze key pieces of data that describe and depict the co-teaching image created by Ms. D, Ms. K, and their students at this early interval of the study.

**Connecting, Disconnecting, and Reconnecting**

Relational connection, disconnection, and reconnection shares the natural process of the way co-teachers come together, come apart, and come back together again, depending on the context and situations in which they find themselves. Typically, within relationships, individuals disconnect when they feel the need to protect themselves from the perceived risk of feeling hurt or rejected. However, when people work through disconnections, they become relationally resilient and move through disconnection by reconnecting (Jordon, 2005). My data helped me to see the value of disconnecting that allowed the coteachers time for reflection to guide their personal and professional growth. I theorize that the process of disconnecting, in the context of co-teaching, can strengthen the relationship as teachers experience transparent communication and a mutual sense of feeling valued by the other.

Connecting and disconnecting are ubiquitous within the natural process of being in relationships. According to Miller (1976), the complexity of connection and disconnection within relationships arise when working through differences and managing conflicts. Moreover, as individuals move toward mutuality in relationships, they demonstrate that they care for one another and their experiences together (Jordon, 2004). A mutual empathic stance serves as the entry point to allow reconnecting to occur. In the context of relational co-teaching, disconnecting becomes a process where each co-teacher can experience the space for personal growth. This time to disconnect from the other toward personal growth can deepen the connection with oneself and between one another. In the case of Ms. D and Ms. K, each teacher understood that
being in and out of collaboration was necessary because it honored the time for self-growth and individual roles and expertise within the relationship as well. This will be seen in greater detail in Chapter IV as the class moved to remote learning. The critical point for co-teachers to consider is what happens after the disconnection. An individual and collective presence must be in place for the reconnection to happen. In the absence of this reciprocal presence, disconnection may prevail, leaving two co-teachers separate from one another. However, reciprocity—specifically the act of mutually listening, speaking, and caring to hear and to share ideas—is necessary for the reconnection to continue co-teaching collaborations.

**Reciprocity**

According to Freire (1970), teaching and learning are reciprocal acts. He espoused the experience of teaching results from an ongoing learning process that continues through the act of sharing with others in dialogue to continue the reciprocal, ongoing process. Relational reciprocity involves the ways co-teachers engage in mutual understandings within the process of communication and interactions. Mutual trust and respect unfold through transparent communication practices—such as oral, written, and nonverbal dialogue. This process involves each co-teacher maintaining a sense of self while being open to expanding their ideas into possibilities for new ways of thinking, teaching, and learning that emerge from being in relationship with one another. When reciprocity is present, co-teachers feel that they matter to the other person, and they experience increased awareness for the ways their actions and presence impacts the other.

According to Mead (1934), individuals become socialized as they increase their awareness of the perspective of others and how they are viewed from another person’s point of view. The acquisition of self is tantamount in being able to adopt a perspective-taking ability.
Furthermore, according to Meltzoff (2007), the knowledge of self and others are inherently reciprocal. Individuals use their self-awareness as a guide for understanding others and use their knowledge of others to understand themselves. Co-teachers are open to learning about themselves and their co-teacher as individuals in relationship with each other. This relational reciprocity allows for the mutuality or trust between teachers and students as well as the duality of structure and resources within their environment to unfold. The reciprocity between teachers provides the opportunity to co-create a comfortable environment for students to feel valued and welcomed. Moreover, the existence of reciprocity determines the ways co-teachers shape the structure, just as the structure determines the way the co-teachers act. Therefore, reciprocity filters through relationships between all learners in the classroom, including the two teachers. In addition, starting with the teachers, reciprocity filters through relationships between the individual and collective interactions with the environment. Ms. D and Ms. K share a plethora of natural ways they exhibited reciprocity to strengthen their co-teaching experience. Specific details will follow this section that describes an overview of my co-teaching framework.

**Impact on Praxis**

Transparent communication and reciprocity filter through the interactions between co-teachers around social and instructional praxis. The degree in which the teachers experience reciprocity influences the degree in which the expertise of each co-teacher will be evident within the process of living and learning in the classroom. According to Freire (1970), praxis is the interaction between theory and reflection. Praxis are the actions that come together and result in specific ways of being together. Co-teachers’ schemas (Sewell, 2005) guide their behaviors in ways that form the duality of structures. On one hand, their individual thoughts and ideas are present within the external environment of resources that exist to guide interactions within the
classroom. According to Bourdieu (1977), how individuals behave is conditioned by these objective possibilities. On the other hand, the schemas, structures, and resources come together to guide the co-teachers to make decisions around social and instructional praxis. Like the flow of connecting puzzle pieces, once the picture began to take shape, the flow of internal and external communications as well as the three experiences of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework unfolded with a clear image of the story of this co-teaching puzzle. The story began with the teachers’ views and perceptions on co-teaching, their abilities, and their experiences of working together.

**Impact on Environment**

The impact on environment describes the ways the co-teaching relationship influenced their decisions around setting up the structures, routines, and classroom space. The ongoing interactions influenced further actions while promoting the validation of self in relation to each other. The classroom space became a product of shared decisions and individual and collective actions. According to Bourdieu (1977), habitus explains the likeliness of how one acts depending on how one expects others to respond; therefore, habitus makes individuals choose some actions over others. Habitus explains how co-teachers work together in their own subjective ways to create a classroom culture. Therefore, the environmental dimension explores the connections and interdependence between all learners (teachers and students) with their physical and natural surroundings.

The relational co-teaching framework provided an organized structure to ensure my methodology, methods, and analysis procedures moved in organic ways as I followed participants’ interactions. The next section reviews specific steps I took to ensure ethical considerations and quality of research.
Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations aligned with the Molloy College IRB, which ensures appropriate treatment of human subjects in research and allow researchers to conduct studies that do not compromise the privacy of students and families or disrupt the process of learning with students and educators. This study was approved by the Molloy College IRB committee as of February 13, 2021—see Appendix J. Following Molloy IRB approval, I sent out the teacher recruitment flyer (Appendix M) and letter (Appendix N) to all eligible co-teachers via email. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close, I amended the protocol for my study (Appendix K) and received additional approval from Molloy’s IRB committee (Appendix L). The teachers in this study were invited to participate and share their experiences as I observed their classroom, facilitated cogenerative dialogues, and provided the teachers space to reflect on their practice. Before the study began, I discussed the nonevaluative and confidential nature of the study with the two teachers and building principal to ensure that the teachers were free to participate and not feel penalized for any information shared. Of course, every precaution was taken to ensure confidentiality. Interviews, journaling, and private conversations remained confidential. All audio recordings and transcriptions were accessed only by me. Transcriptions were shared with participants as they requested as a way to maintain their participatory comfort. They opted not to review transcripts and were content to hear my summary of themes along the way. While I could not ensure the confidentiality in the classroom, I did ensure that all information shared through interviews, journaling, observation, and private conversations were kept secured and accessed only by me. Furthermore, pseudonyms were created for all participants, the school, and the district.
The classroom was selected by offering the opportunity to all tenured co-teachers in grades four and five. The first interested pairing was selected. Once the classroom was identified, I met with both teachers to make sure that they were willing to participate on their own accord. They were eager to participate and did not feel coerced to participate. In addition, I reviewed that what teachers confided in me through interviews, journaling, and ongoing conversations remains confidential and not shared with administration. Classroom practices were not private; however, the personal thoughts, feelings, and individual experiences remained private and was kept confidential. Consistent with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, all student information remained confidential. Most of the data sources aligned well with maintaining the privacy of participants. For example, journal entries, interviews, and student work samples remained private. In addition, lesson plans and Google Classroom postings by teachers were used to retrieve emerging themes.

Although the confidentiality of student journaling activities was a priority, just as all classroom activities, the confidentiality of the students’ responses could not be absolutely ensured. Participants understood that the discussion process was meant for the discussion group only. However, just as in common practice, students were participating in the activity together—and the act of keeping all content confidential by each learner cannot be absolutely controlled by the researcher. All participants had the option to participate in the activity or respond privately to their teachers through their regular practice of privately communicating in the comment section of their Google Classroom.

Although parent permission (Appendix O) and child assent (Appendix P) were obtained to ensure that participation was voluntary and desired as a learning experience for everyone, as this study moved to remote researching, the connection between the students and me was lost.
Therefore, permission from parents and assent from students were no longer needed. Permission from Ms. K and Ms. D remained consistent as we shifted to remote learning.

**Research Quality**

Research quality often refers to the scientific process that embodies all aspects of the design of the study. Specifically, the alignment between the methods, the research questions, the selection of participants, methods, and ethical considerations must be clear (Boaz & Ashby, 2003). Qualitative researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data. Explicitly, they ensure that their recorded data is consistent with what they observe in the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Since I conducted a critical, transformative ethnography, typical positivist research quality criteria were inappropriate to evaluate the quality of my study. I needed to evaluate the quality from a constructivist point of view to capture the way the work evolved in and out of transformative actions. To ensure quality, I applied parallel and authenticity criteria as described by Guba and Lincoln (1989).

**Parallel Criteria**

Traditional, positivist studies establish research quality through internal and external validity and reliability to respond to the question of how to develop confidence that the findings of a study may be trustworthy and generalizable (Hinchey, 2010). For example, positivist criteria include the researcher as detached and objective, where my study required me to participate in close interactions with participants to gain in-depth insights into their experiences to gain an understanding of why they act as they do. Another positivist notion is that society shapes the individual. A positivist stance can generally be explained by attributing human actions to social norms they have been exposed to through socializations. Conversely, my study embraced the belief that individuals have consciousness and are not mere robots who react to external social
forces as seen through the positivist lens. I embraced the notion that individuals are intricate, unique, and complex, thereby understanding that different people experience and understand the same external reality in different ways. In addition, positivist research may be argued as primarily descriptive, lacking the rich insights gathered from respondents. My study went beyond merely describing what is happening by gathering in-depth insights that may transform the status quo. Parallel criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1994) address the need for explicit focus on the trustworthiness of a study that aligns with existing standards for traditional research paradigms yet extends the foundation to constructivist methods.

All methods used in my study ensured that the process and the product included the following criteria:

- **Credibility** refers to the confidence of truth in the findings. I ensured credibility by including the perspectives of all participants in the process of data collection, analysis, and in answering the research questions. The cogenerative dialogues provided ongoing, open conversations that provided the space for Ms. D and Ms. K to share their perspectives. It served to propel an ongoing, transparent communication process.

- **Transferability** refers to showing that the findings may be applied to other contexts. For purposes of this study, transferability applied to the evidence of the co-teachers’ and students’ sense of belonging transferred across different times during each day and through the shift to remote learning across the weeks and months of the research process. The findings showed how cogenerative dialogues may support the co-creation of a culture of belonging that started first with the co-teachers belonging to and with one another. Once the co-teachers made this connection, their established sense of belonging filtered through to their relationships with their students and within their physical and
remote environments. In addition, their sense of belonging as a co-teaching team filtered through their praxis in the physical and remote learning spaces, indicating evidence across locations.

- **Dependability** refers to the findings being consistent and found to be true over time and settings. The research process incorporated the value of both teachers’ and all students’ voices and active participation on an ongoing basis. This iterative process informed next steps on the path to answering the research questions. I ensured dependability of the findings by creating the space and possibility of teachers’ and students’ increased and enduring sense of belonging and engagement through cogenerative dialogues and dialogic practices.

- **Confirmability** refers to the findings being shaped by respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. I ensured credibility through the integrity and intentionality of the research design that valued the voice of every participant. I incorporated various options for participants to express their thoughts, so all participants had the option to speak, write, illustrate through drawing, or remain silent in response to any part of the cogenerative dialogue process or journaling activities. Because analysis was ongoing through the data collection process, emerging themes were vetted through a process of collaborative dialogue with participants. My stance was to be a participant-observer within the classroom as I naturally embedded dialogic tools to connect the spaces that encouraged every learner to feel valued through actively participating in activities. For example, the students’ journaling activities using Padlet and Google Forms provided the opportunity for students to respond to an open-ended prompt with the aim of learning how the students were experiencing the remote-learning process. In addition, although it
was not necessary, the teachers were ready to respond privately to any students’ response that needed further attention.

Evidence of these criteria included prolonged engagement where I was involved and immersed in this class under study to ensure the accuracy of information. Persistent observations added depth and relevance to the data. Triangulation was incorporated through the triangulation of methods, sources, and perspectives. Cogenerative dialogues with teachers increased credibility as they uncovered possible biases, perspectives, and assumptions. For example, Ms. D and Ms. K discussed the challenge of meeting the specific needs in accordance with students’ individualized education plans. In addition, they discussed the challenge of guiding both students with and without disabilities who were experiencing difficulties in shifting to the remote-learning process.

Member checking was embedded throughout the ongoing progression of this critical, transformative, ethnographic data-collection process. Thick descriptions of data collected through the cogenerative dialogues and teacher interviews increased the transferability of the study so that others may apply specific techniques and findings to their situations and contexts. To ensure transformative work, the authenticity criteria in the next section will reveal the degree to which my study embraced individual and collective change.

**Authenticity Criteria**

Since the design of my study involved individual and collective transformation through ongoing collaboration, I incorporated authenticity criteria to ensure that my methods contributed to positive change. Guba and Lincoln (1989) described five *authenticity criteria* as a framework to support the hermeneutic process within naturalistic constructionist research. The first criterion is *fairness*. This study documented all perspectives, differences in values, and views; conflicts were also revealed. The second criterion called *ontological authenticity* was embedded as
participants became more informed and knowledgeable about their classroom culture and the role they played in the process of co-creating the culture of belonging within this co-taught inclusive setting. The third criterion, *educative authenticity*, was accomplished as participants acknowledged and valued the thinking of others through cogenerative dialogues and instructional strategies that supported classroom discussions and classroom community building. Through multiple dialogic methods, participants had the opportunity to embrace new ways of thinking and understanding. The fourth, *catalytic authenticity*, was ensured as classroom culture was co-constructed through participants’ actions and stimulated by a process of inquiry. Finally, *tactical authenticity* ensured the active process of inquiry was consistently evolving and analyzed through intentional methods that adjusted next steps in the research process as needed to meet the needs and learning goals of individuals and the group as a whole. The cogenerative dialogue process, along with the collection of artifacts such as students’ work, comments between teachers and students in the Google Classroom, and district memos, shared a consistent evolving story of maintaining and reimagining a culture of belonging in this classroom.

These parallel criteria served to support the trustworthiness of my study through the constructivist lens as participants became more aware of their unique ways of knowing. The authenticity criteria deepened the rigor of this study by supporting the process of constructionism and the ways that participants shared their multiple views to expand their thinking and co-create their understanding of their classroom culture of belonging and connectedness through their lived experiences.

**Role of the Researcher**

Throughout this study, I positioned myself as a researcher and as a learner within an organic process of illuminating new understandings alongside participants. I was engaged in an
active process of learning with participants as we became critically conscious of how the phenomenon of creating a culture of belonging was perceived and lived in this suburban classroom. Moreover, we co-constructed an awareness of power dynamics and possible oppressive experiences with the possibility of being transformed through ongoing dialogue, reflection, and collaboration. For example, Ms. K and Ms. D made the decision to disconnect students’ ability to collaborate with each other during their live-streamed Google Meet instructional time. This created a strong teacher-directed time that rendered the students as listeners only. The teachers’ decisions were based on their knowledge that students often say or do “inappropriate things.” Teachers discussed options during our cogenerative dialogue process. They chose to balance power dynamics by maintaining the opportunities for students to engage in private commenting with both teachers and through my added student journaling activities.

The learning process placed me alongside participants as learners who embraced the essence of humility as we accepted the necessity to learn and relearn in an iterative process of dialogue, reflection, and praxis (Freire, 1985). My participation served dual roles. Within my role as an outsider, I was an educator who was familiar with this suburban school district. I positioned myself as an objective, non-evaluative observer and learner for most of the process. Within my role as an insider, I possessed some knowledge of the group being studied. I provided professional development on co-teaching and UDL on various occasions over the year. One of the co-teachers participated in many of the workshops I presented. This co-teacher and I collaborated on many occasions over the past few years on topics around special education and implementing a strengths-based focus when working with students of all abilities.

There is no way to assume that the process of cogenerating their culture of belonging to the extent they did would have happened without my contribution of implementing the student
journaling activities. The teachers shared their increased awareness to see the process of learning in their Google Classroom by reading the student journaling responses. For example, teachers increased their private communications to delve deeper into individual students’ responses, which contributed to the teachers’ decisions for the types of activities, resources, and structures they included in their virtual classroom. The duality of my positioning, I believe, placed me between the spaces of perceived reality. For example, because I have some insider knowledge of the school community being studied, it was easier to gain trust and develop relationships with the participants. In addition, as an outsider to the nuances and specific perceptions and practices of this school setting, I learned alongside the participants, and I maintained an objective view to their perceived reality of inclusion.

**Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methods that were used to answer the research questions. Various data sources were outlined to include cogenerative dialogues, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts. Data analysis methods and procedures were reviewed as well as the relational co-teaching framework that was used to analyze the data in the next two data analysis chapters. Chapter IV discusses the relational co-teaching framework in relation to the co-creation of Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s physical classroom. Chapter V continues the analysis as their established culture was shattered and in need of reformation as they found themselves in the unfamiliar virtual space during remote learning.
Chapter IV

Connecting Curiosity and Epistemology: Forming the Inclusive Image through the Relational Co-Teaching Framework in the Physical Classroom

Our teachers care about what we think. We get to make choices about the fun stuff; like, in the morning, we can choose to write about anything we want. And sometimes in the afternoon, we choose what we want to read. We also have fun Fridays, and we can choose the activity we want to do. (Student, personal communication, March 10, 2020)

During the week of March 3rd, 2020, to March 10th, 2020, I entered the co-taught, inclusive classroom culture that is the focus of this study. During my first classroom observation, my intention was simply to see what was happening in the classroom. I was curious to see how participants were interacting, how the furniture was arranged, and how the classroom was decorated. During this first classroom observation, I was led by a strong spontaneous curiosity that motivated me to be present without expectations, judgments, or preconceptions for what I thought or hoped should be happening. It was as though I was simply viewing the results of the hard work it took to place all the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together to form a desired image. The image was already created by the two teachers and students in this classroom. I was simply there to see evidence of their completed image that revealed their classroom culture. I viewed without participating in the critical thinking, collaboration, and reflection that went into putting all the pieces together. During this early stage of data collection and analysis, I was aware of the connection between my curiosity and epistemology, as suggested by Freire (1998), “All that is necessary is that, through reflection on a given practice, ingenuous curiosity perceive itself as such so as to advance to the critical stage” (p. 43). Freire (1970) asserted through dialogue that
we find out how “naïve” we are—and it is through dialogic practices that we become more critical. This critical stance includes learning with others through shared perspectives in ways that empower new understandings and move us beyond the status quo. I quickly transitioned into epistemic spaces where I probed to find out more about this classroom culture. I included dialogic methods, starting with two semi-structured interviews and a cogenerative dialogue with students. However, at the conclusion of this week, my in-person data collection was cut short by school closure because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as the teachers moved to remote instruction, my research moved to remote research. Even so, the data reveal patterns in how the teachers worked together to create a culture of belonging despite the shift to remote learning.

This chapter describes how participants (teachers and students) utilized and embodied time, space, structures, and resources to set their foundation for their physical classroom culture. Through the lens of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework, this chapter discusses how Ms. K and Ms. D co-created a culture of belonging through their shared process of negotiating power throughout their partnership. Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s individual and collective actions influenced the ways each considered the role of the other as they came together to shape their classroom culture in the physical classroom.

When completing a jigsaw puzzle, puzzle users typically begin by glancing over the desired image and then sorting the pieces into categories to organize the patterns and colors that seem to belong together. Once sorted, attempts are made to connect pieces together. A more methodological approach unfolds as they sort and analyze the pieces. Some are a “perfect fit.” Other pieces require puzzle users to squint—maybe even turn on more lights—and turn and flip the pieces in every direction to determine if there is a strong connection. If there is not a connection, the search continues. Ultimately, the aim is to reconnect the pieces that the puzzle
makers created in the process of die cutting the original image. Similarly, Ms. D and Ms. K embodied the notion that a dynamic process of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting was necessary to co-create a culture of belonging together with their students. On one hand, these teachers shared intrapersonal space as evidenced through their commitment to reflect and implement practices specific to their role and expertise. On the other hand, these teachers created a collaborative interpersonal space that permeated through their work together in their classroom. Through my time in the physical classroom, I captured the movement between the teachers’ internal/personal and external/social co-teaching interactions, which guided me to develop the Relational Co-Teaching Framework. The framework explains how Ms. D and Ms. K co-created their culture of belonging by developing and applying their relationship as a foundation that then filtered through their praxis and their environment. They created space for a shared process of negotiating power by remaining critically aware of their own passion for teaching and learning as well as valuing the perspective and experiences of the other.

**The Story Begins: Illuminating the Image of Ms. K’s and Ms. D’s Co-Teaching Puzzle**

The critical movement of interactions between Ms. D and Ms. K had an ongoing rhythmic motion between internal/personal to external/social communication. “We do everything together, but sometimes, we each have to think about things on our own, and then we come back to share and figure out how to reach the kids,” Ms. K. shared in an individual interview.

In a separate interview, Ms. D shared, “[Ms. K.] is so amazing to work with—I mean we each have our ideas—and we always come together to try to make it work for the children.”

Moving from internal/personal communication to external/social communication guided each co-teacher to feel more connected to one another as each shared her personal knowledge. This personal knowledge often became shared knowledge that then connected the co-teaching
pair with their students and classroom environment. Other times, Ms. K and Ms. D moved from external/social to internal/personal communications. For example, each teacher applied what she learned within the classroom setting into personal reflections for strategic actions in the future. These and other vignettes will be described further in the following sections using the Relational Co-Teaching Framework to illustrate how Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s shared process of power negotiation worked to create a culture of belonging in their physical classroom. The next section discusses how Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s relationship of ongoing movement of exchange and reciprocity created the space for each teacher to bring in her specific form of power that resulted in their culture of belonging.

**Reciprocity**

Although it was early March and still cold outside, the sun was beaming with a stream of warmth that followed me as I walked up the pathway to enter the school building. The warm sun was a reminder of the changing of the seasons, and spring was fast approaching. The tease of the spring air energized those who chose to feel it and be aware of its power with a sense of hope for new beginnings that the idea of spring had to offer. I also noticed the buds on the trees and the plants in the flowerbeds that were beginning to sprout through the soil. This was the long-awaited day that would begin my journey in answering my research questions. My internal mood matched the weather outside. The ray of warmth and energy followed me into the building, through the dark halls, and into the small, musty office space where I met with Ms. K and Ms. D for individual interviews.

**Forming the puzzle frame: Mutuality and shared habitus**

It was the glimmer in Ms. K’s eyes that spoke louder than her words as she shared her childhood desire and continued passion to be an educator. “I’ve wanted to be a teacher since I
was probably five, believe it or not. And I actually played teacher with my grandmother in the basement. I would make-believe I had a class, and she was a part of it, and I would teach and then give out work and grade it. And I just followed my dream to become a teacher.”

Like Ms. K, Ms. D always wanted to be an educator. “I knew from very early on that I wanted to be a teacher. I started as a general education teacher, and for the past five years, I have been a special education teacher. So, it’s nice to be on both sides of it.”

The almost palpable joy for teaching was clearly expressed and felt through the responses of both teachers. Their shared passion and self-knowledge in “always knowing and wanting to be a teacher” exhibited a shared habitus in how their deciding to be educators organized their decisions along their career paths with a propensity toward achieving the goal of indeed becoming educators. Ms. D’s awareness of the benefits of having been a general and special educator increases her awareness of how her past experiences increased her skillset for educating learners of all abilities. In addition, this awareness shared how she entered the classroom field through habitus: Ms. D understood how her knowledge of her skills interact within the context of creating this classroom culture. After the first five minutes of my interview with Ms. K, I was struck by the similarity in the dispositions and values shared by both teachers. Although they were not in the same room at the same time with me, I felt their strong connection, evidenced through their use of language, nonverbal cues such as frequent smiles, and bright-eyed expressions as they shared their desire for teaching. This can be explained by a shared habitus and cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1977), individuals have their own habitus, and as they interact with others, their habitus becomes part of the class habitus. Ms. D and Ms. K are individuals with different characteristics; yet they came together, even if they were not in the same physical room together, with communal dispositions toward being educators.
The mutuality between these co-teachers began with the basic understanding of one’s past as a source of pride and in connection with the other co-teacher’s past. This mutuality forged a bond that framed their co-teaching experiences and flowed into an ongoing process of transparent communication. Foucault (1998) believed discourse produced and reinforced power. Furthermore, according to Foucault, power was an everyday, socialized phenomenon that was embodied by individuals. Through Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s relationship and open communication, they created space for each to share their personal ideas that shaped the way they co-created the social norms within their inclusive classroom. This embedded sharing space was the entry point that allowed each teacher to feel valued and empowered. The personal knowledge each teacher held regarding her skills and commitment to teaching moved into social spaces that moved into sharing knowledge and appreciation for working together.

“**We are two pieces to a puzzle.”** Reciprocity between teachers and teachers and students

Ms. D and Ms. K expressed a sense of mutual respect for the role that the other teacher played within the classroom. They acknowledged their strong connection was sustained by being opened to learning together.

Ms. D shared, “We just talk about the ways we want to make lessons work for everybody. It just happens naturally because we just talk about it.” Ms. K described, “Everyone sees us as a great team—everyone sees it. Parents are always saying we are like two pieces of a puzzle that fit perfectly together.” Although it may feel natural to the teachers, co-teaching relationships are complex, dynamic processes that require a mutual sense of worth and belonging. According to Jordon (1986), perceived mutuality is characterized by the ability to maintain a sense of self, while being open to possible change that emerges from interacting with others. Perceived mutuality grounds relationships by establishing trust and respect through an
increased awareness of the impact one has on others around them. Perceived mutuality holds shared empathy and a sense of feeling valued in relationship with others. Moreover, according to Foucault (1998), social norms can become so embedded that it is beyond our perception. The notion that Ms. D and Ms. K have created the space for the other to exercise her specific form of power—namely her skillset and past experiences—into the classroom felt so natural even though it required intentional actions and interactions. Each co-teacher has become socialized as an agent in the field of their physical classroom (Bourdieu, 1977). They have created the space to feel their shared habitus at an unconscious level. As agents, Ms. D and Ms. K acclimated to their role and their relationship with one another within the context of their individual positions in their physical classroom, or field.

The development of mutuality between Ms. D and Ms. K allowed for them to produce and reproduce a sense of mutuality within their classroom culture with one another and with their students. According to Jordon (2010), mutual empathy is co-created as both individuals in a relationship are affected by the other. Mutuality results in a responsiveness that allows each person to feel understood and valued by the other. These co-teachers first belonged to each other, which allowed them to create a culture of belonging with their students. Data from the cogenerative dialogue with students revealed most of the students shared the teachers’ view that “They see us both as their teachers.”

One student stated, “We have two teachers, so we get to do a lot of different activities in groups.”

Moreover, the students acknowledged feeling valued and comfortable to share their ideas and questions.
One student spoke for the group as she shared, “They care about us, and I love my teachers.”

The rest of the group nodded in agreement. Through this agreement, a general culture of belonging was lived between teachers and between teachers and students. The mutuality between the teachers created the space to realize the additional pieces that were needed to create this co-teaching image. Interactions with students and between students became additional pieces of the puzzle that began first and foremost with Ms. D and Ms. K being two of the many pieces that began to “click” to create this culture of belonging.

“We just clicked”: Connecting with schemas, structures, and resources

Each teacher entered this co-teaching experience with a strong connection to a belief in themselves as an educator. Simultaneously, they also valued each other, which seemed to increase their self-knowledge and confidence to connect with one another. Through their co-planning routines, they engaged in dialogue and shared their individual expertise, while being opened to learning from and with one another.

Ms. K expressed: “We are just always on the same page—I plan and share the content, and [Ms. D] plans and shares ideas how we can teach it, so we meet the needs of all the kids.” Each teacher described feeling connected with the other.

“We just clicked,” explained Ms. D. “We are on the same page, have similar values and teaching styles,” shared Ms. K.

In addition to knowing themselves, they each were comfortable to share their ideas and feelings with the other. Through this reciprocal process of communication, they began to acknowledge the ways each made the other grow professionally.
Ms. D recalled Ms. K’s openness to learn and apply new instructional techniques. “Right from the beginning, she was interested in listening to my ideas and we always do all of the co-teaching models and methods.”

Ms. K acknowledged that the experience of working with Ms. D allowed for them to learn from one another. “I have been teaching the curriculum for years now, so I know the curriculum better, but we come together to share strategies because she knows a lot about that.”

They shared their ideas in authentic ways that applied specifically to the needs of one another and their students.

Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s co-planning practices provide an example of how they created the space to negotiate power between them. According to Foucault (1991), power is a way in which certain actions modify actions of others. Ms. D and Ms. K mutually modified the actions of the other by each doing their part to plan aspects of a lesson and then come together to adjust the lesson for the class. Ms. K planned the core lessons and Ms. D planned for strategies to guide the process of learning the curriculum. They then shared with one in dialogue and at times through email. Each teacher’s contributions modified the process of learning for all learners in the classroom. Moreover, according to Bourdieu (1990), habitus is created through a social process rather than an individual process. Ms. D and Ms. K created a consistent social process by planning on their own and then coming together to share and finalize their plans. In addition, they were both flexible in the moments, if either teacher wanted to add or change any part of a lesson. Over time, they began to transfer their co-planning behaviors and interactions from the context of one lesson to the next and over time.

Through the lens of the relational cultural theory (Miller, 1976), each teacher was transparent in communicating and receptive to listening and learning from the other. According
to Jordon (2010), being authentic with one another increases the capacity for each person to share one’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences, with an awareness to the possible impact that one’s actions may have on others. Miller et al. (2004) suggested that authenticity embeds a quality of presence where persons in the relationship are comfortable to be themselves in ways that foster growth for themselves and others. These growth-fostering interactions create meaningful moments with others. Ms. D and Ms. K embraced their mutuality of valuing one another as a resource, so together, they structured the lessons with efforts to meet the varying abilities of all learners (both teachers and all students) in their classroom. The reciprocity was demonstrated in the way they co-planned their lessons moved into the act of applying their lessons with their students.

With the established space for the co-teachers to negotiate and share their individual power through their communication and collaborative practices, they further demonstrated how their relationship and power spaces filtered through their praxis.

**Impact on Praxis**

My second and unknowingly final visit to the physical classroom began as I entered the room with Ms. D sitting on a stool facing the students. Each student sat at an individual desk facing Ms. D. “Okay, so let’s think about where we left off in the story.”

Upon my arrival, they were reviewing the section from *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2002). Ms. D continued to ask the class questions as I quietly walked to the back of the room. I put my book bag down and sat at the back horseshoe-shaped table, leaning in to hear the class discussion. Most students were sitting quietly, facing Ms. D as she continued to guide them to summarize the part of the story. Ms. K was walking around the room, intermittently adding comments within the class discussion. As Ms. D continued to lead the class discussion, Ms. K sat
at the front of the room, following along with the lesson. I noticed one student sitting up rigidly tall with his head leaning forward, eyes aimed downward, and his hands inside his desk. As I tilted my head slightly to the right, I could see that he was reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2007). Although he tried to be discrete, it was evident that he was disconnected from the class discussion to read a book that had nothing to do with what the class was doing.

**Disconnecting and reconnecting with agency and Diary of a Wimpy Kid**

According to Sewell (2005), “Agents are empowered to act with and against others by structures and the knowledge of schemas” (p. 143). The interaction between structure and agency in this case revealed evidence of the student’s comfort to disconnect from the class to attend to another activity of his choice. I noticed this student put his book away and dutifully looked at Ms. D as she concluded the lesson. He shifted his gaze to Ms. K as she directed the class to move into the station rotations for the next lesson. His ability to reconnect and be welcomed back into the whole class routine was seamless. This scenario depicts the overarching cultural backdrop in this classroom. This student symbolized the way internal and external communication existed in different ways between teachers and students. As Ms. D led the whole class discussion, Ms. K contributed to the discussion as she asked students to share and elaborate on their thinking in response to Ms. D’s questions. Although most students seemed to be following along with Ms. D, this one student was responding to his internal dialogue that guided him to quietly, yet respectfully, be doing something else. The schema and resources—namely, the unspoken expectation to follow the teacher’s lead—was understood by this student who applied his agency to respond to the internal calling to read his personal text. The natural movement of his shift from internal to external communication was evident as he put away his book to engage in the class routine of moving into small groups. This vignette is one example of how the co-teachers’
shared process of negotiating power was revealed through the co-created space given to each
teacher and the students. The student’s freedom to pay attention to Ms. D, while secretly reading
a book of his choice at the same time, is an example of the natural process of connecting,
disconnecting to empower individuals that seemed to have resulted from the relaxed, yet
structured learning process created by the co-teachers. This student was paying attention to the
teachers yet motivated by his own action on the side. He was given the space and knew on his
own when to rejoin the group with his full attention.

Another noteworthy observation was the way Ms. D and Ms. K established
interchangeable roles. During the first classroom observation, Ms. K led the class during a math
lesson and Ms. D supported individual and small groups of students. During this observation,
Ms. D was leading the whole class and Ms. K supported small groups of students. This flexibility
in roles and responsibilities provides further evidence of the reciprocity and the co-created
spaces of power that guided each teacher to exercise her personal skillset and feel connected with
one another and to all learners in the room. In addition, the transposability of their roles provided
students with the opportunity to also embrace each teacher as a meaningful resource. This space
for negotiated power can be explained by the teachers’ individual and collective agency.
According to Sewell (2005), individuals use their agency as they apply knowledge of schemas
across contexts. Individuals brings with them schemas to guide their actions across situations.
Ms. D and Ms. K applied their agency by the daily routine of sharing their personal ideas about
how to plan and implement lessons. Through communication, their individual agency became
collective as they combined their ideas to plan and apply lessons together, resulting in a
connected power and partnership. This routine naturally embedded the need for each teacher to
disconnect and consider her own abilities and strategies for working with the students. They then
brought this self-knowledge to the process of reconnecting as the teachers co-taught in varying ways. By adjusting their roles and working together within the context of each lesson, they felt more connected during the learning process. This sense of empowerment and connectivity filtered through their relationship with the students.

**Dialogic practice through cogenerative dialogue with students**

The room was bustling with movement as students began to walk toward their assigned group. At this brief transition, Ms. D came over to greet me. “This is a great time to join us. We love getting into stations and working with small groups. I always learn the most from the kids during this time more than any other time.” According to Freire (1970), teachers do not simply dispense knowledge; they learn with their students through a process of dialogue. Ms. D and Ms. K demonstrated their awareness of how the small group instructional time provided the opportunity for them to learn about students’ perspectives. In addition, they learned about their own instructional decisions as they monitored students’ participation with greater attention in small groups.

Learning is a process where knowledge is presented to us, then shaped through understanding, discussion, and reflection. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire, 1970, p. 31)

Ms. K acknowledged that co-teaching with Ms. D has provided the “change needed” along her journey as an educator. “I love working with another teacher and figuring out different ways of teaching because the kids are at different levels. [Ms. D] suggests different co-teaching models, like station teaching, so we can find different ways to teach the kids.”
Ms. K exhibited her disposition for embracing her learning process as a connected learner with another teacher. Specifically, she shared an awareness for learning from her students and from Ms. D. Her knowledge for how to teach variable learners increased as a result of co-teaching.

On the day I introduced cogenerative dialogues, the students were heterogeneously placed into three groups of five or six students that rotated every 15 minutes. One group was in a writing lesson led by Ms. D. Ms. K reviewed a math concept with another group. My group comprised the third grouping. Although I could not hear what was being said within each group, I was keenly observant to notice the behaviors within the other two groups. I saw teachers and students leaning in toward one another. I noticed students working in pairs. I noticed teachers modeling academic concepts through smiles and eye contact with each student in their group. Overall, there was an interactive learning process at each station. Consistent with teachers’ comments during the semi-structured interviews, the teaching process followed a scaffolded approach (Vygotsky, 1978) in which teachers modeled, then invited students to try the modeled concept on their own. Analogous with Freire’s (1970) worldview, I noticed the teachers and students participating in constant interactions, resulting in the creation of their social reality during the lesson. Solidarity was evident through a process dialogue between teachers and students. Students were seen listening to teachers as evidenced by eye contact and watching the teachers’ modeling. Students were also consistently raising their hands as well as working in pairs. My group extended a dialogic approach through my facilitation of questions that invited students to share their thinking around their experiences learning in their classroom. The reflective cogenerative dialogic process revealed what individual students thought about being
members within their classroom community. The varying individual perspectives came together in a collective voice that expressed an overall sense of feeling valued by teachers.

One student said, “Our teachers care about what we think. We get to make choices about the fun stuff; like, in the morning, we can choose to write about anything we want. And sometimes in the afternoon, we choose what we want to read. We also have fun Fridays, and we can choose the activity we want to do.”

This dialogic process between teachers and students naturally incorporated opportunities for students to feel the power spaces created by the co-teachers. Consistent opportunities for students to make choices between specific learning activities shared the evidence that the co-teachers’ negotiated power spaces filtered out to include the students in prospects of that shared power in creating their classroom culture of belonging.

**Dialogic practices: “…would like to, but often we run out of time…”**

Consistent with critical pedagogy and in addition to providing opportunities for student choice throughout the day, Ms. D and Ms. K expressed the value of including dialogic practices within the school day.

Ms. K expressed value in creating space for students to engage in dialogue. “During our morning meetings, we have discussions that sometimes goes deeper, depending on the questions we ask them.”

Ms. K paused a moment, smiled, and continued, “Like, we ask little questions that make them think like: *What if your friend hurt your feelings; how would you handle that?* Then the discussion is open, and we have that dialogue.”
Similar with Ms. K, Ms. D explained the morning message discussion process. She added, “Sometimes we bring [dialogue] in at the end of a lesson. We’ll have some dialogue to talk about the lesson to see what the children think about what we just did.”

There was a three-second pause, and Ms. D added, “I would like to do even more of that honestly, but oftentimes, we run out of time, but I want to do that more often.”

Ms. D and Ms. K both expressed the desire to learn through their relationship with each other and their students through dialogue. Ms. D mentioned the resource of time being a barrier to their ability to make more time for dialogue with students. It was clear the curriculum needed to be a priority within the time constraints of a school day.

Bourdieu (1977) posited we are both free and constrained by rules of society. It is the ways these two phenomena interacted that resulted in Ms. D feeling as if there was not enough time to embed more discussions with students to find out how students were feeling about specific lessons. The co-teachers’ shared habitus explained the likelihood for them to act in a certain way—in this case, choosing certain structures that allowed them to teach the curriculum within small group instruction. Dialogic practices were something they were incorporating but acknowledging its limited use. Sewell’s (2005) theory of structure continues to explain what was happening. During the individual interviews, each teacher expressed the desire to include more dialogue with students during their instructional time. Specifically, Ms. D expressed the desire to make efforts to manage the resource of time to include opportunities for students to express how they experienced authentic classroom-learning experiences. The opportunities for dialogic practices included the students as resources to further create this classroom culture. Consistent with past comments, Ms. D shared their desire to improve their praxis by listening to how the students perceived and experienced learning in their room.
Critical Theory, Structures, Schemas, and Reflexive Praxis in Action

Some aspects of the instructional process resulted in Ms. D needing to disconnect from collaborating with Ms. K, so she could problem-solve and reflect on her role as a special education teacher. She reported that she needed time to consider her praxis in ways that stayed connected with the whole class community while simultaneously supporting individual needs of variable learners in the room. Ms. D revealed times when she felt tension between working with students during the whole class setting and working with individual and small groups to address individual individualized education plan goals. She was aware of the possibility of students feeling separated from the rest of the class: “I just don’t want anyone to feel singled out; yet I also need to make sure I work on what they need.” Ms. D was concerned about how her actions were affecting their students’ self-image. The heart of critical pedagogy rests at the center and filters through the Relational Co-Teaching Framework; therefore, critical pedagogy, the experience of praxis within the framework, supports that individuals gain a sense of freedom when they embrace their ability to participate in the learning process. Learners free themselves from any possible restricted views they have of themselves.

For example, if students were struggling with academic content or skills, Ms. D and Ms. K were critically aware of supporting their abilities without the students feeling powerless in a focus on the area of struggle. Through the lens of critical disability, Ms. D served as a voice for the students with disabilities. She communicated her ideas with Ms. K, and together, they acknowledged that learning differences between students could not be ignored. They worked to adjust, and they aimed to include and welcome learning differences within the whole class setting. Ms. D reflected on how she could further balance her role to personalize instruction while having students feel included and valued, with also having them feel like a part of whole
class lessons. As Ms. D internally questioned and grappled with possible solutions within her own practices in her efforts to make sure that she did not stigmatize anyone, she began to externally collaborate with Ms. K for further planning and implementation. Ms. D needed time to herself to reflect before jointly reflecting with Ms. K. The process evolved into their negotiated power relations, resulting in their teaching in small groups as well as individualized supports on a rotating basis with all students as needed.

Consistent with critical disability theory (Develin & Pothier, 2006), Ms. D’s thinking connects with the focus on power in terms of ensuring that students with disabilities are not marginalized. Her efforts to invite all students to the small group math review sessions supports that the additional reteaching of math concepts is good for students with and without disabilities. On the other hand, her beliefs that “The kids are just always aware of the kids who always need help” implicates a social view of disability that distinguishes between impairment as a limitation and a disability as social exclusion. Ms. D’s concern for students recognizing who needs “help” and who doesn’t denote a possible binary view of educating diverse learners in her class. In addition, the language of “gen. ed kids, special ed kids, and integrated kids” may be explained by her schema based on her past experiences teaching within the structure of a school system. Critical disability theory here probes the tension between the medical model and the social model in viewing students with disabilities. The medical model views students as having weaknesses that need to be fixed for them to perform within grade-level expectations. They need “help” as if something is wrong with them. The social model characterizes disability by a complex interrelationship between an impairment, the individual’s response to the impairment, and the social environment. This includes the attitudes of others as well as the way the classroom is
structured to meet the needs or not meet the needs of individuals who struggle to meet grade-
level expectations.

Ms. D’s awareness shines a light on how the tension between schema and praxis is something she is constantly mitigating to ensure that students feel connected during the instructional process. Her ongoing search for strategies that could be embedded to include variable learners was at the heart of her need to disconnect to learn more on her own and then reconnect with Ms. K to share and implement with the students in class. Ms. D was critically aware of the social forces that position students with disabilities at a disadvantage. This awareness modified the course of action that unfolded throughout daily lessons and routines. Given the space to negotiate power that Ms. K and she already established, Ms. D activated her form of power that challenged ableist structures. She then distributed this power with Ms. K and throughout the classroom culture.

Ms. D and Ms. K demonstrated the value for co-teachers to connect and disconnect in ways that increased their self-growth to work toward mutuality and empowerment. In addition, with the schemas and structure put in place by both co-teachers, both teachers leading class discussions and balancing small group and whole class instruction, the students experienced a sense of comfort to become empowered within a natural flow of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting. As individuals feel supported and valued by the other, the process of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting may result in transforming experiences that deepen growth-fostering relationships.
Impact on Environment

Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s Relationship Ignites Multiple Fields, Duality of Structures, and Agency

There was a consistent hum of students’ private conversations as some students talked with peers who sat near them. There was the bustling sound of footsteps and chairs screeching as students were in and out of their seats. Many students walked around the room for a variety of reasons. Some were returning their Chromebooks to the cart by the entranceway, some were at the sink, while one student walked across the rows of 19 desks, stopping at selected desks to talk with peers. Most students were quietly working at their seats to complete their math exit ticket.

Ms. K directed the class: “If you are done with your exit ticket, then open to your homework on page 175.”

Five students could be seen turning the pages in their math books, while most students continued with their private conversations.

Another minute passed by before Ms. K announced, “I love the way Jared is ready.”

From the clamor of students’ voices, I could hear a student asking another student, “What book? What page?”

At the front of the room, Mrs. K sat on a stool looking around the room. “Awesome job, Caitlin and Sam; I see you are ready.”

The reciprocal interplay between structure and flexibility provided the opportunities for students to experience the freedom to walk around the room, engage in private conversations, and experience a sense of trust with the teachers in using their time to complete the assigned math exit ticket assignment. The classroom in these moments may be explained through Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of fields. The classroom was a multi-dimensional space that provided
students with changing rules and a fair amount of agency that became a part of the shared habitus between teachers and students. Ms. K began to transition the students from freely walking around the room and engaging in personal conversations with one another to a more formal field within the same physical space. The field of free space was shifting into one with more structure and different rules through Ms. K’s oral prompts and specific feedback. She was guiding the students to quiet down, return to their seats, and be ready to participate in the math lesson. Ms. D entered the room with two students who seamlessly joined the class by going to their seats and taking out their math books.

As the class began to settle down, Ms. K and Ms. D shared a knowing glance from across the room as Ms. K addressed the class. “So, how was lunch?”

Students responded directly to Ms. K within the whole class setting as well as privately by leaning toward peers seated nearby. Brief lunch time stories energized the room. Ms. D began to walk around the room, smiling and laughing as students shared their stories. After another minute, Ms. K stood at the front of the room and provided a final cue to guide students into the lesson. As she began to review the math concept at the board, Ms. D took two students to the back table. The transition between fields within the same physical classroom took shape. According to Sewell (2005), structures are the schemas and resources that guide the way individuals act. Simultaneously, the way individuals act become the structures in place. Ms. K provided structure through oral directions as well as the routines that have been established since the beginning of the school year.

Ms. D reported that she often worked with students at the back table as part of their daily routine during math. “The additional support at the back table is always open to all students, so
we make sure that it is not always the same students—and sometimes I just support different students at their seat—so no one is singled out.”

Students behaved in a manner that was established by the co-teachers working in partnership. In addition, Ms. K expressed the desired learning behaviors through specific positive feedback. The students were expected to adjust their behavior accordingly. Providing positive feedback to the whole class created the time for those who were not following directions to figure it out by looking around the room to see what the teachers and students were doing—which provided an awareness of the structures and resources available.

Transparency through nonverbal communication between the teachers further evidenced reciprocity in making decisions within the moments of class time. In this moment, they each valued the perspective of the other in making decisions for directing the lesson together and working with the students. Ms. K’s approach in asking the students about lunch demonstrated the mutual comfort and care that the teachers and students experienced together.

Ms. D explained, “Creating relationships with the kids is something that [Ms. K] and I do really well. We want the kids to be comfortable to be themselves.”

The relationship between Ms. K and Ms. D flows into the ability for students to be comfortable to “be themselves” and use their agency. According to Sewell (2005), “agency arises from the actor’s control of resources, which means the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources” (pp. 143-144).” In this case, the students themselves were resources as they asked one another, “What page are we on?” Students flowed with the shifting schemas through the different fields within their classroom. According to Bourdieu (1977), when entering fields, individuals always have with them the habitus that become the resources needed to become part of the social capital. In this classroom, the relationship between Ms. D and Ms. K
provided the space for the students to be comfortable and know the codes that worked within their fields to provide a sense of belonging across the various lessons and activities within that classroom.

As I walked along the back of the room, I was immediately struck by the colorful bulletin boards lining the back wall of the classroom. I read the stenciled title written across the broad board: *Welcome to the United States.* The light blue background was revealed only by a speck in the top right corner. The individually colored student maps overlapped one another and covered the board. The message of this overlapping display spoke to me. I counted 19 maps through the collage of overlapping maps. I could hear it say: *Students, your hard work on this map is valued and included here for all observers to see. Your hard work matters.* Next to this bulletin board was another colorful bulletin board that read: *Change your Words, Change your Mindset.* The board included examples of quotes to encourage positive self-talk such as, instead of saying *I am not good at math,* say: *I am not good at math...yet.* I was struck by the clear connection between the messages seen and felt within the environment and the visible and audible interactions intentionally lived between the co-teachers. Their decisions in decorating their classroom served as an appendage that was connected to their strong relationship. The co-teaching relationship framed, supported, and filtered into connecting the many more pieces needed to create the full image of this welcoming classroom environment. Their efforts to empower students to be a part of a comfortable, participatory classroom culture was further evidence of their intention to include students within their shared co-teaching power.

**Duality of Structure, Schemas, and Resources**

The notion of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting was evidenced within this classroom environment. For example, the bulletin board that shared growth mindset statements
invited the students to engage in internal dialogues any time throughout the day to continue their process of personal and social growth. This bulletin board served as a visible reminder in guiding personal dialogue. The process of disconnecting from the whole group to reflect on personal performance guided the comfort in learners reconnecting with a sense of belonging during small and whole group learning. As learners disconnected to work on self-growth during independent work time, they were welcomed back into the externally social aspects of learning.

According to Sewell (2005), resources are anything that can serve as a source of power. Ms. D and Ms. K used the classroom space in ways that evidenced a duality of structure. For example, the district curriculum (such as learning the geography of the United States) served as a requirement for what teachers must teach. In turn, Ms. K and Ms. D decided to display the student work to shape the way the structure of the curriculum was perceived as a message of hardworking, geographically knowledgeable students. In addition, the bulletin board that included positive self-talk statements to encourage a growth mindset (Dweck, 2005) used the variation of language as a structure to empower students to push through challenges naturally found in the process of learning. Ms. K and Ms. D used their schema to display messages of valuing students’ hard work and varying abilities as constituents of their classroom culture.

The reciprocal process of creating routines and structures within the classroom was evident through the teachers’ individual comments that served as a collective message within their partnership.

Ms. D expressed, “We really design the routines together, which is nice because [Ms. K] has been teaching fifth grade for so long. A lot of times when you co-teach with someone with experience, they tell you, ‘This is what I do’ and then you have to do that too.”
Ms. D sank back in the chair and smiled, “But that is not what it’s like. [Ms. K] was completely open to trying different things and I think we are structuring the class in ways she hasn’t done before this year because we came up with it together based on what we think the children need.”

Ms. K shared her excitement for applying a variety of co-teaching models. “We are doing the different models all the time. It’s amazing. Like there are no words to describe it. I’ve been teaching a long time, and I needed this change.”

The evidence of the teachers being in a relationship where each wanted time to learn on her own while coming together to create and implement their shared knowledge served as a pillar and great resource for students to join them in creating this classroom community.

According to Sewell (2005), agency can be collective as well as individual. Ms. D and Ms. K demonstrated examples of how each feels empowered to act with the other within the structure of the classroom. Each teacher learns about herself and the other through the knowledge of their schemas in applying various co-teaching models across lessons and contexts. The ways they create the structures within their classroom are intentional rather than habitual as indicated by Ms. K being open to changing the way she structures her teaching in connection with Ms. D, regardless of the fact that Ms. K had been teaching a long time. The co-teachers shared a mutual desire to learn with one another by connecting their individual experiences and expertise together. Ms. K shared her experiences with the curriculum and her history teaching fifth grade, and Ms. D shared her experiences with the co-teaching models to meet the varying needs and abilities of their students. The environment became a consistent place where the co-teachers modeled their shared power and ongoing partnership in valuing each other, their students, and their time to teach and learn within their co-created culture of belonging.
Co-Creating and Negotiating Power Spaces

Through the lens of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework, Ms. D and Ms. K forged a bond that valued the unique expertise and perspectives of each teacher individually and collectively. They shared a mutual disposition for teaching and learning as well as engaged in ongoing, transparent communication that filtered through their praxis and their environment. They were enmeshed in a process of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting to value their own time to learn and reflect. Due to their recognized mutuality, they easily reconnected in ways that motivated each to continue to work on personal growth as well as social growth through their co-teaching experience. The process they co-created was one of shared power in the way they created their culture of belonging with one another and with their students in their classroom.

According to Foucault (1982), the question is not whether power exists or does not exist. Rather, he explores how power may or may not come into existence. For Foucault, power is pervasive and exists when it is put into action through the beliefs of individuals. Power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge individuals accept as truth. Power then is the interplay of actions through relationships between individuals and groups. It is produced and reproduced through discourse and ongoing interactions. Ms. D and Ms. K put their power into action through the ebb and flow of their personal/internal and social/external communications. This was evident as they followed the district guidelines, communicated with parents, and planned on their own and then came together to blend their ideas. For Foucault, power can be exercised when one is put in a position to act through the guidance of another, with the aim of being modified and manipulated to act in a certain way.
Through the reciprocity of their relationship, Ms. D and Ms. K exercised a willingness to negotiate power by exchanging ideas and actions together—one guiding the other—with the aim of changing their joint actions in a manner that best addressed the needs of every learner in their classroom. Their reciprocity harmonized any potential conflicts that could arise between co-teachers. Ms. D pointed out that she was grateful to be in a partnership with Ms. K, where they each valued one another through open communication and shared responsibilities. Ms. D mentioned past experiences with other co-teachers where she felt her position as a special education teacher made her feel like the “other,” leading her to act in ways that supported her feeling less than “an equal partner.” In those situations, she felt manipulated by a system that brought the general education teacher as the dominant leader—leaving her as the special education teacher who had to modify her teaching to meet the teaching style of her co-teacher.

Although Ms. D shared her ongoing concerns about how to blend students’ individual needs into the whole class setting, she expressed gratitude for working with a co-teacher who was willing to implement new structures and ways of teaching, so that no student was “singled out.” Ms. D’s specific power challenges traditional assumptions on disability that oppresses or violates the rights of students with disabilities (Hosking, 2008). Her critical awareness attempted to ensure students with disabilities had access to the curriculum in personalized, yet community-oriented ways.

Consistent with critical disability theory, Ms. D looked to defy traditional views on disability that often resulted in students feeling a “sense of powerlessness or power over” (Devlin & Pothier, 2006, p. 2). Rather, she met the notion of disability with a sensitivity and compassion and aimed to empower students through carefully designed structures and resources. The flexibility in the way they designed lessons in small groups to accommodate all learners was an
example of how Ms. D’s specific power influenced Ms. K to implement new ways of teaching that resulted in viewing students with disabilities through a strengths-based focus. Ms. K shared her excitement for working with Ms. D: “She always finds a way to have the lesson work for students at all levels.” It was through the ongoing dialogic, trusting, and reciprocal relationship between Ms. D and Ms. K that brought a deeper awareness of the social context of their classroom and the importance to socially construct a view that students of all abilities belonged in their classroom. Ms. D’s specific form of power as a special education teacher was pivotal in reconciling the process of educating students with and without disabilities together in one physical classroom. Moreover, Ms. K’s willingness to rescind her possible power as a dominant general education teacher created further space to create this classroom culture. Their co-teaching relationship made it possible to socially construct a view that embraced all learners through a strengths-based focus resulting in a culture of belonging in this physical space.

**Conclusion**

The co-teaching image created thus far illuminated a culture of belonging that began with the relationship of the co-teachers first belonging with one another through a shared process of creating space to negotiate power throughout their co-teaching partnership. Their personal and social interactions created opportunities for them to experience the process of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting with one another and with their students. Through the Relational Co-Teaching Framework, Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s shared habitus explained how their interactions contributed to co-creating a culture of belonging in this physical classroom. Their co-teaching image was being lived out between the teachers and their students in ways that created and recreated their culture of belonging. Like puzzle users finding a consistent, sturdy table to
assemble their puzzle, Ms. D and Ms. K had their classroom as a sturdy, dependable place to form their co-teaching puzzle.

As I walked out of the classroom on March 10th, 2020, I felt like a connected part of this co-teaching puzzle. “Thank you!” See you next week!” “That was fun!” “Can we do this again next week?” were some concluding comments from students as they scurried to their seats at the conclusion of the introduction to cogenerative dialogues. Students were receptive to sharing their ideas, and both co-teachers were open to participating in new ways of interacting with students. Our second cogenerative dialogue was scheduled for one week later—all the pieces were falling into place, and I became a natural part of this already established co-teaching image. I felt a personal sense of belonging through the transparency in communication and willingness to learn together between the teachers, the students, and me. I felt beyond grateful and empowered to be welcomed as part of their classroom community. Three days later, one district memo changed everything.

On March 13th, 2020, teachers, students, and families in the community were informed there was a county-ordered emergency school closing for the week of March 16th, 2020. This one-week emergency school closing would turn into a state-ordered closing through April 1st, 2020. Through the weeks of crisis teaching, school buildings were to remain closed through the end of the school year. What happens when some of the legs of the table that holds up a completed puzzle break? The puzzle begins to slide off the table. Like dedicated puzzle users, Ms. K and Ms. D ran with outstretched arms to try to catch the puzzle to keep the many pieces intact. They were left standing, facing one another, each holding up whatever remains they could save—as they watched the unsaved pieces fall—without any semblance of putting them back together. This unexpected disruption served as a significant disconnection from the familiar
teaching and learning within the classroom to the unfamiliar structure of remote learning. It was time to reconsider putting the pieces back together—only this time, there was not a clear image to guide the reformation. Chapter V shares the data to explain the ways Ms. D and Ms. K maintained and transformed their culture of belonging as they shifted from the face-to-face classroom to remote learning. Their story continues into the shift and development of teaching and learning during unfamiliar remote times.
Chapter V

Connecting and Disconnecting the Known with the Unfamiliar:

Reimagining the Image of the Co-Teaching Puzzle

These talks are nice because it gets us to slow down and not feel like we are on a schedule to post or do something for the kids this second,” Ms. K shared. “Ms. D added, “Yes, it’s true. It gives us time to think about what we are doing—and decide what changes can be made. (Ms. D, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020)

Shifting and Being within Historical Spaces

Faculty rooms were active with conversations over the increasing concerns of the COVID-19 cases across the county, state, nation, and around the world. Frequent handwashing became intentionally centered within all classroom daily routines. The focus was on doing what could be done to keep everyone safe and healthy throughout the school day. The announcement of the county-ordered school building closure for March 16th and 17th arrived on March 13th. Soon following was the state-ordered closing for March 18th and 19th. Teaching and learning came to an abrupt halt as educators, students, and families waited for district notification to guide next steps. Remote-learning resources and activities were sent home to parents and students to offer opportunities for self-directed learning as we waited to find out how to move forward.

With a state order to close school buildings through April 1st, 2020, the vision for my original study was shattered. Without the physical classroom to connect our interactions, it seemed impossible to continue studying the classroom culture. In the spirit of my critical transformative auto/ethnographic design, I connected with the opportunity before me. As I shifted to researching remotely, I reoriented my focus on how the culture of this classroom was
maintained and possibly transformed during this disruption. My reconnection with my study meant I had to make the difficult decision to disconnect with the students and discontinue the ways we were working together in the physical classroom. The remote learning experience could not provide the space for me to personally work with the students. Still, I remained curious to see where the study would take me as I shifted my focus to the experiences of the two co-teachers, Ms. K and Ms. D. We were in this uncertain space together. The co-teaching image that they created with their students from September to this point fell apart. Yet, there were aspects of their co-created culture that remained intact.

Chapter IV described how Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s co-teaching relationship created a culture of belonging through their shared process of negotiating power throughout their daily responsibilities in their physical classroom. The Relational Co-Teaching Framework illustrated how the co-teachers created space for each co-teacher to bring in her specific form of power. It was in Ms. K’s rescinding power as the general education teacher that allowed Ms. D to bring in her specific form of power as a special education teacher that challenged ableist views as they designed instruction. The two co-teachers created a culture of belonging with one another as a precondition that then filtered into their praxis and classroom environment. The notion of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting was introduced as a process that began to support the power differentials between the co-teachers that then were shared and distributed through their classroom culture.

Before reconstructing their co-teaching puzzle image, Ms. D and Ms. K needed to assess what pieces remained intact and what sections of the image would need to be reimagined. Typically, when puzzle users select their structure, such as a sturdy table, to piece their image together, they remain confident the structure will remain constant to allow for stabilization. Once
the puzzle is completed, puzzle users have the choice to glue the pieces together to ensure secure connections, or they choose to purposefully dismantle the pieces with the satisfaction that they achieved their goal to assemble, knowing they may reassemble for recreational purposes at another time of their choosing. On the other hand, if not given a choice, puzzle users may experience a range of disruptions that result in their completed image breaking apart unexpectedly. For example, they may find a disruption in the form of something or someone knocking into the structure that holds the image, resulting in the pieces falling apart and needing to be reassembled. Like educators across the world, Ms. D and Ms. K found themselves in a situation to reassemble their co-teaching image while simultaneously reimagining what the image they are striving to connect should look like.

This chapter discusses how Ms. K and Ms. D reassembled a new co-teaching image as they adjusted to the process of remote learning. Specifically, this chapter discusses what the co-teachers did to transpose their actions from the physical space into the virtual space in terms of negotiating and mitigating power and creating space for belonging. Through the relational co-teaching framework, this chapter discusses how Ms. D and Ms. K reproduced their co-teaching image and maintained their culture of belonging by holding onto the remaining pieces from the physical classroom to reconstruct and build anew in virtual spaces. At the second the unexpected shift to remote happened, the connection between the students and me was lost. The first cogenerative dialogue with students turned into the last. My connection with Ms. K and Ms. D, however, remained strong and consistent. The role of cogenerative dialogues took on a new structure and process than has been experienced and described in the literature to date. Chapter II explains the details of a new structure and process of cogenerative dialogues that was discovered through my study. The next section discusses how this new way of thinking about—and
implementing—cogens was developed as I virtually interacted with Ms. D and Ms. K throughout our remote teaching and learning experiences.

**Transforming Culture through Virtual Cogenerative Dialogues**

Two weeks into the shift to remote learning, Ms. D, Ms. K, and I were discussing what was happening in their classroom. They responded by sharing the ways they were transferring their once in-person lessons into the digital format. The content and the curriculum were the main topics of discussion. The teachers expressed their intention to make sure they keep the students learning. I inserted my feeling of missing the students’ perspectives.

“How are they doing?” I asked.

Both co-teachers shared that they were all doing well as evidenced by the way they were submitting their work and “doing a good job.”

After a few minutes, I continued, “That is great to hear. I just keep wondering how they are doing with the shift. I miss the cognerative process we started in the classroom; they were so comfortable to share their perspectives on how they experienced learning in the physical classroom.”

Ms. K chimed in, “It’s true, we all lost our interactions with the kids.”

Ms. D added, “Yes, but we are making phone calls and together, [Ms. K] and I are staying connected with everybody.”

The co-teachers were in contact with all students and families to guide them to asynchronously navigate their Google Classroom and remote-learning process for accessing and submitting work.

I added, “I would love to introduce student journaling activities to invite students’ voice back into our learning together.”
Traditionally, cogenerative dialogues (cogens) are reflective conversations amongst selected participants. Typically, they are conversations with a small number of students and teachers to review how they experienced a recent class activity or lesson. Together, students and teachers cogenerate decisions regarding new rules for the class, changes in students’ and teachers’ roles, and their shared responsibility for enacting culture (Tobin et al., 2014).

As I met with Ms. D and Ms. K via Google Meet, I began to feel the process of cogenerative dialogues, but not in the way cogens were understood pre-COVID. Although I was not able to implement cogens as planned and in the tradition of the cogen process as it has been done in the past, I was able to bring in the students’ point of view and dialogue through the student journaling artifacts. I was not dialoguing with students directly, but the student journaling afforded the opportunity for the teachers to dialogue with the students’ experience and then respond by transforming the culture in relation to their perspectives. This cogen process allowed me to continue in the virtual environment the ethnographic work that I began in the physical environment. I have taken the principles of cogenerative dialogues and identified another way to implement and think about the technique in other spaces, like virtual spaces. Through the lens of the Relational Co-Teaching Framework, the next section discusses how Ms. D and Ms. K continued to create spaces to negotiate power to recreate their culture of belonging in their virtual space.

Reciprocity

Transforming and Evolving through Habitus, Structure and Agency

As I entered my well-lit home office, I pushed “play” on my classical music playlist. I sank deep in my oversized chair, closed my eyes, and allowed the structure of the chair cushions to hold me up as I relaxed with the images that emerged from the soothing rhythm. After a few
minutes of flooding out the loud silence that resulted from feeling uncertain about my next steps with Ms. D and Ms. K, I moved to my desk, sat upright, faced my computer screen, and I was ready to meet with them for our first synchronous Google Meet. The abrupt shift to remote teaching, learning, and researching revealed an intense range of emotions that volleyed within a constant motion between gratitude and disappointment. The most difficult shift for me was the sudden and extreme disconnection between the students and me. I no longer had access to their perspectives or thoughts about how they were experiencing learning in their classroom. The idea of their “classroom” became this unfamiliar space that was no longer constructed by the walls that allowed all of us to connect. We were now connected by digital links that led to wide-open spaces that were not defined or understood. We were disconnected from our familiar learning experiences.

Through reconnecting via Google Meet with Ms. D and Ms. K, there was a profound glimmer of hope that served the three of us well. As we entered the digital space together, there was an audible collective sigh that was heard, seen, and felt as we all relaxed our shoulders and sank comfortably into our seats facing the computer, everyone smiling. The screen seemed to take on human qualities, bringing us all together again as if we were in the same physical space. We readily admitted how grateful we were to continue with this study.

“We get so much out of our talks together,” revealed Ms. K.

Ms. D added, “Yes, our talks always give us something to think about—like trying new strategies to try with our class.”

I shared the mutual gratitude for them welcoming me into their co-teaching experience. Our conversation segued seamlessly into our upcoming work together. We needed to wait for further guidance from the district, which in turn waited to hear guidance from county and state
officials. Through the waiting, and through my ongoing dialogues with Ms. D and Ms. K, I became humbled by being included within their continued reciprocity.

The process of waiting for district guidance and following through with the unfolding district mandates can be explained through the lens of structure and agency (Sewell, 2005). The co-teaching image that Ms. D and Ms. K pieced together with their students in the physical classroom fell apart at the closing of the school building. They were left holding up any pieces they could to salvage remnants of what the story of their co-teaching puzzle depicted with hopes of transposing familiar schemas. Yet, as expected, shifting into unprecedented remote-learning spaces revealed a stark awareness of how the structures and resources that once connected to support their culture of belonging were lost. The teachers had no choice and had to alter their schemas and resources through their digital Google Classroom.

Ms. D explained: “We are spending so much time transferring our lessons to be digital. It takes a lot of time.”

Ms. K added: It’s true—it takes so much time, and it’s so great to have someone to do that with—I mean [Ms. D] finds great links and online resources to support our lessons, and I think that helps all of the kids transition to this digital mode.”

This unfamiliar way to teaching and learning ran counter to the individual and shared habitus in the physical classroom. Bourdieu (1984) explained that power is culturally and symbolically created. It is recreated and reauthenticated through an interplay of agency and structure.

The bi-monthly virtual cogerative dialogues became an added resource and space for Ms. K, Ms. D, and me to consider what was happening to their classroom culture and what could be done to maintain, produce, and reproduce a culture of belonging in their Google Classroom.
“These talks are nice because it gets us to slow down and not feel like we are on a schedule to post or do something for the kids this second,” Ms. K shared.

“Ms. D added, “Yes, it’s true. It’s gives us time to think about what we are doing—and decide what changes can be made.”

Early in the remote-learning phase of the study, the bi-monthly virtual cogens became something to look forward to for all of us. It contributed as a support as the teachers worked to build their new classroom culture in an unfamiliar virtual space. Their willingness to accept my idea to include student journaling was evidence that our virtual cogens served as a cultural seedbed. In addition, our virtual cogens provided the space for me to hear from them about their experiences. At the onset of the shift to remote, I noticed the ease with which Ms. D and Ms. K transferred their transparent communication practices into their virtual space.

Critical disability theory, cultural and social capital, and newly constructed view of students’ abilities

The laughter was uplifting. As I logged in to join Ms. D and Ms. K for our cogenerative dialogue, they, too, just logged in, and were already sharing stories about how they were managing at home. The laughter came from a place of relief.

“It just feels so good to have this time right now,” stated Ms. K. She continued, “It’s just been quite stressful, and our talks just let us look back and think about how it’s going.”

Ms. D added. “It’s so true. When we are doing what we have to do, we just have to think on our feet and do it. This is all just so new.”

They explained what a difficult process it had been in “teaching this way.” They were sharing their responsibility in translating lessons into the digital format. In addition, they were eager to collaborate with grade-level teachers in their building.
Ms. D mentioned, “We are all doing the same thing to keep the consistency.”

Ms. K added, “We are sharing the work and that is a big help.”

I asked them if they feel that they needed to adjust because they were an inclusive classroom.

Ms. D responded, “So far, all the children need support. So, we are all doing the same thing as we all get used to this—and we are emailing and speaking individually with students individually.”

Ms. D explained that individual differences were accounted for, but there was also a need, at least at this point, to ignore some differences to advance equity. For example, Ms. D was the only special education teacher in the group. Their class was one of three fifth-grade classes in their building. In addition to Ms. K and Ms. D, there were two other general education teachers who were co-planning. Their reciprocity in collaborating and sharing the responsibilities between the four teachers guided new structures, schemas, and expanded resources.

Ms. D explained, “We are all sharing the core curriculum, and I am mostly sharing digital tools that support all of the children.”

Ms. K added, “It’s great how [Ms. D] finds additional videos or links that provide the kids with ways to support their learning—and it’s given to all the kids.”

The teachers’ actions can be described by Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital—namely, cultural and social capital—which serves as a relational force. As a group, the teachers’ cultural capital brought them together in terms of their experiences as educators. Their intellectual abilities to design instruction and embrace the challenge of learning ways to digitize their lessons advanced their social condition. Although Ms. D was the only special education teacher, her role within this group blended with her general education colleagues in a way that merged the invisible boundary
between general education and special education. The four teachers came together based on their professional connection.

Ms. D was embraced as an “equal” partner within this co-planning group. Yet, she continued to be mindful to keep the space she needed to exercise her specific form of power. Based on her schema and her past experiences working with Ms. K in their physical classroom, Ms. D continued to embed a space in their new remote field to use her agency to identify additional tools and resources that support all learners across the grade level. Ms. D’s personal capital as a special education teacher became embraced without question by the others in the group. Ms. D’s actions of sharing additional supplemental supports is another example of how her actions aimed to overcome the discrepancies that have been structured within the history of special education. The strategies and tools she contributed were good for all learners.

The traditional societal view that creates an imaginary, yet visible line between general education and special education did not exist within this group. Ms. D’s cultural capital helped her to exercise her specific form of power. The general education teachers as a group exercised their power as well, but also rescinded some of their power to connect with new ideas presented by Ms. D. In addition, the teachers did not want to overwhelm the students or themselves. It was not necessary to address differences individually but rather as a whole class. This was a time that everyone needed to adjust and to settle into learning within this new virtual field. Ms. D and Ms. K expanded their symbolic capital as they entered this new experience. The notion of learner variability (Meyer et al., 2014) was embraced to acknowledge that every learner in their classroom required unique and collective supports as they adjusted to the remote learning process. As the co-planning group continued through the weeks and months, Ms. D and Ms. K continued to grow personally and professionally in relationship with one another.
Multiplicity of structures, transposability of schemas, and Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s evolving shared habitus

Ms. K and Ms. D transferred their co-established social norms from the physical classroom into their virtual spaces. For example, the transparent communication practices continued to be strong between Ms. K and Ms. D.

“We just talk at all hours of the day and night,” stated Ms. D.

“Yes,” Ms. K added through a slight chuckle. “I told her she has to add my photo on the wall behind her.” Ms. K guided me to look closer to notice that Ms. D had photos of her family members hanging on the large wall behind her. They both began to laugh.

Ms. K added: “We are like a part of each other’s family now.”

They admitted that their connection with one another made these changing and unfamiliar times much easier.

“It feels like we are together around the clock, but we are also feeling so apart because we are working on our own and then coming together to share,” added Ms. D.

“I don’t even want to think about what this would be like if we didn’t have each other,” Ms. K shared as Ms. D nodded affirmatively, wholeheartedly, with a slight smile.

According to Jordan (2010) and Miller (1976), individuals who participate in growth-fostering relationships have a better connection with feeling a sense of worth and an increased capacity to be productive, with an increased desire for more connection. The co-teachers’ sense of belonging to, for, and with one another continued to be a resource that guided the structures and routines they were recapturing and reinventing as they rebuilt their classroom community in their remote spaces. This reciprocal relationship continued to be the source of Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s shared understanding that each teacher was a unique resource for the other. As they
navigated through the transition to remote learning, Ms. K and Ms. D continued to create the space to negotiate power through their shared habitus that evolved across time and setting. The co-teachers’ actions made the theory of habitus visible through their practice. According to Bourdieu (1977), an individual’s social action transcends the duality of structure and agency. Human actions are not determined by structures of explicit rules but by transposing dispositions and past experiences that served to guide their interactions in the new structure of their virtual classroom. The co-teachers did not have past experiences in co-teaching virtually. They did, however, have their past experiences in belonging with one another along the teaching experience. Their relationship fueled their ability to enact social action by continuing to value the role of the other and then blend their areas of expertise into creating their virtual classroom culture based on their pre-existing approaches to teaching and learning in the physical classroom. They continued to empower one another by co-creating personal space for individual reflection and then flowing social/partner space to share what each thought about designing instruction for their students.

**Historical Reciprocal Forces of Habitus and Fields in Ms. K’s and Ms. D’s Virtual Classroom**

According to Bourdieu (1977), an individual’s habitus refers to something historical; it is the interplay between one’s past and present experiences. For Ms. D, Ms. K, and their students, the current remote-learning experience was being internalized and becoming another layer to add to the layers from their experiences in the physical classroom. Ms. K and Ms. D were starting to notice instances where they felt “like we used to feel” as they naturally strived to maintain and apply some of their classroom culture, some of their co-teaching puzzle pieces, from the physical to remote fields.
“We are all definitely feeling more connected because of our live weekly Google Meet time,” shared Ms. D.

Ms. K added, “And we are learning so much more as we go along because we learn every time we see the kids.”

As an example, the teachers decided to set up their live Google Meet sessions in small groups rather than as a whole class because “some of the children were feeling overwhelmed with all the faces on their screen.”

Ms. K explained they made that adjustment because of their individual phone calls with students and parents. As remote learning unfolded, Ms. D and Ms. K were mindful to include the students’ actions and personal comments as they considered their next steps in designing the virtual-learning experience. The students entered the reciprocal, transparent communication process that illuminated Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s co-teaching actions.

The co-teachers’ increased feeling of connection with their students can be explained through Bourdieu’s (1980) attempt to reconcile structure and agency. The teachers were constantly reflecting on how to rebuild their classroom culture. They were internalizing the new external structure of remote learning, while externalizing their internalized success within their physical classroom. Specifically, they recalled their success teaching in small groups in the physical classroom and decided to continue applying small groups in live Google Meets in the virtual space. The students’ feedback—namely, that some were overwhelmed by the whole class Google Meet—contributed to the reciprocity of transparent communication and shared habitus between the two teachers. Moreover, habitus is the result of history being codified into practice, which explains that although the field of remote learning required a different habitus in comparison to the physical classroom, Ms. K and Ms. D were in constant communication with
one another and individually with students. Therefore, it was through these moments of reciprocity and evolving shared habitus that allowed them to continue cultivating relationships and a virtual culture of belonging to the best of their abilities. As the co-teachers adapted to remote learning, they understood that they were learners alongside their students. They were critically aware of how they were learning from and with their students through parents’ and students’ feedback. Through their ongoing transparent communications, Ms. D and Ms. K fortified their individual and collective decisions for designing their virtual classroom culture.

Impact on Praxis

**Universal design for learning and a new socially constructed notion of disability**

The co-teachers’ instructional decisions underwent vast changes at the onset of remote learning. Their once student-centered classroom was missing students’ active participation and interactions. They intentionally eliminated the comment feature in the Google Classroom.

“We miss hearing their voices in class, but we are still communicating with every student,” said Ms. D.

Ms. K added, “Yes, we communicate with them through their work. We write a comment about how they did, and they can ask us questions.” Ms. K sat up taller and smiled. “You know what else? It’s amazing how the kids who needed the most support in the classroom are more independent. And the students who we would never expect to need additional support need it.”

Critical disability theory probes the tension between personal independence and interdependence as well as the social construction of disability and non-disability (Hosking, 2008). As our cogen session unfolded, both Ms. K and Ms. D agreed that they needed to support all students as they did in the physical classroom. Yet, in the remote setting, the students who did
not require additional supports now sought it out. This raises the notion of disability emerging differently in the two fields.

Ms. K shared that although a few students with disabilities continued to require additional supports, more non-classified students needed assistance. As she explained, “Ms. D works hard to find different ways to share the same content information, so that is helping all the kids.”

“Yes,” Ms. D added we are really applying UDL by making sure the children have options for learning.” Ms. D explained how she shared additional information through EdPuzzle and Google Slides, “…so the children can choose which way works better for them. It helps all the students.”

The multiple resources evidenced the way Ms. D and Ms. K negotiated their power through Ms. D’s personal capital that was then shared with Ms. K to become their social capital. Their shared power enabled them to design instruction through the lens of UDL and meet the needs of all their learners. The teachers offered options of videos and written text. In addition, they uploaded multiplication charts and graphic organizers to guide paragraph writing.

“We offer as options for all—not just the students who really need it,” Ms. D added.

The continued space for negotiating power was visible and an intentional part of Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s collaborative process. Ms. D continued to be the voice for students who needed further support by working to proactively represent materials in multiple ways to meet the needs of their variable learners. The process they created in this remote space continued to value diversity. Unlike the physical classroom, diversity now included all learners because as the co-teachers continued to say, “They all need support during these times.” Critical disability welcomes the inevitability of differences and envisions a framework of equity. Differences in transitioning to remote learning were identified and not ignored. Differences were embraced by the teachers, and
variability rather than disability became the lens for co-creating a culture where everyone had the opportunity to belong.

Through our cogens, the teachers spoke about all students as individuals within a collective. Each learner was supported and valued by both teachers. By presenting the information with multiple options, the shared power between the co-teachers permeated through their praxis, resulting in maximizing the human freedom for each student to choose how best to access the content. The structures in place were met with options for the students to choose and apply agency for completing the work. Even though the teachers set up their Google Classroom in a manner Freire deemed as a banking model of instruction by posting and waiting for students to submit completed work, they continued to work together to try to move beyond that. This addition of student voice was pivotal along the process of co-creating this classroom culture. As the co-teachers acclimated to the remote co-teaching process, they continued to embrace students’ point of view. Ms. K continued to rescind power at key points to create the space for Ms. D to personalize the learning process for specific needs of their diverse learners.

**Dialogic Practices: Inviting student voice within the practice of production and reproduction**

When I first introduced student journaling activities, Ms. D and Ms. K were hesitantly agreeable.

Ms. D explained, “It’s just that we have to do the same thing as the other classes.”

Ms. K elaborated, “Everyone just needs the consistency right now, and we have sets of twins in our grade level, so their siblings are in other classes—it’s just easier for the parents if we do the same thing.”

A thoughtful silence entered our cogen space.
I smiled and said, “I see, and I understand what you are saying.” Internally, I was in an active dialogue: *Where is the students’ voice? How do we know how they are experiencing remote learning and their virtual classroom?*

Through our virtual, socially constructed notion of disability in this class, it was apparent that all learners needed support. Yet this class was an inclusive co-taught classroom and different from the two other classes involved in their co-planning sessions. Ms. D and Ms. K reported that both students with and without disabilities were working well. In fact, most students with disabilities were “working more successfully” than their non-classified peers. I kept wondering: *How are the students with and without disabilities experiencing this time?* My constant search for ways to invite student voice back in can be explained through critical disability theory.

According to Hosking (2008), “It is only by listening to and valuing the perspectives of those who are living disabled lives that the able bodied can begin to understand that even severe disability does not have to prevent a joyful and desired life.” (p. 13). In the process of recreating this classroom culture, the voices of all students were needed. The co-teachers’ new notion of disability was socially reconstructed to include their experience that “all children” needed their support. Although the teachers were intentionally co-planning and designing multiple ways to present the information, I wondered how the students were feeling about what was happening in their classroom. The personal communications between Ms. D, Ms. K, and their students revealed superficial notes indicating the students were “doing fine.” As time went on, many students stopped responding to teachers’ private comments. The added student journaling activities were a welcomed dialogic process that allowed our cogen sessions to consider how the teachers were transforming their virtual culture.
Student voice and dialogic practices: A new way of thinking about this new virtual social reality

The first student journaling activity entered their virtual field five weeks into remote learning. It was an activity called *Rose, Thorn, Bud*. Students wrote phrases or words to describe:

1. Rose: What was going well;
2. Thorn: One challenge they were experiencing; and
3. Bud: One thing about their online classroom that they look forward to each week. The link to my Padlet was added to their Google Classroom by the co-teachers. Within minutes of the posting, students began to respond. Within the first hour of the posting, every student responded. Responses to share what was going well included sports, time with family, and doing schoolwork. Their perceived challenges included: missing their friends, seeing their teachers, and sheltering in place. One student replied that the math was hard. One thing they looked forward to in their online classroom included: Reading, doing the math, seeing their teachers each week during the pre-recorded teacher videos to say hello to the students. Most students reported enjoying the weekly challenge that Ms. D and Ms. K provided. Each week, there was a new challenge where each teacher would invite the students to solve a problem. One week, Ms. K brought her dog into the video, and she asked, *Guess how much my dog weighs?* Ms. D showed a large jar of jellybeans and asked: *How many jellybeans are in the jar—what is your estimate?* Each week was a new challenge by both teachers. The weekly challenge was further evidence of the teachers moving away from the banking model of virtual learning and including more problem-posing opportunities.

During our cogenerative session that followed this journaling activity, Ms. K replied, “It was so great to see how the students were doing; they said more than we are used to in the private comments through their work.”
Ms. D added, “Yes, it feels so good to hear their perspectives on things again.” They acknowledged that the challenge helped to motivate the students and further support the social-emotional learning needed at this time.

Two weeks later, I shared a link to complete a Google Form. Questions included their feedback on the following questions: 1. How comfortable they felt learning through their Google Classroom; 2. Whether they felt like an important member of their Google Classroom; 3. Identifying specific Google Classroom activities they enjoyed; 4. One thing that would make them feel more comfortable in learning in their virtual space; and 5. One thing they would like their teachers to know.

Once again, all students responded by the end of the school day. Their responses revealed most students felt comfortable because, “My teachers are there for me, even if we can’t be together.” Other students replied, “I feel good because I have time to think about things, so I understand the work better.” Many other responses indicated feeling comfortable at home. A few students replied they were not comfortable because, “This is not a real classroom—I miss everyone.” Most students felt valued in their virtual classroom. “I can talk to my teachers anytime I need anything.” Another student’s response shared the collective voice, “Even though we are not in our real classroom, it still feels like we are because we still get to see and talk with our teachers.”

The most enjoyable classroom activity was the weekly challenges along with most students enjoying the math lessons. All response to the final open-ended question shared that they had nothing to share but that they were enjoying the weekly Google Meets.
“I was blown away at how candid the kids were,” shared Ms. K in our next cogen session. “I am glad to hear they are feeling comfortable and enjoying our Meets and weekly challenges.”

Ms. D added, “It helps to hear their feedback because we think we know how they’re doing through our private comments—but it’s nice to see it this way.”

Ms. K and Ms. D continued to discuss specific tools, like EdPuzzle and video links, mentioned by the students.

“It’s good to hear that what we are posting is helping them to learn,” Ms. D shared.

The discussion flowed into the ways the students feel connected with both teachers. We also discussed the few students who reported feeling disconnected from the class. Ms. D and Ms. K engaged in crosstalk to reveal they already had supports in place, but they planned to reach out to the students further.

“These are just tough times,” replied Ms. K. “We are all doing the best we can, and we keep trying to find new ways to reach the kids, so their feedback helps a lot.”

Habitus can explain the ways the students’ feedback guided Ms. D and Ms. K to apply their perspective in the process of reproducing culture. The students’ responses suggested they felt like a part of the process of becoming socialized in their virtual field. Their relationships and social roles have changed; yet they were embracing their form of capital by identifying how their actions felt or did not feel in relationship within this new social domain. All students still felt connected with the teachers, and most students felt disconnected with their peers within their virtual classroom; yet most were finding ways to connect with peers personally. Most students shared how they were enjoying time with family, sports, and learning from the comfort of their home—their new field. Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s relationship continued to allow students to have the
opportunity to feel a sense of belonging through their individual communication practices with each student and their increased dialogic practices through student journaling. The opportunity to experience a sense of belonging also permeated their virtual environment.

**Impact on Environment**

“We already had our Google Classroom set up, so the kids did not have to adjust to that,” Ms. K shared as we discussed the transition into remote learning.

“We are so lucky that we had this already,” added Ms. D. “We used EdPuzzle, especially as one of the stations, so the children became independent with that.”

The conversation flowed, with the teachers sharing their gratitude that their Google Classroom was already in place and “it was a familiar tool for the children.” However, the transition to the virtual environment was no longer supplemental as a motivational tool; it was now replacing their physical classroom. All lessons were digitized and posted. Communication practices shifted into digital modes.

“It is just so hard to teach this way,” Ms. K shared. “I mean we are posting the lessons and everything they need, but we miss the kids.”

Ms. D added, “It’s so true. That’s why we make sure to comment on all their work and communicate with them that way.”

The teachers were missing the humanizing elements of teaching and learning.

**Humanizing virtual inclusive spaces and structures through habitus**

Freire (1970) shared the notion of existing “in” and “with” the world. On one hand, Ms. D and Ms. K are individuals with their own views on how they experienced reality in their physical classroom. On the other hand, Freire’s notion of critical consciousness may explain how the two co-teachers related to their new reality of teaching in their virtual space. According to
Freire, critically conscious educators intervene with reality to change it. Humanism is a central component of Freire’s worldview and is guided by the notion that individuals are motivated by the need to reason and engage in the process of becoming (Freire, 1998). The shared habitus between Ms. K and Ms. D included the familiarity with using Google Classroom as a supplemental tool in their physical classroom. Yet, they were feeling some of the inherent barriers that may unfold with using virtual classrooms as the primary learning space—for example, the asynchronous way that the teachers and students were interacting.

“It is hard not being right there to help them through the lessons,” Ms. D added as Ms. K nodded in agreement.

The effects of their evolving habitus were in motion. The teachers and students were knowledgeable agents in navigating Google Classroom for resources. Yet, they now needed to embrace the multiplicity of structures in using this virtual space as their primary source of connecting with one another. I engaged in classroom observations on a bi-monthly basis through asynchronous virtual visits. At this early stage, I noticed the Google Classroom was organized by discipline with headings and links that provided students with multi-media resources that covered all academic content areas. There were sections for “Counseling” and “Speech” that were accessible only to the students who received those services according to their individualized education plan.

“We are still figuring all of this out,” said Ms. K. “It’s like we put the material on our Google Classroom and then just wait for them to submit their work.”

They admitted to the discomfort of the waiting period.

“We are used to teaching something and then being able to see right away how the children are doing,” shared Ms. D.
“Yeah, we are just waiting to see how they do with this, and we will adjust accordingly,” added Ms. K.

In addition, Ms. D shared their experience communicating through private comments via Google Classroom. “So many students need directions clarified and there are so many questions about how to find everything they need.”

According to Sewell (2005), resources that are shared within structures may lead to different interpretations based on individual schemas. Ms. D and Ms. K were experiencing students perceiving directions, lessons, and the process of navigating through the Google Classroom differently. The various interpretations by the students were clarified by the two teachers. The students as agents had to reinterpret and interact with the collection of resources posted by the teachers. Moreover, the teacher interpreted the students’ questions and adjusted the Google Classroom to meet the organizational needs of the students as time unfolded. Ms. D and Ms. K continued to be grounded in their relationship. As a result, the classroom culture was naturally emerging as the co-teachers also continued to include the students as resources in their own learning.

**Emerging cultural structure through an evolving shared habitus**

By my second asynchronous classroom observation, after the first two weeks of remote learning, I noticed Ms. K and Ms. D changed the format of their classroom. They now organized the sections by date rather than subject area to “guide students to navigate better.” This feature, according to Ms. K, “made things more accessible, and we know it is working because the kids have less questions and are handing in the work.” As Ms. D and Ms. K continued to learn from the students’ actions, they adjusted their own decisions. In this case, the students served as a resource for the teachers on their own journey in bringing meaning to designing instruction.
during these unfamiliar times. Ms. D and Ms. K were applying dialogue topics from our cogen sessions as well as being critically aware of the way their students were experiencing their Google Classroom. The teachers were changing culture along the way as they kept the needs of their students in mind.

As the weeks unfolded, changes were quickly set in motion.

“We no longer have time to exercise or do anything outside of school, it seems,” Ms. K shared.

“That is so true,” added Ms. D. “We are seriously working nonstop, right [Ms. K]? We are texting and calling each other into all hours of the night with questions like, ‘What do you think about this?’ or ‘Should we change that?’”

Ms. K chuckled and added, “It is so great to figure all of this out together.”

It was becoming clear that the shared habitus between Ms. D and Ms. K was not only transferring from the physical classroom as evidenced by their commitment to maintain transparent communication with one another, but their habitus was also evolving because of the emerging cultural structure in this new space. They were figuring out how to enter this new remote-learning field via their Google Classroom. The structure, schema, and resources were being reconstructed, so they and their students could adapt their habitus to be able to enter this new remote field while striving to reimagine their classroom culture.

According to Bourdieu (1980), our habitus typically becomes so ingrained in the ways we act in our environment because we are accustomed to the underlying structures of social life. Typically, habitus may feel as if it is at the unconscious level. Yet, in this remote space, the underlying structures of virtual co-teaching were unfamiliar; therefore, Ms. K and Ms. D were
not conditioned to act with the same subjective expectations. Through the weeks, they remained open to learning and recreating their virtual classroom environment.

**“Naming the World” a Freirean approach in creating experiential learning environments**

Although the Google Classroom continued to present a banking model presence, it was clear the teachers continued to work together to increase more interactive routines.

“I don’t know who loves our weekly challenge activity more—the kids or us,” shared Ms. K.

Ms. D added, “…it is great to feel their excitement as they share their thinking.”

The teachers explained that the weekly challenge provided time for students to solve a “fun” problem that was relevant in the teachers’ or students’ lives. One example, mentioned earlier in this chapter, was to guess the weight of Ms. K’s dog by observing the dog in the pre-recorded video. The relevance of these challenge activities can be explained through Freire’s (1970) model of “naming the world.” The topics asked the students to solve a problem relevant to their own lived experiences. These weekly pre-recorded video challenges became a part of a consistent routine. The students shared their responses to the weekly challenge on a shared Google Doc as well as continued private comments with Ms. D and Ms. K.

In addition to the weekly challenge, the student journaling activities became another highly visible opportunity for the students to share their thinking in the Google Classroom. Our first activity was, “Our Feeling-Connected Padlet.” Although students were invited to comment on one another’s posts, they did not interact with one another. They all followed the directions and interacted with the teachers, but when given the opportunity to comment on one another’s posts, they did not engage. We were five weeks into the remote-learning process as these activities were introduced. The students’ evolving habitus may explain their initiating their posts
on the Padlet activity. However, they did not engage in peer interactions by commenting on one another’s posts. Thus far, the structure of the Google Classroom environment required students to receive and submit work. The students became accustomed to not interacting in their virtual classroom. Therefore, this became internalized behavior that explained the way they entered their virtual classroom. Although the teachers and I were changing the structure by including the peer interactions through journaling, the previous virtual structure continued to influence the students’ behavior. According to Sewell (2005), the duality of structure reveals that “schemas are the effects of resources, just as resources are the effects of schemas” (p. 136). As the students adjusted to remote learning, they became accustomed to communicating with teachers privately outside of the Google Classroom space. As the weeks unfolded, although they missed interacting with peers in class, they accepted the changing rules that disconnected peer interactions during Google Classroom activities. Although student interactions were no longer a part of their classroom culture, the co-teachers continued to cultivate their relationship and maintain strong connections with the students. Although students missed interacting with their peers, they felt connected with their teachers. The classroom culture was evolving with teachers and students still feeling a sense of belonging by sharing personal experiences and new routines to guide continued connections.

Habitus, field, and agency: A dialectic between the internal/external and external/internal

There was a consistent structure to the Google Classroom that invited me to organize the focus of my visit. Students continued to follow the daily sections that were clearly dated. The day’s activities and assignments were salient. With the added section that included students’ journaling, there was a clear space that invited students to share their voice. The duality of structure and agency was reconciled as teachers and students internalized the external Google
Class offerings. Moreover, through habitus, they were externalizing the internal through private comments with teachers, class activities such as weekly challenges, and student journaling activities. Moreover, the cogenerative dialogues between the teachers and me provided time for the teachers to further consider the students’ perspectives as they worked to reconstruct their classroom environment. The cultural work of the cogen process allowed for the teachers to further internalize the external by reviewing the students’ feedback and then applying their ideas. As the teachers entered the weekly challenge, for example, they were not sure if they would continue with that activity on a weekly basis. Through the students’ feedback, they decided to make that a consistent part of their learning environment. In addition, the teachers adjusted their actions by reaching out to students following their journaling responses to increase communication and students’ personal and academic growth. Ms. D and Ms. K continued to work together to communicate with all parents and students. The students’ feedback served as a pivotal resource in guiding the co-teachers to navigate and negotiate power to create their virtual classroom culture.

“Everyone is navigating and following along so well now—it is working, right, [Ms. D]? Ms. D nodded enthusiastically.

“Yes, everyone is comfortable with how things work, but we keep checking in with them to make sure.”

The familiar way Ms. K spoke and looked to Ms. D for reassurance was evidence of the way these co-teachers continued to care about the perspective of the other. Through every cogen session, each teacher added to the thinking of the other by agreeing and/or adding their additional thoughts. They shared the space to negotiate power and consistently came together to share ideas. The evolution of their shared habitus included the way each individual co-teacher
accommodated her role in the context of their own position in their virtual field. They transposed their relationship from the physical classroom and further internalized their relationship in their virtual space. Their newly evolved relationship included the way they valued the other’s perspective in this virtual space as they co-created their culture of belonging over time.

According to Bourdieu (1990), habitus is historical. The current remote learning situation was internalized and added a layer of experiences to the teachers’ and students’ earlier experiences of teaching and learning in the physical classroom. This remote-learning experience transformed their classroom culture in what Bourdieu termed “a cultural habitus” (Bourdieu, 1967, p. 344). It carried with it the social constructs from past experiences with a new way of acting in the environment that transcended the social conditions from the physical classroom where it was first produced. The teachers and students reconstructed their classroom culture in a way that resulted in learning new ways of belonging together. Ms. D and Ms. K continued to create space for them to negotiate power. They continued to blend their specific levels of expertise that resulted from their ongoing communications, cogen sessions, and their continued inclusion of students’ point of view to inform the way they maintained and reformed their classroom culture.

**Cogenerative Dialogues and Reciprocal Reflections**

Time seemed to be slowing down. I felt an audible silence that instantly brought in a sense of calm as I met with Ms. D and Ms. K for our final cogen session. I was the first to log in. I situated myself outside and leaned back in my chair. The table umbrella protected me from the hot sun, but I felt the comforting, external warm rays meet with an internal energy that I noticed and expressed through a deep, slow-paced breath. Moments later, Ms. K and Ms. D entered our cogen field with a blend of joyful laughter and quiet reflective stances.
Ms. K launched our dialogue, “I just can’t believe we are at this point.”

The teachers began to discuss their actions from the past four months. I remained quiet, knowing they needed time to decompress and share whatever they felt like sharing. Our conversation organically moved into a flashback session where the teachers discussed the ways they supported one another.

“I remember feeling so uncomfortable when we had to record our lessons.” Ms. K began and paused for a second. “I was just so hard on myself—but I felt so much better that we reviewed each other’s videos.”

Ms. D interjected, “Oh, yeah, those were stressful times—but we did it.”

Ms. K continued, “Yes, I realized I didn’t need to be perfect—after all, the kids know we are human.”

Ms. D continued, “Yes, we all did the best we could to help the students continue to learn.”

The co-teachers’ acknowledged each being a valuable resource for the other.

Bourdieu’s concept of fields provides depth within the notion of habitus at this point. The reciprocity between the learners’ habitus and the field of remote learning can explain the process of reconstructing their classroom culture. The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of the field (or of a hierarchy of intersecting fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to the constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with a sense or with value, in which it is worth investing one’s energy. (Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989, p. 44). Moreover, the intersection of habitus and fields reveal a dynamic understanding.
According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), social reality exists twice: once in the external world—the fields—and once in the minds of individuals—the habitus. When habitus encounters a familiar world, actions seem to be at an unconscious level, and an individual may act with ease and comfort. However, when habitus encounters an unfamiliar field, there may be a disconnection that requires intentional strategic actions to allow for reconnection between habitus and field that leads to transformation (Reay, 2004).

Ms. K, Ms. D, and their students demonstrated this relationship between habitus and field. Through the communication and keen observation on the part of the teachers to notice how students were experiencing remote learning, they adjusted the field of their Google Classroom to guide the evolving habitus of each student. Reciprocity between habitus and field was also evident as the teachers shared their increased knowledge of technology as one example of embodying this new way of teaching and learning. In addition, the students expressed their evolving habitus through communicating with their teachers for further clarification when they needed support to engage in their new virtual field.

Our cogenerative dialogues created the space for the culture to be reconstructed. We were not in the same physical space together; however, the teachers and I connected in our virtual space. I was able to bring in the students’ point of view through the student journaling activities along with the individual conversations the teachers had with the students. Even though I did not implement cogens in an ideal way or in the traditional way, the students’ voice contributed to the cogeneration of the culture that the teachers created. It served as another space for teachers to dialogue with the students’ ideas.
Co-Creating and Negotiating Power Spaces

Bourdieu (1977) explained power as the result of the interplay between agency and structure (Navarro, 2006). Ms. K and Ms. D created a shared power first in the physical classroom by co-creating social norms within their classroom that guided each teacher to act and think in specific ways. Their co-created space for negotiating power was utilized as Ms. D shared her specific form of power in challenging the deficit model thinking. Her power was distributed to Ms. K, and through their relationship, they distributed this power into their praxis and environment by working together to value the diverse needs of their students. This power distribution continued into their virtual culture through Ms. D’s actions to include UDL principles to provide options for meeting the variability of learners in their class. Ms. K and Ms. D were both active in the co-planning and teaching process and felt a sense of belonging and value with one another.

Where Bourdieu (1977) explained power as culturally and symbolically created (Wacquant, 2005), Foucault (1982) saw power as ever-present and beyond the explanation of agency and structure. Foucault believed the movement of power required one person or group to impose their action to another as a means of structure. The “other” has a choice of actions based on the imposed actions of those attempting to affect the actions of others. Foucault believed power could be productive. He defined power as:

a total structure of actions brought to bear possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it contains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of actions. A set of actions upon other action. (Foucault, 1982, p. 789)
Ms. D and Ms. K shared the awareness for the value each teacher brought to one another and to the classroom learning experience. They each shared ongoing opportunities to provide structures and resources for and with one another. In the physical classroom, the teachers were resources for one another as evidenced by Ms. K sharing her knowledge of the content and Ms. D sharing her knowledge of strategies to meet the needs of variable learners. They planned sections of the lesson on their own and then co-planned to deliver the lesson in partnership between themselves while extending their connection with students through their praxis and their environment. This power-sharing mindset was evident in the physical classroom, and it is what kept them connected through the weeks of reimagining their co-teaching image through the remote-learning experience. The Relational Co-Teaching Framework illuminated the many ways their power-sharing mindset served as their strong foundation to allow them to re-create and maintain their culture of belonging throughout a time of significant change.

Conclusion

I could hear the birds chirping through Ms. D’s microphone. I was brought back to my own surroundings in my own backyard. As the final cogen session was ending, Ms. D and Ms. K reflected on the process of our ongoing cogen sessions.

Ms. K began, “There’s a benefit to having these discussions, even outside of this study because it helps to bounce ideas off each other.”

There were a few seconds of silence. I could see Ms. K gazing up to indicate she was thinking.

Ms. K continued, “The components you brought up—like having the students get more involved in sharing their thinking with everyone was so good for them; I’m thinking it’s good for all students even not during these times.”
More silence and visible reflection.

Ms. K concluded, “Their feedback and thoughts were so valuable—it showed us what we could do to improve on our end of things.”

It was as though they choreographed this dialogic dance.

Ms. D jumped in to add, “I agree, our dialogues really helped us to come up with different ideas together. Like outside of just the two of us—it was helpful to have your ideas and talking with us to try and see what works—and what can work even better.”

It was humbling to have those moments where Ms. D and Ms. K and I experienced a shared habitus with the reflexivity needed to remain life-long learners. The conversation flowed into times they felt supported by the structure of our cogenerative dialogues.

“On the days where the technology didn’t work, it was frustrating,” shared Ms. K, “and it felt good to discuss those kinds of things in our discussions.”

The three of us continued to discuss the benefits of sharing and problem-solving together to empower the actions and interactions between all of us along this process.

As we signed off one last time, I sat back in my chair, stretching out my legs under the table. As I leaned back and closed my eyes, my thoughts roamed to my ongoing wish to connect with the students. As a result of the final student journaling activity, I knew most of the students were excited to move into the freedom of summer. As for their concluding thoughts about their remote classroom experience, it was clear that even though they were disappointed to have been disconnected from their familiar classroom and interactions with their peers, they felt valued with a continued sense of belonging based on their ongoing communication with their teachers. According to most students, the “Google Meets were the best” because they got to see and hear their teachers each week. As one student wrote, “It’s not our real classroom, but our teachers still
“care about us, and they give us work every day.” The culture of belonging began with Ms. D and Ms. K first and foremost belonging to each other. This relationship permeated through their interactions with one another, their students, and through their praxis and environment. The Relational Co-Teaching Framework explained ways they co-created their culture of belonging in the familiar physical classroom and throughout the extreme shift to remote learning.

Like any committed puzzle user whose puzzle falls apart, Ms. D and Ms. K salvaged the pieces from the original co-teaching image they created. Once they tried to reassemble the image, there was no way to find all the missing pieces. Unlike puzzle users, there was not a way to retrieve or replace the missing pieces by calling the puzzle-making warehouse. Through ongoing communication with district memos, parents, students, colleagues, and first and foremost one another, Ms. D and Ms. K reassembled another co-teaching image. The “two pieces” that “just clicked” at the beginning of the year were never lost. However, they did evolve into different shapes that once again “fit perfectly together.” These two pieces were amongst so many others that allowed for more pieces to click. The teachers created new strategies and resources and included the students in reassembling their new image. Their two pieces provided the foundation of their classroom culture in the physical and virtual spaces. The data and the Relational Co-Teaching Framework revealed the transformation of what their cultural spaces became as a result of each co-teaching and creating space for and with one another.
Chapter VI

A Transformed Cogenerated Culture of Belonging: Summary, Findings, Implications, & Conclusions

We’ve been through so much together and separately during this time. It was a lot to juggle with taking care of our own families, ourselves, and then we needed to learn how to teach remotely and be there for our students. I am just so glad we had each other through it all. (Ms. K, personal communication, June 12, 2020)

We were all sitting in chairs that were situated in three sections, with five rows of 10 chairs in each row facing the principal. The principal looked around the room, smiling and nodding as various colleagues made eye contact. The natural, unspoken shift began. The chatter of colleagues faded into whispers and finally to a respectful silence as the principal began to share information. It was 2003, and it was the end of the school year. This was the faculty meeting I learned to dread after experiencing it for the past two years.

“We will have three co-taught classes next year,” the principal shared. “We need volunteers—one for grade three, one for four, and one for five.”

I felt the nonverbal communication shrieking with distraction through the room as many colleagues squirmed in their seats and fumbled with papers in their laps.

“As we have been doing for the past two years, if there are no volunteers, we will continue to rotate to be fair to everyone,” the principal said.

Audible whispers and groans were heard.
As one of the special education teachers in the room, I sat up tall; yet my heart sank with disappointment at the reality that teaching in an inclusive classroom was a burden to colleagues in this room.

As the meeting concluded, I walked down the hallway to my classroom. The principal met me in the hallway and said, “Are you okay? You seem upset.”

I felt so grateful to have a principal who expressed such awareness. “Thank you for asking,” I responded. “Yes, I am fine—I just wonder what we can do to change this situation.”

She shrugged her shoulders, smiled, and said, “Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

We each walked in opposite directions to get ready for the students’ arrival. I had a few minutes to spare and decided to sit at my computer to craft a heartfelt email. I thanked the principal again for checking in with me briefly in the hallway. Yet, I needed to say more—and so I was compelled to add: What will it take for us to live in a world—starting with this building—where all teachers embrace including students with varying abilities? When will teachers shift their energy from trying to avoid co-teaching to embracing the powerful task of working with another teacher and including all learners while welcoming the opportunities to teach and learn with an open mind and heart?

The principal was clearly sitting by a computer as well because within seconds the response arrived in my inbox: That sounds nice, Elizabeth, but does anyone live in this world with you?

My heart sank for the second time that morning. I knew in those moments, all those years ago, that it was a moment to remember. I printed out that email exchange, and I continue to use the memory to inspire and empower my current actions. Although I felt supported by the building administration, it was clear that embracing co-teaching and including students of
varying abilities together in one physical classroom had a long way to go. I was committed to seeking ways to meaningfully blend the worldviews to increase inclusivity for teachers and all students in co-taught classrooms.

Ms. K’s and Ms. D’s interactions describe what happens when co-teachers create the space to negotiate power relations. Moreover, the power spaces they created illuminated a process of collaboration that necessitated the ebb and flow of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting with one another. This process described a reciprocal relationship that then permeated through their praxis and their environment. The next section provides a summary of the study followed by the major findings in answering the research questions. The findings reveal that if I could continue the dialogue with my principal from 2003, I would respond, *Ms. K and Ms. D live in this world with me.*

**Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to document what happened as one co-teaching pair and their students engaged in the process of cogenerative dialogues to listen, share, and learn how each was experiencing the learning in their classroom. The focus began with studying how they co-created a culture of belonging together where students with and without, along with the two teachers, felt a sense of belonging as valued members of their fifth-grade inclusive classroom. One week into the study, the research shifted to remote as school buildings were shut down due to the COVID pandemic. As the physical classroom changed to remote learning, my study also changed to remote research. I maintained my connection with Ms. D and Ms. K through cogenerative dialogues via Google Meet.

My experiences were documented into a critical transformative auto|ethnography about how Ms. D and Ms. K collaborated and co-created their classroom culture in the physical and
virtual classroom. We began working together in March 2020 and concluded our study in June 2020. I collected data in the form of audio-recorded and transcribed interviews and cogenerative dialogues. The critical transformative autoethnography allowed me to consider co-teaching and classroom culture beyond the traditional rhetoric by addressing co-teaching and inclusive classrooms with a focus on culture, power and knowledge, structure and agency, relationships, and context. I also developed The Relational Co-Teaching Framework to explain specific actions and interactions that shined a light on the ways Ms. D and Ms. K included the necessity of disconnecting along their collaborative practices. This framework allowed me to describe the interactions I observed during cogen sessions, interviews, student journaling, and classroom observations. Furthermore, the framework can be used as a structure of collaboration in co-creating a culture of belonging between co-teachers and their students.

Through the lens of this framework, Ms. D and Ms. K experienced a process of created space to negotiate power between the two teachers. Their reciprocal relationship included the process of collaboration that valued the need to connect, disconnect, and reconnect as a critical facet of collaboration. Their relationship permeated through their praxis and their environment. Although the data do not fully demonstrate a culture of belonging from the students’ perspective given the constraints of remote learning, the data do claim that a culture of belonging was co-created between the co-teachers. Given more time, perhaps the emerging data from students’ journaling responses and teachers’ private communications with students would reveal that a culture of belonging would exist for the students. The next section describes the major findings in response to the research questions.
Major Findings: Dialoguing with the Research Questions

This section discusses the findings and possible interpretations described through the story of two fifth-grade co-teachers, Ms. D and Ms. K, in a suburban school district in New York. This section is not about final answers, but rather, interpretations based on the experiences of participants in this study. These interpretations may ignite ongoing conversations about co-teaching and creating a culture of belonging within inclusive classrooms where one general educator and one special educator unite to educate students with and without disabilities in one classroom—physical or virtual. I entered this study with the belief that by listening to the perspectives of one another, new understandings unfold as multiple perspectives are shared in dialogue. Through the process of dialogue, change may occur as time, conversations, and interactions unfold (Freire, 1970). As I entered this study, I was eager to find out what would happen as two co-teachers and their students interact to create their classroom culture. Through the lens of this critical transformative auto|ethnography, I found out that as the co-teachers in this study created space for each to contribute their specific forms of individual and collective power, they cultivated a reciprocal relationship that filtered into their praxis and their environment.

Ms. D, Ms. K, and their students entered the shift to remote learning with a clear image of a physical classroom culture that welcomed student voice, valued the expertise of both co-teachers, and illuminated a culture of belonging in their physical space. Although their culture of belonging continued to exist through the remote learning experiences, it lived out differently because of the need to teach and learn remotely. Some of the changes that occurred were due to the natural evolution needed for any teacher to make the unprecedented shift from the physical space to the remote experience. Yet, through the process of virtual cogenerative dialogues, my findings extend the current research to consider this question: *What constitutes cogeneration of*
classroom culture? What constitutes dialogue and culture, and how do we witness and experience it?

Research Question #1: What specific interactions contributed to the ways that Ms. D and Ms. K co-created their classroom culture?

From the first day of the school year, Ms. K and Ms. D valued the perspective and knowledge of one another. For example, in Chapter IV, I reported how Ms. D explained that she was new to the fifth-grade curriculum, so Ms. K would share her knowledge about the curriculum. Furthermore, Ms. D and Ms. K shared that Ms. D’s knowledge of strategies for making sure the curriculum was accessible and meaningful to the individual students in their class was jointly embraced and blended with Ms. K’s knowledge of the curriculum. In addition, both co-teachers, as shared in Chapter IV, valued the students’ perspective. Both teachers were viewed by the students as individuals and as a pair for supporting the learning process. Furthermore, I described the student-centered environment that provided the opportunity for the students to feel individually and collectively valued in their classroom culture. In the physical space, the teachers and students expressed the connectivity and care that resulted in their culture of belonging. Through the co-teachers’ shared disposition and eagerness to learn from and with one another, they cultivated a reciprocity in communication that guided the students to view both teachers as their teachers.

Chapter IV also introduced the notion that the collaboration between Ms. D and Ms. K was more than the actual time connecting to co-plan and co-teach in unison. There were moments of disconnection that served to empower each teacher to act to grow personally and professionally. One way this was evidenced was through Ms. D’s contribution of her specific form of power in challenging the deficit model thinking. She was striving to implement ways to
blend the needs of students with disabilities within the whole class culture. She was concerned with the students’ growing awareness of who consistently needed help—she did not want to single out any of the students. Ms. D planned on her own to ensure that students’ individualized education plan goals were a part of meeting grade-level academic goals. She expressed her awareness of her perceived personal responsibility as well as her awareness of her shared responsibility with Ms. K to ensure that students of all abilities worked toward their personal goals. Based on the co-teachers’ ongoing communication and desire to teach to students of all abilities, they began to address the historic binary view of special education and general education by being individually and collectively mindful to blend students’ strengths and needs within the general education learning process. As another example, Ms. D needed to disconnect from her collaboration with Ms. K to individually learn about the curriculum as well as consider instructional strategies for upcoming lessons. Ms. K needed time to individually plan lessons that followed the district and state expectations. She and Ms. K then reconnected to blend their ideas into upcoming lessons. In the physical classroom, both teachers were connected by their individually and collectively perceived spaces for negotiating power. They rotated roles by each teaching whole class and small group as well as both teachers being responsible to teach all learners in the room. Their relationship permeated their praxis as the teachers moved between team teaching and station teaching. Their relationship also permeated through their environment as evidenced by students shifting through informal and formal instructional time. Students felt comfortable to walk around the room, dialogue with one another, as well as completely disconnect from the whole class to secretly read a book and then reconnect with the class to move to the next lesson. This ease of learning in motion was halted at the start of remote learning.
Chapter IV continued to share the ways that Ms. D connected and disconnected, resulting in their spaces for negotiated power, mutuality of communication, and care for and with one another. They continued to co-plan together; work individually; and reconnect via phone, text, email, and Google Meet to design their Google Classroom and the lessons and resources to share with their students. The process of their collaboration—namely, the ebb and flow of their connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting—was a familiar source of comfort during this unfamiliar remote learning process since there was a forced disconnection due to the classroom moving from the familiar physical space to the unfamiliar remote learning space. Ms. D and Ms. K embraced the shift through remote learning and valued the perspectives of one another through shared decisions.

As a result of student journaling, explained in Chapter V, most students continued to feel valued and connected with their teachers. Yet, most felt disconnected from their peers and missed the socialization of the physical classroom. Their culture of belonging was maintained between the two co-teachers and between both co-teachers and their students. The following questions further describe the ways Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s shared power was evidenced by their continued shared decisions throughout the weeks of remote learning.

**Research Question #2. How did Ms. D and Ms. K maintain a culture of belonging when their familiar physical classroom was unexpectedly replaced with unfamiliar remote learning spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The collaborative process of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting that was established prior to shifting to remote learning played out in consistent, yet new ways. In Chapter V, I shared the need for the teachers to wait patiently for guidance from the district. During this time, they were forced to disconnect. They used this time to personally revitalize through
engaging in chores around the house as well as exercising. Through this forced disconnection, they had an opportunity to personally take care of themselves as they, along with educators around the world, grappled with making sense of the current and next steps. Ms. D and Ms. K remained connected through text, email, and phone calls. They began to learn more about one another’s home lives, which continued to strengthen the reciprocity of their relationship and co-teaching roles. In Chapter V, Ms. K mentioned she felt like part of Ms. D’s family now that they were connecting during the current remote situation.

As they began to follow district guidelines, increased synchronous and asynchronous process of teaching and learning unfolded. Ms. D and Ms. K continued to apply their shared power from the physical space to the remote learning space. Ms. D and Ms. K shared the responsibility to communicate with all parents and students as well as post curriculum materials and activities on their Google Classroom. Ms. D noted that in the beginning, they were posting material and waiting for students to submit work. This banking model soon changed into more interactive problem-posing learning as district mandates were applied. For example, Ms. K and Ms. D jointly decided to share a weekly challenge where each teacher would pose a problem, such as “guess how much my dog weighs” or “guess how many jellybeans are in this jar.” They shared the responsibility through every phase of the instructional process. Their connected relationship continued to permeate their praxis and their environment. They were both visible and active during live Google Meets as well as pre-recorded instruction. They each posted curriculum content as well as “fun” activities, with the aim of continuing to harmonize the learning process by allowing the students to take natural breaks from the curriculum and engage in multi-media options such as videos and games. Ms. D was intentional in posting curriculum in multiple ways using video, text, and audio recordings. Her awareness guided her desire to make
sure that students had the opportunity to access the content in a manner that matched their abilities and further developed their skills. Ms. K and Ms. D were intentional in offering multiple ways to apply the process of learning. Ms. D posted graphic organizers, anchor charts, and addition links for resources that were optional scaffolds to specific lessons.

One change that happened at the onset of the shift to remote learning was the co-teachers’ shared decision to cut off students’ ability to interact with one another in their Google Classroom. The comments feature was disabled, and the students were directed to turn off their microphones and not use the chat box during Google Meet synchronous sessions. Both co-teachers were concerned about the possibility of students being inappropriate. In the physical space, they addressed any need to redirect students’ comments or behaviors. Both teachers felt they did not have the same ability or control to ensure an environment where all students felt comfortable, given their past experiences of some students’ inappropriate behaviors in the physical classroom. As I introduced the student journaling activities, both teachers shared a sense of relief with me, noting that it felt good to hear their students’ perspectives about how they were experiencing the learning process in their remote classroom. The culture in this remote space took into consideration the needs of the teachers as they intently attended to the needs of all learners in their room. They were unsure of how they would address any possible behaviors, and so through a shared decision, they eliminated the possibilities of behaviors interfering. Their once student-centered classroom shifted into a teacher-centered experience. The results from student journaling reveal that students continued to feel valued as members of their remote classroom. The culture in their classroom changed; yet, through the co-creation of spaces for negotiated power, the teachers managed to maintain a culture of belonging as their situation changed.
**Research Question #2a:** In what ways did the remote environment compel the teachers to begin and not to begin transforming culture in ways that supported a sense of belonging in their classroom?

Ms. D and Ms. K were compelled to continue using each other as resources as well as thinking partners in all decisions. Chapter V shared their awareness of the blending of boundaries between home and school as their communications spanned into all hours of the night so that they could feel organized and ready for each unfolding remote school day. They continued to value one another and connect as a co-teaching team and with all students and parents through personal comments in their Google Classroom and via telephone calls. Along with their shared decision to eliminate students’ interactions through asynchronous comments in their Google Classroom and synchronous use of the chat feature and microphone during their live Google Meets, the teachers were comfortable with their decision to increase the communications with parents and students via phone and private comments in Google Classroom. Their classroom culture extended to include more interactions with parents as the parents shared their questions about navigating through remote learning experiences with their children. The experiences that unfolded revealed evolutionary changes that any teacher was faced with during the shift through remote learning. This classroom culture continued to maintain a strong sense of belonging between teachers and between teachers and students with an additional increased connection with parents as part of the teachers’ role in embracing all learners in the remote classroom culture. The use of each co-teacher as a resource transferred from the physical classroom; yet it changed in the ways the teachers needed to apply the structures as indicated by the changing rules of students’ participation and digitized lessons and activities in their virtual classroom.
Research Questions #2b: How did cogenerative dialogues contribute and not contribute to their ability to transform a culture of inclusion in their unfamiliar, unexpected virtual learning space?

Chapter V reveals the change from implementing cogenerative dialogues in the traditional manner—with students in the physical classroom—to the virtual setting via Google Meets with Ms. D and Ms. K. Since I no longer had access to the students directly, the cogenerative process was experienced through direct dialogues between the co-teachers and me. The contributions of the students’ point of view occurred through the co-teachers’ private communications via phone, email, and individual comments on Google Classroom and through the online student journaling activities. The virtual cogenerative dialogues afforded the opportunity for the teachers to dialogue about the students’ experiences and the ways the teachers were responding by transforming the culture in relation to the students’ feedback. For example, in Chapter V, I reported that the teachers discussed how they changed the structure and resources in their Google Classroom so that the students could navigate through the classroom with more manageable access and meaningful connections. The teachers also discussed ways Ms. D contributed her specific power to include additional resources that aligned with UDL principles to create an environment that welcomed all learners to access and connect meaningfully with the content and activities in their virtual classroom.

Chapter V revealed Ms. K’s and Ms. D’s appreciation for the process of reflection that occurred as the teachers and I dialogued throughout the bi-monthly, virtual cogen sessions. I entered the cogenerative dialogue process as a researcher as well as participant in the process of thinking about how culture in their Google Classroom could be maintained and transformed. Both co-teachers acknowledged the way the cogen process created the space for them to slow
down their actions to sit and discuss what was happening in their classroom. As a result, they claimed they implemented new strategies to meet the needs of students of all abilities in their classroom.

**Co-Created Spaces for Negotiating Power and Transformation**

Through the co-teachers’ reciprocal relationship, they valued the perspectives and role of the other. In the physical space, Ms. D contributed her specific power as she challenged the deficit model thinking through the lens of valuing all abilities and diversity. She distributed this power to Ms. K by expressing specific co-teaching structures and resources that supported students of varying abilities. Ms. K rescinded her power to apply new ways of teaching, while blending her knowledge of the curriculum. This negotiated power resulted in a learning process that provided access for all learners to meaningfully connect within a culture of belonging. The co-teachers’ relationship allowed for their negotiated power to permeate their praxis and environment.

As the shift to remote learning unfolded, Ms. D’s and Ms. K’s relationship continued to embed the space for each teacher to exercise her specific power. Ms. K continued to share content knowledge and Ms. D continued to share instructional strategies and supplemental resources within a UDL lens to provide choice for students to apply their agency by using resources that guided their construction of academic knowledge. The virtual setting brought additional situations that allowed Ms. D to further exercise her specific power. As Ms. D and Ms. K co-planned lessons with grade level, general education teachers, Ms. D knew that the situation called for her to acknowledge her role as a special educator and her colleagues’ role as general education teachers by ignoring the differences in each role. In this virtual context, all students were struggling, and all teachers were working together to provide the same structure and
RELATIONAL CO-TEACHING FRAMEWORK

resources for consistency purposes. All teachers participated and collaborated equally by creating individual lessons and sharing with one another to support the time restraints as all teachers struggled to learn technology tools and digitize their lessons. However, Ms. D continued to apply additional graphic organizers, supplemental multi-media resources, and links to aid students who required support through special education. Ms. K and Ms. D acknowledged that the resources were “good for everyone,” so they posted in their classroom though the lens of UDL. As agents, students chose the resources that worked for them along their learning process.

Throughout the virtual classroom experience, disability was socially constructed in a manner that no longer required Ms. D to be concerned about marginalizing anyone. All students were viewed as needing support. In addition, Ms. D and Ms. K continued to support each student individually as needed.

Limitations of the Study

While my research design produced multiple, robust sets of data, there were certain limitations to the design that must be addressed. First, the findings are not generalizable. The findings are unique to the participants who co-created the culture of belonging within this specific setting and time. However, the method of cogenerative dialogues may be transferred as other educators read about experiences within this study. The second limitation is that as a researcher and active participant within the process of the classroom, my view was subjective. Yet, it was my hope that my subjectivity revealed how cogenerative dialogues may be a powerful tool for any educator to apply as they strive to create more inclusive practices. A third limitation was one of constraint. I could not predict how inclusive or how much teachers and students would feel a sense of belonging in the specific classroom. The fourth limitation was the abrupt and unexpected emergency school building closing that resulted in significant changes. The
abrupt closing forced teachers and students to shift from a familiar physical classroom to a virtual remote classroom. Also, the shift to remote learning required many changes from my original design that drove a wedge between the students and me. As a result, my findings are predominantly from the co-teachers’ perspective. Future research, whether in the physical classroom or virtual, should include more data from the students’ perspectives.

Given the shift to remote learning, this classroom experienced parameters that limited the freedom to transform to its greatest potential. However, at the conclusion of this study, varying degrees of transformation still occurred due to the co-teachers’ interactions. Although the remote learning process brought about unique challenges in comparison to learning in the physical classroom, I believe the findings support co-teaching and learning in any mode, including in-person, asynchronous, and live-streamed instructional time. In addition, this research was not designed to document causality and it was impossible to know to what extent the cogenerative dialogues contributed to change versus what change may have been naturally occurring anyway. However, individual interviews allowed co-teachers to reflect on their understandings of their specific co-teaching role and the process of cogenerative dialogues in changing classroom culture and sense of belonging. Moreover, both Ms. D and Ms. K acknowledged the contributions the cogen sessions made to their reflexivity and development while teaching and learning remotely.

**Benefits from the limitations: Even when missing puzzle pieces, Ms. K’s and Ms. D’s reconstructed image is complete**

Two opportunities unfolded as a result of some of the limitations of the study. The first was the awareness that although students were no longer a direct part of the cogen dialogues, their voice was still included through journaling and private conversations with the teachers.
Therefore, their point of view was a part of the teachers’ reflections during our virtual cogen sessions. This raises further questions for research about what constitutes dialogue and culture. As my study began, the focus was on in-person dialogic practices and co-creating a culture in the physical classroom. Yet, the findings revealed that a recreated culture of belonging still occurred in the virtual setting. This culture was evidenced through the relationship with the teachers. Although this study does not prove that students felt a sense of belonging overall, it did show that the students felt valued by their teachers through the shift to virtual spaces. Moreover, they may have evidenced a further sense of belonging within the classroom culture in time.

The second opportunity occurred through my lack of interaction with students and my increased connection with the co-teachers. As the research shifted to remote spaces, the cogenerative process flowed into a virtual process and product of cogenerating culture through a strong co-teaching lens. Therefore, this study shined a light on the ways co-teachers may collaborate in physical or virtual spaces. Through my time with Ms. D and Ms. K, I developed the Relational Co-teaching Framework to describe new and specific ways to experience collaboration within co-teaching relationships. Within the framework, the data revealed the value of co-creating spaces to negotiate power relations; value spaces to connect, disconnect, and reconnect; as well as include cogen sessions to reflect on how co-teachers may create the structures and apply their agency and unique forms of power to co-create a culture of belonging in inclusive, co-taught classrooms.

**Implications and Recommendations for Further Study**

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* and the reauthorization of the federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Act 2004, increased expectations for students with disabilities to be educated alongside their peers without disabilities. Co-teaching is one arrangement that responds
to the pressure to educate students of all abilities together in one classroom. Yet, co-teaching is a complex process that requires time and critical awareness to create and recreate a culture of collaboration and belonging. The implications for this study include actions for administrators, policy makers, and teacher educators.

Traditional professional development includes educators participating in an opportunity to learn with the hopes that new understandings are applied in practice. This study illuminates the essence of professional development to be the ebb and flow of an iterative process of reflection and practice within authentic situations. Practicing educators as well as pre-service teachers may explore the complexities of co-teaching through the dialogic lens of valuing multiple perspectives in the cogeneration of a classroom culture of belonging. The Relational Co-teaching Framework can provide a structure to guide new and veteran teachers in identifying effective co-teaching experiences. This study also implies considering the language and ideas to define the notion of disabilities. This study encourages special and general educators to consider and contribute their specific forms of power along the process of viewing students with disabilities through a strengths based as opposed to deficit model approach. In addition, co-teaching between a special educator and general educator is one arrangement. This study may also inform the co-teaching experiences between general educators and teachers of other languages who support students who are learning English as a new language.

As this study moved to remote learning, the process of cogenerative dialogues took on a different meaning. Students continued to contribute to the cogeneration of the culture, but it was very different from the traditional way cogenerative dialogues have been done before. Through the shift to virtual cogens, my study changes the conversation for what cogens might look like in virtual and asynchronous environments and how we can understand culture in physical and
virtual spaces. Ms. K and Ms. D transposed some of their structures from the physical classroom to their virtual classroom. Yet, the virtual space changed a few key ideas, such as the way the students no longer interacted with one another in their classroom. Yet, their voice was still part of recreating the virtual culture due to other ways to bring dialogue to the forefront, such as through student journaling. My study revealed a dynamic interplay between the physical and the virtual and how that raises important ideas about what we think about culture. At the beginning of the study, culture was very connected to the physical classroom. Yet, remote learning changed everything. Culture no longer felt tangible and visible in the same way. Yet, culture was recreated and existed in the virtual space. It was not attached to the physical classroom with face-to-face interactions. Culture existed in the wide-open synchronous and asynchronous spaces that brought these two teachers and students together.

**Conclusions**

“We looked forward to these meetings so much,” Ms. K added during our final cogen session.

“It’s so true,” added Ms. D “I realized things that I may not have made time to think about, right, [Ms. K]?”

Ms. K agreed and they both discussed the way they noticed the students “felt more connected as we went along.”

Ms. D added, “I think it was impossible to make them feel as connected as they did in the classroom together, but the journaling and other activities really helped.”

“And I think we got even closer,” added Ms. K.

She and Ms. D reminisced about the way they continued to co-plan and “do it all together.” The two pieces of the puzzle that brought their entire co-teaching image together—
then apart—then together again revealed that the consistency of their relationship structured the frame that supported the complex inner processes of their co-teaching experience.

Throughout the months dialoguing with Ms. K and Ms. D, I remained aware to listen and participate in ways that supported their experiences. In addition to offering advice or strategies along the way, my contribution was in the way they included students’ point of view back into the classroom. Through the journaling activities, student voice was reintroduced for teachers to reflect on and apply as they cogenerated their classroom culture.

Ms. K explained, “The kids all said how much they liked our weekly challenges, so we included more of that during our live Google Meets.”

Decisions like this were the result of creating opportunities for students to share how they were experiencing remote learning. Students’ comments were then included in the reflective process of our cogen sessions, which were then translated into the teachers cogenrating their classroom culture. Through this study, I created the Relational Co-teaching Framework to answer my decades-old questions about identifying specific collaborative interactions that may guide co-teachers to create a culture of belonging within their classroom. As my actions unfolded along the process of remote learning, I organically reimagined what the process of cogens could be in the virtual classroom. Ms. K and Ms. D were still able to recreate a culture of belonging—in a different way—but still inclusive of students’ perspective. As the co-teachers created space for power negotiation, they created a culture of belonging that existed regardless of physical or virtual structures of their classroom. They were now in a place where the past year was added to their past experiences. Their present included time to disconnect as a natural part of growing personally and professionally within a co-teaching relationship. The future would hold opportunities for them to reconnect—either with each other or with another co-teacher,
depending on their teaching assignment in the fall. Yet, it was clear that these teachers would carry with them the experiences of this past year to guide their future pedagogical decisions that serve to create any classroom culture. “We will miss the children,” said Ms. D “Yes, that part is always sad at the end of a school year,” added Ms. K, “but it’s nice to have a little break now to take care of ourselves, and then, of course, September is right around the corner, and who knows what that will bring—so we will have to prepare.”
References


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https://evaluationcanada.ca/distribution/20021010_boaz_anette_ashby_deborah.pdf
RELATIONAL CO-TEACHING FRAMEWORK


Kincheloe, J. L. (2011). Describing the bricolage: Conceptualizing a new rigor in qualitative research. In K. Hayes & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Key works in critical pedagogy* (pp. 177-189). Brill Sense.


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https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=59#:~:text=In%20fall%202017%20some%2095,in%20one%20of%20the%20following


https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol3/iss1/6
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Date and Time:

Introduction: As you know, I am Elizabeth Stein, and the purpose of this study will be to explore and co-construct the culture of inclusion in your classroom. Basically, we will be discussing what it is like to learn within your classroom setting. To facilitate our notetaking, I would like to audio record our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will have access to the recording which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our ethical human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview session to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that we will discuss. In addition, we will allow the conversations to unfold naturally, so new questions may arise through the process of our ongoing dialogue.

Opening question: Tell me what made you want to be an educator.

Content Questions:

1. How would you describe your experience teaching and learning in this class?

2. Who creates the classroom structures and routines?

3. What part do you play in creating the learning environment and learning process in class?

4. How do you create relationships with your students? With your co-teacher? How do you position yourself as a learner in your role as a teacher?

5. How valued and comfortable do you feel learners in your class are when sharing their thoughts and ideas within this learning environment?

6. Describe your experiences with classroom dialogue. Would you describe yourself as an active participant? Explain.

Probes include examples such as: Please tell me more, please elaborate, we would love to hear more details, could you explain your response or give an example?

Closing: Share gratitude for participants responses and authentic participation throughout the dialogic process. Reinforce confidentiality and ask if any clarification is needed, if participants would be willing to revisit their responses. Explain that summarized transcriptions will be shared with participants as a way to include them in the process of identifying themes toward responding to the research questions.
Appendix B: Cogenerative Dialogue Protocol with Co-Teachers

**Date and Time:**

**Introduction:** As you know, I am Elizabeth Stein, and the purpose of this study will be to explore and co-construct the culture of inclusion in your classroom. Basically, we will be discussing what it is like to learn within your classroom setting. To facilitate our notetaking, I would like to audio record our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will have access to the recording which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our ethical human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview session to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several open-ended questions that we will discuss to follow up from our most recent cogen session. In addition, we will allow the conversations to unfold naturally, so new questions may arise through the process of our ongoing dialogue.

**Possible Questions**

1. What resonates with you the most from the cogen session?

2. Is there anything that strikes you as interesting or concerning?

3. What is at least one action you would like to take as a result of this cogen session?

4. As a result of this cogen session, what else is on your mind?

5. Did the cogen session change your view about students’ perspective and the notion of co-creating a culture of inclusion in any way?
## Appendix C: Observation Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic of Lesson(s) during observation</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time began: Time concluded:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of observation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the classroom setting:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe how the session begins:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the interactions of the observation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who makes decisions during the observation time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the teachers doing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the students doing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe nonverbal communication observed:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who was engaged? How do you know?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the lesson end?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Cogenerative Dialogue Protocol with Students

**Date and Time:**

**Introduction:** As you know, I am Mrs. Stein, and the purpose of this study will be to explore the culture of inclusion in your classrooms. Basically, we will be discussing what it is like to learn within your classroom setting. To facilitate our notetaking, I would like to audio record our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will have access to the recording which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our ethical human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this cogen session to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that we will discuss. In addition, we will allow the conversations to unfold naturally, so new questions may arise through the process of our ongoing dialogue.

**Opening question:** Tell us one part of the school day that you enjoy the most.

**Questions:**

1. What is a typical day of learning like in your room—is there a general routine and structure to the day? If so, what is your role in creating the structure? What is your role in following the structure?

2. What does learning look like in your classroom?

3. What does learning feel like for you in your classroom?

4. What is your role in developing the classroom routines, structures, and activities?

5. What part do you play during lessons throughout the day?

6. How would you describe your relationship with your teachers and peers?

7. How do you feel about your own value as an individual thinker and member of the group in the classroom?

**Probes** include examples such as: *Please tell us more, please elaborate, we would love to hear more details, could you explain your response or give an example?*

**Closing:** Share gratitude for participants responses and authentic participation throughout the dialogic process. Reinforce confidentiality and ask if any clarification is needed, if participants would be willing to revisit their responses. Explain that summarized transcriptions will be shared with participants as a way to include them in the process of identifying themes toward responding to the research questions.
Appendix E: Story in Story #1: Baseline Data

Interval #1: March 3, 2020, through March 10, 2020

Figure 1: Story in Story #1: Baseline data

**Cogenerative Dialogue with Students**  
*(March 10, 2020)*

- All feeling valued by both teachers
- Some feeling frustrated when class was “noisy” by students who “call out.”
- Most feeling valued by peers.
- Many happy to be making choices during parts of the school day
- Needing teachers “to make choices for math. “If we made choices for math--then not too many kids would learn.”
- Acknowledging “kids who don’t behave don’t get to make choices.”
- Some feeling comfortable to ask questions and share ideas

**Teacher Semi-Structured Interviews:**  
*(March 3, 2020)*

- Sharing similar past experiences and desire to be an educator.
- Feeling valued and eager to share individual expertise.
- Learning from one another.
- Needing time to work individually in between co-teaching collaborations.
- Sharing the roles and responsibilities of teaching all students in the class.
- Communicating frequently throughout the day.

**Classroom Observation:**  
*March 3, 2020*

- Students free to move around the room.
- Building relationships with students.
- Co-Teachers sharing nonverbal communications.
- Class decorated with student work and mindset messages.
- Teachers providing specific and positive feedback.
- Most students paying attention to math review lesson.
- One student reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* secretly in his desk.
Appendix F: Story in Story #2

Interval #3: March 20, 2020, to April 29, 2020

Teachers: Cogenerative Dialogues: April 3, 2020 and April 14, 2020

- Collaborating with grade level teachers: “Lightening the load.”
- Posting and waiting.
- Time to self and with family.
- “Doing what supposed to be doing.”
- “Waiting to hear what we should be doing.”
- Increasing communication with parents.
- Providing supports to everyone.

District Memos

- Transitioning to remote learning.
- Increasing COVID cases in the community.
- Learning opportunities through shared resources.
- Recognizing time of crisis and need for personal wellness.

Classroom Observations

- Teachers posting assignments and resources.
- Private communication between teachers and individual students.
- Using familiar and new technology.
- Including multi-media.
- Changing organization to increase accessibility.
Appendix G: Story in Story #3

Interval #4: April 30, 2020 - May 11, 2020

Cogenerative Dialogues: April 30, May 11
- Adding student weekly challenge.
- Helping students to feel more connected through pre-recorded videos and live Google Meets.
- Feeling hesitant, nervous, but learning along the way.
- Choice to continue disconnect student interactions.
- Expanding dialogic practice through journaling.
- Technology guiding students to be more independent.

Classroom Observations
- Daily posting of academic assignments
- Feeling familiar structure and routines
- Students all navigating well
- Increasing communication between teacher and students through private individual comments through their work

District Memos
- Parents and students completing survey.
- Closing of school buildings to the end of the year.
- Teachers beginning pre-recorded instructional videos.
- Teachers to begin weekly live Google Meet to connect with students.

Student Journaling
- Enjoying family.
- Playing outside.
- Feeling distracted by siblings.
- Missing friends.
- Finding ways to socialize.
- Enjoying teacher challenges and videos.
Appendix H: Story in Story #4

Interval #5: May 18, 2020-June 4, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cogenerative Dialogues: May 18th, May 25th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling like we are teaching again through pre-recorded video—scaffolding “like we used to do in the classroom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Connecting better in small groups rather than whole class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Beginning was “just posting” Now showing strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Each co-teacher supporting the other in learning to create videos before posting-- feeling positive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling closer with families. No chat box feature and students directed to mute microphones.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Increasing posting with multi-media (Interactive Google Slide/Reflection).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maintaining familiar routine and structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students navigating with ease.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Memos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Expressing gratitude for all efforts to stay connected with families and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Informing of opportunities to participate in planning committees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Journaling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Most feeling comfortable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Most feeling valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some missing the classroom and not feeling valued and feeling “separated”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All enjoying weekly challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Most enjoying technology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Story in Story #5

Interval #6: June 5, 2020-June 19, 2020

Cogenerative Dialogues: June 18
- Feeling relieved and sad school is over.
- Teaching that was a difficult adjustment.
- Reflecting on feeling pressured to make sure students were still learning.
- We kept trying to make learning fun and interesting.
- Providing feedback and communication all the time kept everyone “in the groove”.
- Always checking in with each other.
- Complimenting one another’s efforts.
- Realizing we had difficult time balancing school with own lives.
- Acknowledging so many stressors and grateful to go through it together.
- Empowering one another along the way.
- Reflecting on dialogic practices with students.
- Missing the students—feeling grateful for “figuring this way of teaching out together.”

Classroom Observations
- Continued teacher-student private commenting.
- Increasing individual student reflections through interactive Google Slides activity.

District Memos
- Reviewing end of the year professional development activities.
- Expressing gratitude for perseverance and individual teacher efforts “no one can replace what you do.”

Student Journaling
- Most feeling connected with teachers.
- Few were feeling connected with peers.
- Enjoyed doing the challenges.
- Most missing talking with friends.
- Wishing for more whole class during Google Meets.
- Many learned “how to be more independent.”
- Making time to learn new things—like cooking, using technology, spending time on new hobbies.
- Enjoying time to figure things out.
- Learning to manage time and still get work done.
- Learning about the “things I am good at—like computers and reading.”
- Enjoying time with family
Appendix J: Approval Letter

Molloy College IRB
Approval Date: [blank]
Expiration Date: [blank]

Kathleen Maurer Smith, Ph.D.
Dean, Graduate Academic Affairs
T: 516.323.3391
F: 516.323.3396
E: s.smith@molloy.edu

DATE: February 13, 2020
TO: Elizabeth Stein
FROM: Molloy College IRB


REFERENCE #: [blank]
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: February 13, 2020
EXPIRATION DATE: February 12, 2020
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (6,7)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Molloy College IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has reviewed based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UIRISOS) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be an expedited categories 6 and 7 project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.
Appendix K: Protocol Amendment for COVID-19

Elizabeth Stein
Molloy College

Protocol Amendment for COVID-19
March 29, 2020

Modifications include:

- **Eliminating cogenerative dialogues and in-class observations** until the possibility that school reopens and social distancing restrictions may be lifted.
- **Continuing with dialogic interviews with teachers via videoconferencing** tools such as Google Meet or Zoom.
- **I will virtually observe the online classroom** by teachers inviting me as a member of their online Google Classroom. At this platform, teachers will be posting assignments and written messages to guide students to participate asynchronously in a variety of learning activities. **Students will not be participating in any videoconferencing** during the distance learning experience.
- **Research Questions will change** to:
  1. How do teachers maintain a culture of inclusion when their physical space changes from the familiar classroom setting to unexpected virtual learning spaces?
     a) How do the teachers attempt to maintain and expand the conditions of engagement and sense of belonging through this disruption?
Appendix L: Modified Protocol Approval

MODIFICATION of PROTOCOL for COVID-19

Patricia A. Eckardt <peckardt@molloy.edu>  
To: Elizabeth Stein <estein@lions.molloy.edu>  
Cc: Gina Nedelka <gnedelka@molloy.edu>

Tue, Mar 31, 2020 at 10:41 AM

We have received and reviewed your COVID modifications with regards to Co-Creating a Culture of Inclusion in a Co-Taught Suburban Elementary School: A Critical Transformative Auto-Ethnography.

These are approved and you may proceed.

Project Status: Active
Project Expiration Date: 02/13/2021
Initial Approval Date: 02/13/2020
Project Risk Level: Minimal Risk

Regards,
Patti

Patricia A. Eckardt, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board
Professor, Barbara H. Hagan School of Nursing
peckardt@molloy.edu
Appendix M: Informational Recruitment Flyer

Co-Creating a Culture of Inclusion in an Elementary Suburban Co-Taught Classroom: A Critical Transformative Auto/Ethnography
Principal Investigator (PI): Elizabeth Stein

Elizabeth Stein from the Educational Leadership for Diverse Learning Communities Doctoral Program at Molloy College is recruiting participants for a research study about creating a culture of inclusion with students in an ICT classroom. This study may help to better understand how learners experience teaching and learning in an inclusive classroom. Additionally, it may provide insights about the possible ways involving students in co-creating classroom culture may influence all learners’ sense of belonging and engagement in an inclusive classroom.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a tenured co-teacher in a 4th or 5th grade ICT classroom in [School District].

The study will take place in the co-teachers’ classroom with students. Your participation will be embedded into your classroom routine for up to 1 hour each week between January and June 2020. In addition, co-teachers will engage in semi-structured interviews with the PI to reflect and debrief about the teaching and learning process.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Elizabeth Stein;
Appendix N: Teacher Recruitment Letter

Teacher Recruitment Letter

To: All tenured co-teachers in grades 4-5

Subject: Molloy College Ed.D. student seeking teachers to participate in a research study

Dear co-teachers,

My name is Elizabeth Stein, and I have spent the last 17 years at a K-12 public school on Long Island working as a special education teacher. The last 6 years I have been working as a special education and universal design for learning instructional coach where I work within schools across the district. I work closely with teachers and students every day and appreciate living their stories about the successes and challenges of teaching and learning within inclusive settings. That is why I turned this topic into my dissertation study at Molloy College, in which I seek to answer questions about the sociocultural context of teaching and learning.

The key focus of my study is about implementing the notion of inclusion beyond the historically embraced special education lens. Specifically moving from a deficit-model lens to a strengths-based lens—with the notion of inclusion including all populations of learners.

Mr. [last name], the superintendent of schools, has given me permission to conduct this study with one co-teaching pair within an inclusive classroom in grades 4, or 5. My goal is to gain insight from teachers and students about their experiences co-creating a culture of inclusion within their classroom and how students perceive their sense of belonging and engagement within this culture. I hope that the results of my research will contribute to the research literature that will ultimately result in recommendations for school leaders to support teachers’ in co-creating an inclusive, equitable classroom culture that may increase students’ sense of belonging and engagement.

The co-teachers and students in the study will meet bi-weekly within cogenerative classroom discussions facilitated by me. These sessions will be scheduled according to the co-teachers’ choice. The bi-weekly sessions will be naturally embedded within the classroom routine. During alternating weeks, I will observe one lesson. I will be an active participant during these observations. The observations will be video-recorded to gather data on how participants co-create and experience their inclusive setting. Video recordings will be transcribed and shared with the two co-teachers to include their insights into making sense of the data. The recordings and transcripts will be kept confidential and not viewed by anyone other than the two co-teachers, if they choose, and me. Each teacher will participate in two semi-structured interviews (estimated at 45 minutes each), one at the beginning of the study in February or March 2020 and the second at the end in June 2020. Both teachers will also engage in dialogic interview discussions with me to debrief following the classroom discussion.
The building principal will assist me by finding coverage for the participating teachers during the school day, if necessary. All interviews, observations, and cogen sessions will be kept confidential. The district, school, teachers, and students will be given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

I hope that my study will contribute to the body of literature that embraces differences as part of the natural variability seen in any population of learners and inclusion may be seen as a term that embraces differences in any classroom regardless of special education labels. I hope you are willing to join me in this study.

Please feel free to contact me at the number or email below if you would like to participate or if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration!

Elizabeth Stein, M.S. Ed., NBCT
Doctoral Candidate
Molloy College
estein@lions.molloy.edu
Appendix O: Parent Consent Form

Parent Permission Form

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am the special education instructional coach in the Smithtown School District. I am also a doctoral candidate at Molloy College. I am conducting a research study of elementary school students and teachers to learn about their experiences co-creating classroom culture in an inclusive setting. Specifically, I am studying how teachers and students may create a classroom environment that may increase students’ sense of belonging and engagement in the learning process.

The district has given me permission to conduct this research in one elementary classroom and is facilitating this communication with you to tell you about the study and give you the opportunity to decide whether you want your child to participate.

If you give permission for your child to participate, they will be invited to join their teachers and classmates in bi-weekly whole class or small group classroom discussions (approximately 30-45 minutes each) where we will discuss how they are experiencing learning within their classroom. These classroom conversations, along with participation during instructional time will allow me to learn how teachers and students work together to co-create a classroom culture where each member of the classroom community feels a sense of belonging and engagement. These discussions and observations will be video recorded and transcribed for purposes of analyzing data. All recordings and transcriptions will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of names of district, school, teachers, and students. In addition, students will be invited to sketch or write in a journal as an option for expressing their ideas. Classroom work samples may also be used to learn how students are engaging in the learning process. Although student journal entries and work samples may be collected for review, they will be returned to your child. There may be occasions to make a copy of student work. In this case no names or identifying information will be revealed.

Students will also be asked to agree to participating in this research. Please see the Student Assent form that was also sent home today. Please carefully review with your child and send the completed form back with your consent form. All students will be invited to participate through a variety of options. Therefore, in the event any student does not want to participate, they will still feel part of the classroom learning experience. There are no known risks to your child from participating in this study. Their grades and class standing will not be affected in any way if they do or do not participate. Your child will not directly benefit from this research; however, their participation may benefit the class and others by informing the development of future instructional materials and learning activities that instill a sense of belonging and engagement in the classroom. The alternative to participating in this research is to simply not participate and continue with usual daily classroom activities offered at the same time as the research with your child’s regular teacher.
This research is confidential. No names or other identifying information will be collected. The information will contribute to the completion of a dissertation and defense of the dissertation. The researcher may also disseminate the findings in scholarly outlets like journal articles, book chapters, conference presentations, and/or professional development. If a report of this study is published or presented at a professional conference, only group results will be communicated and not individual responses.

To ensure that this research activity is being conducted properly, Molloy College’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), whose members are responsible for the protection of human subjects’ rights for all Molloy-approved research protocols, have the right to review study records, but confidentiality will be maintained as allowed by law.

I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study. Please contact Elizabeth Stein at [email protected].

You (and your child) have rights as a research participant. All research with human participants is reviewed by a committee called the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions about your rights, an unresolved question, a concern or complaint about this research you may contact the IRB contact the Molloy IRB office at irb@molloy.edu or call 516 323 3000.

Please fill out and sign the form below and return it to your child’s teachers. Please return the form on the next page or reply via email by February 27 2020. Thank you!

Please do one of the following by February 27, 2020:

(1) sign and return this page of the form to your child’s teachers
(2) email estein@smithtown.k12.ny.us with the subject line “Research Project” and include your name and your child’s name in the message along with “I give my child permission to participate” or “I do not give my child permission to participate.

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Stein
Advisor: Dr. Tricia Kress

Research Project Title: Co-Creating a Culture of Inclusion: A Critical Transformative Auto/Ethnography

_____ Yes, I give my child permission to participate.

_____ No, I do not give my child permission to participate.
Print your child’s name: ____________________________

Parent/Guardian’s Signature

Print Parent/Guardian’s Name

Date__________________________________________
Appendix P: Student Assent Form

Student Assent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project that I am working on to complete my doctoral degree. In this research, I would like to learn more about how teachers and students in your class work together to create a classroom learning environment. You can help with this project if you would like to. You do not have to help if you do not want to.

In the project you will participate in classroom conversations by listening to your teachers and peers and by sharing your thinking and adding to our conversations. You will also be given a notebook that you may use as a journal to sketch or write some of your thinking. Your journal entries will be read by your teachers and me, as a way for you to share what you are thinking about. There may be times when your journal is collected at the end of the day, but it will always be returned to you by the next day, so you may use it any time you feel. Classroom conversations will happen two times each month as another way you may share what you are thinking as well as listen to what your peers are thinking. I will also come into your classroom to observe two time each month. Each time I come in to observe or to have class discussions, we will video record our time together, so I may look back at the recordings and learn more about what everyone shared.

After the school year is over, I will use the information I gathered from your class to write a research report called a dissertation. I may also give presentations or write papers about what I learned in your class. Your name will not be used in any presentations or papers written about this project. Your name will not be put on the video recordings and all the data I collect will be destroyed after the study is done.

If you decide to help with this project but then change your mind, it is fine for you to stop helping at any time.

If you have any questions about what you are being asked to do, please ask me now. Or if you have any questions later, you can ask your teacher. You may also ask me questions when I am in your classroom.

If you want to participate in this project, please write your name on the line at the bottom of this page. If you do not want to participate, please print your name, but do not sign the form.

Student’s Name _______________________________________

Student’s Signature __________________________________

*Students’ signature and/or printed name affirms that parents/legal guardians have explained the assent form and the classroom project description to guide their decision to participate or not to participate.