Navigating the Use of Cogenerative Dialogues: Practical Considerations for Graduate Faculty

Ginny Jones Boss
Michigan State University

Chris Linder
University of Georgia

In this study, we explored cogenerative dialogue (cogen) as a tool for learner-centered teaching in graduate education. Cogen consists of small group dialogues among instructors and students for the purposes of improving course processes. We engaged cogen during a semester-long, graduate-level campus environments course. Using the theoretical framework of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and case study methodology, we explored cogen's use in highlighting ways in which our course processes were enhanced or impeded. Our analysis resulted in the prominent themes of the role of physical space, power dynamics, and internal and external influences on the potential for learning in our classroom. We conclude by offering considerations for educators interested in using cogen in a graduate education course as a result of our study.

We, the authors and instructors of the course discussed in this study, strive to create classroom environments that foster student agency in learning and challenge power structures inherently built into traditional classroom structures. Using cogenerative dialogue (cogen) in our class provided both students and instructors an opportunity to engage in a learning partnership in which we all had responsibility in guiding course processes and challenging power structures inherent in our learning environment. We found cogen to be a powerful tool in transforming not only how students thought about learning in our class, but also how students thought about learning beyond it (Linder & Jones, 2015). In this paper, we discuss cogen, a learner-centered pedagogy; cultural-historical activity theory, the theoretical framework guiding our course and research design; and our reflections on using cogen in a graduate education course.

Learner-centered teaching can have tremendous positive impacts on student learning, engagement, and retention of content (Blumberg & Everett, 2004). Learner-centered teachers create classroom environments in which responsibility is shared with students by providing them opportunities to guide the learning process. These opportunities encourage "collaboration, acknowledging the classroom (be it virtual or real) as a community where everyone shares the learning agenda" (Weimer, 2013, p. 15). Learner-centered teaching shifts the role of the instructor from lecturer to facilitator. In the role of facilitator, instructors must be equipped with multiple pedagogical tools and work with learners to negotiate how those tools will be best used to facilitate learning. With ever-increasing approaches to learner-centered teaching (Weimer, 2013), educators interested in this pedagogical approach may have difficulty identifying effective practices. In this paper, we highlight the pedagogical practice of cogen.

Cogen provides students and faculty opportunities to work together to create learning environments that support a variety of learning styles and practices (Murphy & Carlisle, 2008; Tobin & Roth, 2006). It involves small group discussions in which students and instructors in the learning environment reflect on the course processes and make appropriate modifications throughout the semester. In this way, cogen becomes an intentional space for focusing on the classroom learning environment as its object of study (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmerman, 2002). The instructors maintain responsibility for introducing content in the course, but students move from "participation to contribution" (Murphy & Carlisle, 2008, p. 497) in the class process.

Cogen also provides opportunities to address social power dynamics in learning environments (Bondi, 2013; Scantlebury & LaVan, 2006). One intention of cogen is to interrupt formal power dynamics in classrooms. Therefore, it is crucial instructors use cogen to create a space in which power, privilege, and oppression are named and addressed. For example, women and girls may be socialized to avoid conflict and may choose not to share perspectives counter to those with more formal and informal authority (Scantlebury & LaVan, 2006). Since cogen involves making explicit all observed dynamics in the learning environment, it becomes a space in which students and instructors can attempt to mitigate inequities through explicit discussion and behavior (Bondi, 2013).

We designed and facilitated a course on campus environments in which we used cogen as a means to guide students into taking ownership of their learning. Simultaneously, we conducted research around the use of cogen in our learning environment. While there is a growing body of literature around the use of cogen in primary and secondary teacher education (Murphy & Carlisle, 2008; Stith & Roth, 2010; Tobin & Roth, 2006), very little is written about it related to teaching and learning in collegiate or graduate contexts. As such, we struggled to make sense of what cogen may look like within our own graduate classroom. One other researcher, Dr. Stephanie Bondi, has used and

written about cogen in her work with graduate students (Bondi, 2011). We connected with Dr. Bondi prior to starting the course to strategize how we might go about using cogen in our classroom. While we still had to do the work of figuring out the aspects of cogen that fit within our learning context, our conversation with Dr. Bondi helped to demystify the process. This paper is an attempt to pay forward that benefit.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) examines human thought and action within the larger cultural and historical contexts in which they occur (Roth & Lee, 2007). When used in education inquiry, CHAT explores how learning opportunities are transformed by the collaborative efforts of instructors and students to improve the learning environment (Murphy & Carlisle, 2008). The learning environment, through the lens of CHAT, is considered an activity system. As the primary unit of analysis, the activity system's interrelated parts are explored in order to make them explicit as well as address contradictions within the system (Foot, 2014; Murphy & Carlisle, 2008).

Activity systems comprise six interrelated components: subject(s), object(s), tools/artifacts, community, rules, and division of labor (Foot, 2014). Our activity system for this study was our classroom learning environment, in which both students and instructors were subjects. Collectively, we worked toward the objects of shared power and agency in order to achieve the outcome of deeper learning. Several tools and artifacts mediated our efforts toward our object. At a macro level, our learning was mediated through the engagement of a body of content knowledge connected to campus environments. As instructors, we brought a multitude of tools to use in facilitation of learning, including small and large group discussion, engagement with social media, creative representations of content, and theory-to-practice reflections. However, the primary tool introduced to our activity system to mediate deeper learning was the use of cogen. In terms of community, we had a number of community influences on our activity system both within and outside of our classroom context: students and instructors in the class, assistantship providers, other students and faculty in the program, and a multitude of personally significant relationships connected to each subject beyond the student affairs program. The structure of cogen included a set of rules which governed how we used it within our activity system. Additionally, there were external rules such as the amount of time allotted for class, university-mandated structures for the course, and programmatic structures, in particular the comprehensive exams

engaged in by students. Finally, in terms of divisions of labor, cogen provided an opportunity wherein the division of labor was shared among the students and instructors. For example, at the conclusion of each cogen session, each member would make a personal commitment to improve future class sessions based on the feedback we shared with one another.

CHAT also gives focus to the exploration of contradictions within the activity system (Foot, 2014). Contradictions in an activity system can happen both internally and externally. Contradictions are explained as things impeding progress toward the desired outcome (Roth & Tobin, 2004) or influential factors presenting opportunities for growth within the activity system (Foot, 2014). In either definition, discovery of contradictions presents subjects with an opportunity to address them and continue progress toward the desired goal (Foot, 2014; Roth & Lee, 2007). Contradictions serve to highlight the possibilities for expansion and growth. When subjects address contradictions, they are better able to expand their activity system beyond its current state.

Methodology

We employed a case study methodology to research the use of cogenerative dialogues in our course. Case study is an effective methodology in studying phenomena when boundaries between the content and process are not always clear (Yin, 2009). Such was the case in exploring the use of cogen in our classroom context. As instructors we maintained responsibility for introducing the content, but our approach was dictated by changing course processes in accordance to cogen discussions. The case study approach allowed us to highlight the interplay of content and process in our class. Specifically, we employed an exploratory case study design (Yin, 2009) to better understand cogen as a pedagogical practice with students in a graduate-level campus environments course.

Case Description

Our class was a semester-long course in a cohort-based college student affairs administration program at a four-year research university in the United States. The student affairs program is structured such that students take a series of courses in a prescribed sequence over two years. During the last semester of their second year, students take comprehensive exams which require them to incorporate their learning from classes across the curriculum. The focus of our class was to examine the impacts campus environments have on their community members. This involved theoretical examinations of physical and human aggregate characteristics, organizational structures, and the constructed environment—implicit assumptions held by

campus stakeholders (Strange & Banning, 2001). First-year master's students in their second semester of study enrolled in this course. The students in the class, with the exception of one student, were part of a 19 student graduate cohort. Two instructors led the class: a tenure-track assistant professor in her first year and a doctoral candidate.

Course Design

Keeping previous research results from cogen in mind (Bondi, 2013) and given the subject matter of our course, we were intentional about what classroom spaces we chose. We believed traditional classroom spaces may impede our efforts at challenging power dynamics and providing comfortable and safe spaces for critical discourse. Additionally, the course's focus on campus environments encouraged us to seek a variety of locations around campus to explore various environments.. We secured different spaces across campus in which to meet, including multipurpose rooms with movable sofas and cushioned chairs and traditional classrooms in non-traditional spaces (residence halls).

We were intentional in introducing and structuring the cogen experiences. To introduce students to cogen, we provided an article describing its use in graduate education (Bondi, 2013). Additionally, we explained the focus of cogen was on evaluating the learning process more than content of the course. Students were required to participate in two sessions of cogen and write a reflection paper about their experiences with cogen at the end of the semester. At the start of the semester, students were randomly assigned to groups of four and were given the option to switch with other classmates if they had schedule conflicts. On their assigned days, students would meet with the two instructors for one hour to participate in cogen. In this research, and in past research (Bondi, 2011), cogen sessions were held after the class had concluded with a small group of students and the instructors. We typically began cogen sessions with an open-ended question such as, "What did you notice in class this week?," and the dialogue would proceed from there. Sessions would conclude with a prompt, such as: "As a result of our conversation here, what will we take responsibility for in improving future class sessions?" As instructors, we made use of the content of cogen sessions to determine what learning tools we would employ for future class sessions. Additionally, students typically spoke of using what they learned from cogen to improve their personal interactions with the larger class.

Data Collection and Analysis

Although student participation in the dialogues was required, students were not required to participate in the research project. We collected data from the two instructors and 19 of the 20 students enrolled in the class in three different ways: (a) two researcher reflection journals written in connection with the dialogues, (b) eight audio taped and transcribed cogen sessions, and (c) 19 student reflection papers on their experiences of the cogen process.

To analyze the data, we developed a codebook based on individual and collaborative review of the transcripts and reflections (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 1998). We began the process by dividing half (4) of the cogen transcripts and individually coding them. We then met together to discuss similarities and differences to establish preliminary categories and codes. Based off of the initial categories and codes, we begin creating the codebook. Throughout the process of making the codebook, we defined and refined codes connected to practical considerations of using cogen as a pedagogical tool (Yin, 2009). Our codebook included broad categories, individual codes associated with each category, and a definition of each code. Individually, both researchers used the codebook to analyze all data, including the instructor/researcher reflection journals, cogen transcripts, and student reflection papers. When necessary, we added and defined emergent categories and codes if we came across information that did not fit our initial codebook. After all data were coded, we looked across the data and identified several themes related to practical aspects of cogen.

We attended to matters of authenticity and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in our findings in a number of ways. The nature of cogen provided us an opportunity to engage catalytic authenticity by using information to make changes throughout the course (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). During post-data collection analysis, we employed member-checking by providing student participants our research findings and soliciting their feedback. Student's participant feedback indicated our findings resonated with their experience of the course and cogen. We have also partnered with the student-participants to present our findings at regional and national conferences. This provided us an opportunity to engage in peer debriefing (Lincoln, 2001).

Findings

In the next section of this paper, we use student and instructor reflections as well as excerpts of cogen discussions to highlight practical considerations for using cogen in graduate education. The themes of the role of physical space, the difficulty of separating power and meaning making, and internal and external contextual influences on classroom spaces frequently recurred in the data

Space Matters

One area of focus students highlighted during cogen was the role physical classroom spaces played in

facilitating dialogue. We held classes in various spaces on campus; some of these spaces closely resembled traditional classrooms with chairs and tables/desks while others were multipurpose rooms with different combinations of tables, sofas, and chairs. Similar to previous research (Bondi, 2013), our study indicated space was particularly salient when conducting cogen. As instructors, we were acutely attuned to energy levels both during formal class time and in our cogen sessions. In both instances we recognized that students seemed to respond more positively to the non-traditional spaces, which included movable sofas, lounge chairs, open space, and much more light than traditional academic classroom settings. Students appreciated spaces that provided opportunities for "informal" conversations.

Though using alternative spaces provided much benefit, we experienced challenges navigating the bureaucracy of space on campus. We were part of a campus in which there was no centralized method of reserving spaces across campus, and the demand on non-traditional spaces made it difficult at times to obtain what we desired. On the weeks we could not find availability in multipurpose rooms, we opted for traditional classrooms in non-traditional spaces. Despite the fact we used traditional classroom spaces in non-traditional locations, such as residence halls or the student union, there was a noticeable change in student interaction in those spaces. Students shared both during their cogen and their end-of-semester reflections about the impact of the space on the climate of the classroom and the dialogues. Atticus shared the following:

> In the beginning we read that article [about cogen], and then we were meeting in the residence hall, and it made sense to me because it was related. Then, as we started moving across campus, moving into nicer classrooms but still in a square formation table it made less sense to me as to why we were meeting in those spaces. I felt like it was nice to see campus, but then we were still like in a classroom setting. Whereas, in the beginning, it was like everyone gets to sit in a nice couch. I felt like that changed the environment, kind of, or the way we discussed things.

Courtney, also referring to one of the traditional classroom spaces used, commented, "I understand not one place is going to be great for everyone, but it felt heavier the times we had to meet [in that space]." One of the ways we attempted to alleviate the impact of the space on the learning process was by identifying closely situated alternative spaces for the dialogue portions of that class session or cogen. For example, one of the more traditional classroom spaces had a lounge not too far off from it and to which we would move for the purposes of engaging dialogue. There

was a noticeable change in energy levels when students interacted in those spaces.

Attending to Power

Issues of power came up frequently in our cogenerative dialogues. As instructors, we noticed students frequently looked to us for the right answer, and, in cogen, students revealed they had also become aware of this trend. We would also sense hesitancy on the part of the students: they seemed to be feeling out the "right" way to go about the cogen process. Despite our attempts to minimize our power in the learning situation, some students still felt hesitant to trust their own processes of meaning making. During a cogen session Skyler noted the following:

> …every time y'all come by a conversation, I'll be talking, and you get there and I'm like, "oh my gosh, what do I say? Is this right? She could tell me this is wrong right now." So, I always get worried in class, even though I shouldn't get worried anymore, but when you come and listen, [I think] maybe [I] should stop talking…

Having space to discuss this phenomenon through cogen helped us to address it throughout the semester, but we wrestled with trying to empower students to trust their own knowledge. This points to the importance of on-going discussions related to power in the classroom, as well as the importance of intentionally taking steps to reduce instructor power. We did this by sitting with the students around tables in the classroom rather than standing at the front of the room and by encouraging the students to call us by our first names. Another way we did this was by engaging students in power dynamics during cogen. During a few cogen sessions, we mentioned our own struggles with breaking the habit of "giving students permission to share" by calling on people. This helped continue the conversation around how we could make our learning community more democratic, with the students taking more of the lead in making meaning. Students eventually began to dialogue about how they could shape the learning environment in a way that privileged their knowledge rather than looking for our approval. Houston was one of the students who brought this idea to cogen saying, "…I think it would be so awesome if we could, as a group, get away from this idea of discussing with the professor. We can discuss with one another; that'd be great." Throughout the semester we also began to notice a shift in behaviors. In her instructor/researcher reflection journal, Chris wrote the following:

> I am certainly seeing changes in class behaviors based on cogen discussions and it is so cool! I

noticed this week Olivia did a great job of talking to her classmates rather than directing her attention to me and/or Ginny. Additionally, James spoke up in the beginning of class and Spencer beautifully challenged his peers to think differently about gender versus sex.

We both reflected on specific times when we noticed students adapting their classroom behavior to address issues that arose during cogen discussions.

One power-related struggle we both reflected on in our journals was how to mitigate oppressive structures inherent in where we were situated. We were in an institution of higher education where instructors have real power over students by providing grades in the course, serving as references for jobs, and grading comprehensive exams which determine whether students will graduate. Both of us reflected in our journals on times when we struggled to make sense of how vulnerable to be and how much to try to connect with students as a colleague in addition to as an instructor. For example, Ginny recorded this in her journal:

How do I converse as colleagues with all cogen members? Will it get easier to not be the "(co)instructor" in that space? How much of what students share do we challenge them to take control over changing in subsequent classes and how much do we take responsibility for changing?

Similarly, Chris reflected the following after the second cogen:

The conversation seemed to stay surface level and students seemed to be nervous about being critical. Unfortunately, the power dynamic in the space was obvious and I wasn't sure how to address it. It made me skeptical of sharing too much since I knew my voice was carrying a lot of weight, yet part of breaking down the power differential is to participate as an equal in the conversation, so finding that balance was tough.

We continued to reflect on this challenge in our journals and with each other. Eventually, the power dynamic in cogen lessened some, yet institutional barriers never allowed for the power to dissipate completely.

Internal and External Influences on the Classroom

External factors, including program structure and cohort dynamics, also influenced classroom experiences. As mentioned before, students in our class were part of a student affairs master's program that culminated in the experience of taking comprehensive exams (comps). The program was also cohort-based in which students started in a group and took all classes throughout the program with the same group. These particular elements of program structure emerged as areas of focus during cogen.

Program structure. Students described having anxiety around comprehensive exams. They talked about how they felt pressure to make sure they were learning the "right" information in classes to be successful on their comps. They shared that some of this pressure was compounded by concern over being compared to the cohort ahead of them or by other faculty. Although they were appreciative of the attention we were giving in our class to learning processes, they expressed concern over whether or not it was adequately preparing them for their exams. One student expressed, "I think that a lot of our anxiety is due to comparison to the second years. Cuz I think we learned it in a very different way." Other students would say they believed instructors in other classes were teaching them the content in more traditional ways, and that made them feel more confident they had the "right" information for comps. They also spoke of wrestling with the tension of enjoying the constructive nature of our course versus the more prescriptive nature of other courses, but feeling uncertain about its effectiveness. Julio's account highlights this tension:

I don't want to say I want you to teach to test, because I don't want to teach to the test. But I'm always worried that I'm not going to do as well on comps. … I love the fact that we write papers and get to approach it from our own thinking and learn through our own construction, but not necessarily being exposed to [the right knowledge]. …I don't like tests, but I'm also worried because that's a reality for this program.

Marilyn shared her experience in a conversation with a student in the cohort ahead of her. In a discussion on class experiences and comprehensive exams, the other student said to her "You're going to fail." Marilyn then shared, "I might have to brush up on my [knowledge], because [the other student] can articulate it very rigidly, very academically. You know, this is what [a particular theorist] says, this is what the stage is…"

Students were not the only ones who shared this concern. In both our instructor/ researcher journals, we wrote about feeling pressure to "teach to the test." Both of us questioned whether or not we needed to readjust course processes to focus more on imparting knowledge to the students lest we be held responsible for their poor performance on comps if they did indeed perform poorly.

Ginny reflected in her instructor journal about this:

All-in-all, I leave today's class and cogen experience wondering, *How do you model for a class there is no right answer but prepare them for being evaluated in a way that says this answer isn't right enough?* This is especially salient to me because I have no influence over how students are evaluated in their cumulative experiences and this class is an important part of that.

We discussed this challenge at length in our meetings and continually wrestled with ways to engage students related to both content and process. Eventually students seemed to recognize making meaning of the material for themselves resulted in them having a strong understanding of it. They became increasingly aware they did not need the instructors to tell them what they needed to know for comps. However, it presented a challenge for us in choosing to incorporate cogen into their classroom. We had to ask ourselves, does cogen fit with the overall philosophy of the program? How do we help students navigate the multiple, and sometimes contradicting, messages about what "knowing" means to different faculty?

Cohort dynamics. In addition to comparison issues that existed between the two master's cohorts, we experienced issues associated with intragroup cohort dynamics as well. Students expressed difficulty in navigating cohort relationships in and out of the classroom and often struggled to negotiate the difference between friendship and collegiality. Students expressed fear of negative consequences in their relationships with cohort mates based on their classroom participation. For example, Elizabeth shared the following:

> When we were talking about orientation, I had an unpopular opinion. I felt like because I had an unpopular opinion and chose to share it, I was then a bad person for having that unpopular opinion….[I] was hurt. Some of the things people were countering my argument with were not nice.

More than we anticipated going into this research, cogen often centered on cohort dynamics as they influenced our learning environment. Students expressed concern about their peers "talking about" them if they said something "wrong" in the classroom. One student succinctly articulated the importance of addressing this: "It's good to not ignore what's going on outside the classroom. Because of the cohort model, there's so much going on outside the classroom that definitely affects what's going on inside it, so it's hard to ignore, just pretend it's not happening." Furthermore, students spoke about how intragroup dynamics influenced how uncomfortable they were in sharing around certain topics. Julio highlighted this:

> Maybe it's our cohort, but there are certain groups of friends within our cohort. …sometimes the groups become like "oh, those people hang out most of the time." Clearly the [cogen] groups that happen are small and maybe that's why people are being more honest, but it also somewhat feels intimidating and frustrating.

In our own reflection journals, we also noted our surprise at how often we focused on cohort dynamics in cogen, as Chris highlighted in her journal:

> The heavy focus from some students on being friends with everyone in the cohort is still surprising to me. I would think by this point students would be clear they can have multiple and complex relationships with people and they don't need to be "friends" with everyone in order to have a successful graduate school experience.

We also struggled with whose responsibility it was—ours, the students, or some combination thereof—to address these dynamics. Ginny elaborated on this in her journal:

> The focus of the conversation was frustrating, because, again I was feeling as if they should be in a better place of giving each other the benefit of the doubt and not letting the life stuff suffocate out the learning opportunities. Students talked about not wanting to share in class because of the repercussions of it or not wanting to offend others. There is a real avoidance of negative feelings and emotions among the larger group of students that was voiced in this cogen group. That both saddens and frustrates me. How are they going to affect change, if they are afraid to make waves in this more insulated environment?

Cohort relationships were so much a focus of cogen that Courtney wrote in her reflection paper at the end of the semester, "I noticed that in a lot of our cogen reflections we spend a lot of time talking about our relationships with our peers rather than our feelings about class. They are, of course, intertwined, but I think that we were focusing too much on our cohort relations."

Discussion

Our experience with cogen revealed it to be an effective tool in creating space for more balanced student participation in the learning process. The use of cogen allows students to provide real-time feedback to course processes impeding or enhancing their learning, taking ownership over their own learning, and gaining a

clearer understanding of their role in the learning environment (Linder & Jones, 2015). In our classroom context, three major areas of consideration were salient: the role of physical space in mediating dialogues around course processes, the importance of dialogue in addressing issues of power within the classroom, and the impact of external influences on the learning environment and dialogic processes. In conjunction with CHAT, these considerations offer pertinent information for understanding the usefulness of cogen in graduate classrooms.

CHAT gives focus to the contradictions within the activity system, and within our activity system we had a number of contradictions. As mentioned before, contradictions "provide an understanding of [the activity system's] developmental trajectory" (Foot, 2014 p. 337). In our class, we were better able to maximize the potential for learning when we addressed contradictions around space, power, and internal and external influences. Cogen provided the students and us the means to name and address those contradictions.

When it came to concerns of space, students vocalized their concerns and appreciation for the role space played in facilitating our dialogues. It revealed to us the salience of place around fostering open dialogue. While we had gone into the semester with these considerations in mind, neither of us anticipated the strength of their impact. The contradiction here existed at the nexus of our own and students' cultural and historical understandings of what learning spaces were supposed to be and the potential to maximize learning by utilizing different kinds of environments. We discovered that it was difficult to navigate locating and finding spaces with availability during the semester. Had we known how impactful this element would be for our class and dialogues, we could have planned sooner for using different spaces and had greater success in securing them. Meeting in spaces with more comfortable and movable furniture served as an additional tool for fostering an environment in which all members of cogen could feel comfortable contributing.

The most complex system of contradictions we encountered were connected to attending to power dynamics. The complexity of this effort stemmed from the variation of individual and collective understandings of each of the subjects, in this instance the instructors and students, around issues of learning and identity. As displayed in our findings, years of socialization on the parts of the instructors and students made it difficult to break out of traditional classroom power structures, namely the instructors as authority. Even when we (the instructors and students) would address this power dynamic in cogen, we still struggled collectively to disrupt our behaviors associated with it. At one point, we all agreed students would no longer raise their hands or otherwise wait for the instructors to give them permission to share during class. Yet students would still looked to us for permission, and we would find ourselves nonverbally granting it. It took several cogen discussions to figure out what worked best for our environment to disrupt those practices. Some of those solutions included creating large group class discussion circles of which the instructors were not a part, providing more opportunities for dyad and small group discussion among students, and having students structure and present class content.

The external influence of program structure both presented its own contradictions and impacted how we could address other contradictions. Our efforts in disrupting traditional power dynamics were sometimes thwarted by the looming pressure of comprehensive exams. Though students desired the space to navigate their own learning, they also worried about their ability to do so and learn what they needed to in order perform well on comps. As instructors we also struggled. Our own educational philosophies fall in line with learner-centered approaches, but fear of job security, student evaluations, and perceptions from our colleagues impacted our interactions in class.

The complexity of cohort dynamics also proved challenging to address in the classroom space and illustrated the importance of considering power dynamics among the students and the instructors of the course. Cohort dynamics created conditions in which students did not always feel safe to engage in critical discourse with one another in the large group setting but became a major focus of discussion in the cogen setting. However, none of the students wanted to challenge each other for fear of repercussion. Students' hesitancy to confront each other presented a conundrum for us as instructors who recognized our stepping in and doing the work of challenging for them went against the democratic learning community that we, the instructors and students, were attempting to create.

Implications for Practice

Our findings present implications for practice for educators interested in using cogen in their own courses that transcend our specific course and program contexts. Given cogen's focus on examining learning processes over content, it has the potential to be an effective practice across disciplines. Several studies have documented the use of cogen in teacher education and in pre-collegiate STEM classes (Stith & Roth, 2010; Tobin & Roth, 2006), and a few have been documented in graduate education (Bondi, 2011; Linder & Jones, 2015). Future research on the use of cogen in at the undergraduate level could provide further insight to its usefulness in that context. In this section, we offer suggestions for educators interested in using cogen in their own classrooms.

First, the space in which cogen is conducted has the potential to promote or constrain dialogue. It was a focus of our class to use various spaces for our class sessions. Through this process, we discovered the spaces we used also impacted student participation in cogen. This finding is consistent with another study that used cogen and was not situated in a campus environments course (Bondi, 2011). We recognize it may not be a logistical possibility for many courses to use alternative spaces for the entire class session. However, because cogen dialogues usually occur outside of scheduled class time and with a small subsection of the class, instructors may inquire after alternative spaces to meet for the purposes of cogen, including a lounge space in the building the class session was held or nearby.

Second, cogen can be a powerful companion tool for educators interested in creating learner-centered classrooms. As long as current institutional structures exist, instructors will wrestle with tensions around power in the classroom (Weimer, 2013). In our classroom, there were a few gatekeeping structures, including students' anxiety related to comprehensive exams. However, for other courses there may be a different set of external pressures and structures impacting how students experience class. Our class was structured to be learner-centered, not just through the use of cogen, but also through challenging students to rely on their own ways of making meaning without us giving them the "right" answer, granting students choice over how to engage some assignments, and in one case having them design the assignment activity altogether. These are all pedagogical tools many educators might use across disciplines, and they are also potential areas for students' resistance if they are accustomed to classes that are more teacher-centered (Weimer, 2013). As was highlighted in our findings, students spoke of their discomfort in taking agency over their own learning. Cogen becomes an effective tool in naming this resistance and addressing it collectively (Bondi, 2013; Scantlebury & LaVan, 2006). We found when students named their discomfort and we, as instructors, provided more clarity and transparency about our approaches, students more readily and positively responded to learner-centered techniques. In fact, they begin to suggest ways in which our class could promote learner-centered activities.

Cogen takes more time and planning than traditional teacher-centered methods. Educators interested in using this tool will need to examine the fitness for using cogen given their own contexts. In our course, we held cogen for an hour outside of class. However, the literature does not present a "one size fits all" format for cogen sessions. Varied institutional constraints about how and when to use cogen will warrant investigation and decision making on the part of the instructor. For instance, it may make sense to use the last 30 minutes of a class session to conduct cogen to ensure students are available for participation. Instructors also have to be prepared to restructure course plans throughout the semester or operate with a loosely structured course plan going into the semester. One of the most powerful elements of cogen is the action associated with what comes up in the dialogues on the part of the instructors and students (Linder & Jones, 2015). When students realize their feedback was considered and impacted course processes, this increases their investment in the course and learning process.

Conclusion

Because so little is written about the use of cogen in graduate education, our research and reflection provides insight for those interested in using this pedagogical tool in their own class contexts. Our findings revealed a few practical considerations for those interested in using cogen in graduate education. Cogen served as a great place for students to express their struggles in trusting their own voices, and it gave us as instructors an opportunity to encourage them to do so and examine how to create more space for that in the classroom. Our findings also called attention to internal and external influences that may impact the learning process and focus of cogen. It is a great reminder of the power of context in learning and how programmatic structures can influence the learning process. Considering these aspects of cogen can be helpful when designing classroom environments that maximize student learning and development.

References

Blumberg, P., & Everett, J. (2004). Achieving a campus consensus on learning-centered teaching: Process and outcomes. *To Improve the Academy*, *23,* 191-210.

Bondi, S. (2011). *Complicity with the neocolonial project in education: A deconstruction of student affairs preparation practices* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article= 1513&context=etd.

Bondi, S. (2013). Using cogenerative dialogues to improve teaching and learning. *About Campus, 18*(3), 2-8. doi: 10.1002/abc.21117

Foot, K. A. (2014). Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Exploring a theory to inform practice and research. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 24*(3), 329-347, doi: 10.1080/10911359.2013.831011

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Linder, C., & Jones, G. M. (2015, March). Exploring cohort dynamics through cogenerative dialogue. Research presented at the annual meeting of the American College Personnel Association. Tampa, FL.

MacQueen, K., McLellan, E., Kay, K., & Milstein, B. (1998). Codebook development for team-based qualitative analysis. *Cultural Anthropology Methods, 10*(2), 31–36.

Murphy, C., & Carlisle, K. (2008). Situating relational ontology and transformative activist stance within the 'everyday' practice of coteaching and cogenerative dialogue. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 3*, 493-506. doi: 0.1007/s11422-008-9124-y

Roth, W., & Lee, Y. (2007). "Vygotsky's neglected legacy": Cultural-historical activity theory. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(2), 186-232.

Roth, W., Tobin, K., & Zimmerman, A. (2002). Coteaching/cogenerative dialoguing: Learning environments research as classroom praxis. *Learning Environments Research, 5*, 1-29.

Scantlebury, K., & LaVan, S. (2006). Re-visioning cogenerative dialogues as feminist pedagogy/research. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 7*(2), 1-10. Retrieved http://www.qualitativeresearch.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/126/266.

Stith, I., & Roth, W. (2010). Teaching as mediation: The co-generative dialogue and ethical understandings. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*, 363-370.

Strange, C. C., & Banning, J. H. (2001). *Education by design: Creating campus learning environments that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Tobin, K., & Roth, W. (2006). *Teaching to learn: A view from the field.* Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

_____

GINNY JONES BOSS is an assistant professor in the Higher, Adult, Lifelong Education program at Michigan State University. Her teaching and research interests include: the scholarship of teaching and learning, scholarship engagement among higher ed/student affairs practitioners, partnership and critical discourse among higher ed/student affairs faculty and administrators, and graduate student learning and development.

CHRIS LINDER is a social justice educator and Assistant Professor in the College Student Affairs Administration program at the University of Georgia. She has taught undergraduate and graduate courses on equity and inclusion for over 10 years, including courses in women's studies and ethnic studies. Her research interests include campus environments, student activism, and the scholarship of teaching and learning.