

## The Ethics of Cogenerative Dialogue: A Cogenerative Dialogue

*Ian Stith, Kathryn Scantlebury, Sarah-Kate LaVan,  
Christopher Emdin, Ed Lehner & Mijung Kim*

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**Abstract:** In this cogenerative dialogue about cogenerative dialogue as qualitative research method and ethics, we move beyond our individual contributions in this special issue to begin a process that we hope will be carried further by our readers. We conclude that cogenerative dialoguing constitutes an excellent starting point towards enacting equity in practice.

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### 1. Cogenerative Dialoguing and Gender

Ian: After reading the responses to the article that Michael and I wrote, I am eager to explore these alternative interpretations. When I began thinking about the original article, I wanted to analyze the cogenerative dialogue as ethical research praxis, but it is apparent now that there are numerous perspectives I had not considered. To begin with, I want to address the issue of gender as part of the cogenerative dialogue, and then relate this to the question of exclusion as described by EMDIN and LEHNER (2006). Personally, I have not made any particularly deliberate attempt to conduct single-sex cogenerative dialogues, but there have been times that this has occurred. For example, the second cogenerative dialogue included in the article consisted of three girls, where as the first was split between six boys and six girls. As a male science teacher, I was conscious of the differences between girls and boys roles in my class, and it was an issue I struggled with regularly. [1]

Kate & Sarah-Kate: On reflecting on his practice, Ian raises the issue that the girls and boys had different roles in the class. Often, those roles are unconscious practices and one attribute of cogenerative dialogues is in foregrounding and discussing students' and teachers' unconscious practices. We noted the need for teachers and students to develop trust before meaningful cogenerative dialogues on sensitive topics could occur. Videotaping is a powerful means when reflecting upon practice and one approach to foregrounding gender issues in a class could be to review video with the students and ask for their input. Or to engage students as researchers and ask them to clip salient vignettes relating to gender. [2]

Chris & Ed: Responding to both Ian's and Kate's & Sarah-Kate's comments, we have seen that a researcher's commitment to participant beneficence can strongly inform practice. For example, if girls are disadvantaged in science classrooms and cogenerative dialogues, the researcher's dedication to all participants benefiting will force s/he to change classroom practices. Students too may raise such issues when reviewing videotape or reflecting on classroom practices. In fact, as Kate and Sarah Kate have mentioned, the use of videotape can bring to our awareness many unconscious actions. [3]

Ian: Looking back, it is clear that I missed an opportunity to strengthen my relationship with the female students and encourage the bond between them. The goal of the cogenerative dialogue is to incorporate the entire class into the group and it seems that separating by gender at some times is vital to this development. [4]

Kate & Sarah-Kate: Also, as girls are often the "outsiders within" and socialized into caring roles, they have different observations of social life than their male peers. A single-sex cogenerative dialogue can provide the space for girls to develop their voice, learn to justify their opinions with data and thus, speak out during class at times when they may previously been silent. [5]

Chris & Ed: Although Kate's & Sarah-Kate's comments rightly capture how cogenerative dialogue can simply recreate the socially disadvantaged position for girls in science, we also have seen exciting transformative change that girls have brought to the classroom. Often these girls change the practices, benefiting not only themselves but the entire class. Much of this comes down to the communal vision of the group and often girls have played vital roles in shaping these types of collective practices. If all participants, both teachers and students, are allied to enacting communal practices for the benefit of all, changes may occur that promote beneficence for the girls in the class. We don't want to sound too utopian; however, in our practice of cogenerative dialogues, we found that spaces were often created where high levels of emotional energy and solidarity lead to enactments of cosmopolitanism. [6]

## **2. Solidarity**

Ian: This goes along with the concerns voiced by EMDIN and LEHNER (2006), about how the research group may develop into a "gang" and separate itself physically and emotionally from the rest of the class. In my own experience, it is vital to include as many of the students from the class in the dialogue as possible over time. I think it would be worthwhile to investigate these issues even further by trying different models for the cogenerative dialogue. For example, could the cogenerative dialogue encourage the same solidarity among the students, if the group varied with each meeting? Perhaps, the researcher could have an all girls meeting every month and the other meeting could be coed. Would this still allow the female students the opportunity they need outside of the traditionally male dominated settings? In addition, how would the change of participation affect the sense of solidarity between the students involved with the research and those who are not? [7]

Chris & Ed: First, in terms of "gang formation," it may be good if teachers/researchers and students/researchers become so connected that a temporary "gang" is formed. In our experience, when practices are collectively transformed and group solidarity grows, then the cogenerative dialogue group may go through a highly emotionally connected phase. This can be a very good thing; however, researchers should be aware that the phase is temporary and the focus must always remain on participant beneficence. Additionally, researchers should always think about ways that the students can transport newly learned skills into other fields of their lives. Being closely connected to teachers in one class where a student performs well is not enough; the next level is when a student can successfully access the same strategies in another class- that is truly transformative! Secondly, in terms of single sex cogenerative dialogues, the concept seems rich with opportunity for both girls and boys to enact expanded student roles that may later be reproduced in the classroom. Although we have not used single sex cogenerative dialogues, they certainly seem like they could help address inequity, privilege and a host of other classroom related issues. [8]

Kate & Sarah-Kate: For us, the issue is why a teacher, and given enough time, students engage in cogenerative dialogues? And while a teacher may be interested in changing classroom practices to reduce or erase inequities, the inequities that are important to a teacher may not be those that students would foreground. [9]

Chris & Ed: In addressing why a teacher would engage in cogenerative dialogues, it is important to realize that the critical lens employed in looking at ethical issues are not necessarily utilized by classroom teachers in the initial stages of the practice. In many instances, the immediate goals are not even focused on reducing or erasing inequities; more often than not, the goal is more mundane. Frequently, the reason why teachers decide to engage in cogenerative dialogues is to address specific tactile goals in the classroom. For example, a teacher may be concerned that students exhibit signs of disinterest and are not paying attention in class. The teacher may then want to have a conversation to discuss this issue with students to co-generate a plan of action to address the issue the next time it appears in the class. As the cogenerative dialogues become more frequent, students begin to find their voice and their goals start to become more central in the discussion. This serves as a reason for continued student engagement as they find an arena where their voices are heard and valued. In our experience, when classroom practices are transformed by actions generated by both teachers and students, and group solidarity is high, the cogenerative dialogue group goes through a very associated stage that ushers in fresh perspectives when looking at the issues of ethics and inequities. [10]

### 3. Emotion, Mindfulness, and Ethics of Care

Mijung: Chris and Ed's comment on the teacher and students' emotional connection through co-generative dialogue is intriguing. The level of trust, the feeling of belongingness, and solidarity, which also was mentioned earlier by Ian, seem important for students (boys as well as girls) to find their and others' voices in the classrooms. This raises the question of in what circumstance we teachers can help students construct those emotional bonds in order for them to feel confidence in their voices as individuals and collectives and later to understand the importance of their participation and collaboration during the practice. This emphasizes not only giving the equal chance of participation to all students but also attending to the way of they participate, that is, the way they present their ideas and respond to and interact with each other. The interaction among students is a process of dynamic feedback, which greatly influences each individual and the whole class discussion. In this process, emotional connections (trust, belongingness, confidence, etc.) can emerge and built up or the other way around. This is implicit, but essential, for a long-term successful practice. It will require a mindful attentiveness from the teacher, which can be another challenge for us to practice co-generative dialogue. [11]

Kate & Sarah-Kate: There is a level of trust between teachers and students, but also *between* students. The establishment of this trust can become problematic when other issues impact the classroom. I am particularly thinking of sexual harassment that occurs between students. These types of interactions can quickly erode trust, a sense of belonging and emotional connections. Moreover, some student to student interaction occurs in classes but there is also the corridors, the buses and in the neighborhood. [12]

Ian: Throughout this discussion we have referred back to the notion of solidarity and equality in the classroom, but true equality really possible? Mijung raises the point that teachers' need to be mindful of their role in cogenerative dialogue praxis to encourage positive emotional connections, so does this imply a higher degree of responsibility for the teacher? I think it is important to keep in mind who has initiated the cogenerative dialogue and for what purpose. Ed and Chris mention how a teacher may initiate a cogenerative dialogue because of an apparent disinterest in the class and that, over time, the discussion may lead to topics of ethics or equality, is this different from a cogenerative dialogue begun with the intent of discussing these issues? In my mind there are still many questions concerning the actual process of the cogenerative dialogue, questions that may not appear until brought up during an actual cogenerative dialogue. The idea of solidarity is vital to the success of the cogenerative dialogue but the participants may have different concepts of what success is. It is, of course, the goal for all participants to agree on the actions of the whole and agree on what is important but can a group of people really ever totally agree on this? Ethically it is important to remember how much is really at stake when a researcher or teacher introduces the cogenerative dialogue into the class: students' education, teachers' jobs, students' relationships, and so on. As a researcher it is sometimes easy to ignore the possible harm the research can cause, but we cannot let this

happen. For example as a teacher in Philadelphia I was constantly reminded how unusual my approach was compared to the other teachers and some parents of the students. Many students resisted and withdrew from my attempt to reach out to them personally, and I took a risk with each handshake. This is not to say that I would change my approach now, or that we should not strive to include everyone as equals but more that there are many people not prepared and or unwilling to participate even towards their own benefit. In my own experience, I have not run into a student unwilling to talk to me or against the cogenerative dialogue in principle, but I should be aware that this could be a function of my own choice of students or simply timing. In the end we are responsible for what takes place in a class, as Michael and I have discussed, but practically responsibility and ethics are more complicated than that. We as researchers and educators need to be aware of how our intentions, methods, or styles may clash with others and that it is up to us to incorporate those concerns into our work. [13]

Kate & Sarah-Kate: As researchers we should be courageous but also mindful of the participants and enact an ethic of care, such that our research does not become exploitive and/or self-interested. What I continue to find problematic regarding cogenerative dialogues is the power differentials that exist between teachers and students. And the time it takes for a teacher to build the social capital and networks with students, parents, and administrators to fully utilize the potential of implementing cogenerative dialogues. [14]

Chris & Ed: Regarding Ian's point of teachers/researchers "intentions, methods, or styles" clashing with students, it is a point that can not be overemphasized. Simultaneously, we have also found that the practice of cogenerative dialogue can create a field where conversations can occur despite the dissimilarities of race, gender, age, status, or classroom role. Students and teachers often come away from this "conversation across difference" more emotionally connected, or at least, more mindful of the others' needs. [15]

Mijung: To bring forth change or new dialogue in educational settings, we as teacher and researcher often experience some degree of resistance in the presupposed, dominant discourses and disciplines of education. The resistance to change can arise from students, colleagues, and institutions. I am often astonished to see my own resistance even though I think myself open and willing to try new trials. Our resistance takes place because new changes often challenge our own comfort zone that we have already built in the existing discourse. The complexities of cogenerative dialogue can be related to this process of renouncing the familiarity of traditional teacher-student relationships and instructional disciplines as part of ethical dimension of pedagogy. The approach to ethics and responsibility through dialogue suggested by Ian and Michael is an innovative challenging discourse in current educational settings where top-down power relationships are predominant. It suggests reconstructing our pedagogical relationships on the basis of ethics. To live out ethics in educational/institutional structures, resistance or discomfort of cogenerative dialogue might be a necessary step in the beginning of changes that we hope to bring. In this regard, Ian's discussion on the difficulties/possibilities of the dialogue suggests us a way

of mindful reflection on our own encounters with cogenerative dialogue. As LEVINAS (1989) understands that we all are hostage to one another in our human relationships, we as teacher carry the burden of our ethical responsibility for students and institutions. So maybe these challenges of cogenerative dialogue are part of the inevitable burden of our being as teacher to bring ethical relationships in our classrooms. With this understanding, I will need to reflect on the challenges of ethics of pedagogy and cogenerative dialogue through my own practice. [16]

#### 4. Conclusion

Ian: In the end I think we can all agree that the cogenerative dialogue is an excellent starting point towards equity based research and teaching praxis. In addition there is much work to be done in regard to the ethical issues raised here and in our other works that will inevitably lead to further development. Our conversation here demonstrates just how difficult ethical research and teaching practices really are given the variety of experiences we as social beings have. Personally I am excited to incorporate the cogenerative dialogue into my regular research practices and develop its theoretical basis even further. [17]

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#### Authors

Ian STITH is doctoral fellow in the Pacific Center for Scientific and Technological Literacy at the University of Victoria.

Contact:

Ian Stith

MacLaurin Building A420, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC V8W 3N4, Canada

E-mail: [ianstith@uvic.ca](mailto:ianstith@uvic.ca)

Kathryn SCANTLEBURY is an Associate Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Delaware. Her research interests focus on gender issues in science education.

Contact:

Kathryn Scantlebury

University of Delaware, Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, Newark, DE, 19716, USA

E-mail: [kscantle@udel.edu](mailto:kscantle@udel.edu)

Sarah-Kate LaVAN is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Technology in Education at the Temple University. Her research interests focus on cogenerative dialogues in school and college classrooms.

Contact:

Sarah-Kate LaVan

Department of CITE, Science Education  
1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave  
Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA

E-mail: [layan1@temple.edu](mailto:layan1@temple.edu)

*Christopher EMDIN* is a full time doctoral student in Urban Education at The Graduate Center of City University of New York. He currently teaches Physics and Chemistry in the New York City Public Schools. His research interests include Science and Mathematics education and the emergence of student culture within those fields.

Contact:

Christopher Emdin

The Graduate Center  
City University of New York  
365 Fifth Avenue, Fourth Floor  
New York, NY 10016, USA

E-mail: [cemdin@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:cemdin@gc.cuny.edu)

*Ed LEHNER* is a New York City Teacher and a full-time student in Urban Education at the Graduate Center of City University of New York. He currently teaches in Brooklyn where his research considers how cogenerative dialogues can be used to improve academic achievement across the high school curriculum.

Contact:

Ed Lehner

The Graduate Center  
City University of New York  
365 Fifth Avenue, Fourth Floor  
New York, NY 10016, USA

E-mail: [Ed\\_Lehner1@yahoo.com](mailto:Ed_Lehner1@yahoo.com)

*Mijung KIM* is postdoctoral fellow at the University of Victoria. Her research focuses on the embodied nature of cognition.

Contact:

Mijung Kim

University of Victoria  
MacLaurin Building A548  
Victoria, BC, Canada

E-mail: [mjkim@uvic.ca](mailto:mjkim@uvic.ca)

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