

Toward A Theory for Understanding Teacher Agency:
Grounded Theory with Inclusion Co-Teachers

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Abstract

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The study seeks to contribute to a conversation on the nature of teaching and the work of teacher education by developing a theoretical model for understanding *teacher agency*. Grounded theory methodology was used to study teacher agency within a collaborative action research project conducted with 17 public school teachers and one administrator in a co-taught inclusion program in a large middle school in Seattle, WA. Five dimensions of a theoretical model for understanding teacher agency were identified. (i) The macrosociological context of teacher agency and (ii) context-specific constraints and opportunities provide a crucial lens through which to understand the choices of teachers. Within their macro- and micro-contexts, teachers find ways to (iii) exert agency within their perceived constraints, (iv) take advantage of ambiguities and contested spaces in education to exert agency, and (v) use available structures to exert agency. The theory for understanding teacher agency offers a structure for discussions of teacher agency in teacher education and other areas of the field of education.

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Dedication

For my mom, my first and best teacher.

For Lorrin, my partner in life and love.

And for my darling girls, Esmae and Rissi, the joys of my life.

Chapter One: Why Study *Teacher Agency*?

When examining the landscape of education, the discourses around education, and the challenges facing educators in the first decades of the 21st century, it is easy to presume that classroom teachers have little to no opportunity for agency. A cursory examination of educational news in recent years surfaces an array of issues that highlight the changing and challenging nature of teachers' work, with a reoccurring theme of mounting oversight. K-12 curriculum is increasingly defined by state and national standards and high-stakes standardized assessments.¹ Stricter teacher evaluation is on the national agenda (US Department of Education, 2011). American students are increasingly diverse, especially in our urban centers, with more immigrants, more poverty, more languages, and more recognized needs than a quarter century ago (Hussar & Bailey, 2014). American teachers, as a group, have less teaching experience than their peers a decade ago, and, with over 80% of the teaching force being white and female compared to a student population that is over 50% students of color and over 20% in poverty (Feistritzer, 2011; Kena et al., 2014). Teachers frequently have a different cultural reference than their students. State education budgets are anemic (Leachman & Mai, 2014), and public school educators across the nation are struggling to adjust to shrinking budgets while the pressure to do more with less is constant.

In light of these constraints, it may appear that a study on *teacher agency* is a naïve choice, or perhaps willful blindness on the part of the researcher to the challenges and trials facing teachers and the teaching profession in 2015. Yet I argue that it is precisely in these times of challenge that we need to better understand how teachers can and do exert their agency in

¹ E.g. Common Core State Standards and the increase in standardized testing since the passage of No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001.

their classrooms, schools, communities, and profession, for without this understanding, we have an incomplete conception of the profession of teaching. For those of us engaged in teacher education, the preparation of the next generation of teachers should include explicit discussions of teacher agency. Novice teachers are particularly in need of support, as more than half of them are predicted to leave the profession in their first five years (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2007). In order to address issues of severe attrition in our profession, our young teachers need to understand the context of teacher agency, while developing tools to recognize their own capacity for agency as educators.

This chapter will explore the tensions inherent in the study of teacher agency and the need to better understand the structural realities that define, limit, frame, constrain, and enable teacher practice. The need for a framework to understand teacher agency is explored, concluding with a description of the contributions of this study to understandings of teacher agency.

Tensions in the Study of Teacher Agency

What is *teacher agency*? While a lengthier exploration of the concept “agency” will be undertaken in Chapter Four, for current purposes, *teacher agency* can be understood as the capacity of a teacher to make an impact or exert power. As an area of research, teacher agency has not frequently been studied exclusively or at length.² However, while not always named as examples of “teacher agency,” reflective teaching (e.g. Boody, 2008; Clarke, 2006; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), teacher action within constraints (Baker, 2006; Valencia, Martin, Place, &

² A Google Scholar search in August 2014 using the term “teacher agency” revealed 2,330 hits. For comparison purposes, “reflective teaching” had 1,020,000 hits, “teacher thinking” had 14,000 hits, “teacher action” had 6,540 hits, and “pedagogical reasoning” had 2,530 hits. “Teachers as agents” returned 1,980 hits.

Grossman, 2009; E. V. S. Walker, 1993), and pedagogical reasoning (e.g. Monte-Sano, 2011) can be found in a wide variety educational and historical literatures. Scholars interested in teacher agency need to read a wide variety of literature looking for characterizations and descriptions of teachers as agents (Anderson, 2010).

Without a robust literature that examines teacher agency as a distinct phenomenon, however, the conceptualization of teacher agency is inconsistent in the existing research. My own understanding of teacher agency evolved significantly through the course of this research, as I negotiated the range of ways *teacher agency* is discussed in educational research with my own emerging grounded theory. Three distinct tensions in how teacher agency is conceptualized eventually solidified for me, allowing me to articulate differences in how I understand teacher agency and how agency is sometimes characterized in educational literature. While these three tensions will be addressed further during the discussion of this study in chapter six, they also serve to frame how *teacher agency* is understood in this dissertation.

First, teacher agency is sometimes characterized as something “special,” the province of particularly resourceful or gifted teachers (e.g. Anderson, 2010; Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010). Similarly, agency often appears to be conceptualized as only a “positive” phenomenon, as if all teacher agency is beneficial and has a positive impact (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012).³ Third, teacher agency is sometimes discussed as occurring despite the context of teaching, either as removed from the context or a response in resistance to the context (e.g. Flessner, Miller, Patrizio, & Horwitz, 2012). The following sections will explore each of these three tensions in more depth, and articulate how this study approaches these tensions.

³ (e.g. Castro et al., 2010)

Teacher agency as a “special” phenomenon? Anderson (2010), in her review of the literature on teacher agency, identifies a set of literature that characterizes teacher agency as something “special.” She writes that this literature focuses on “offering narrative accounts of teachers’ against-the-grain practices and rooting those practices in teachers’ principled critiques of the material, pedagogical, professional, and/or ideological realities they encounter in the workplace” (p. 542). While these examples are powerful examples of agency, an exclusive focus on the “special” can obscure the powerful yet mundane choices that every teacher makes, every day. Case study research that focuses on “unique” cases are particularly prone to characterizing teacher agency as something above the ordinary. For example, Anderson (2010) shares the experiences of Liz, whose story has been chosen for “its uniqueness, particularly in the way she drew from a mix of school-based and beyond-school ties to secure additional resources for students, hold colleagues accountable, accumulate political capital, and transform conditions for teaching and learning at her school” (p. 548). While this is an extraordinary story, characterizing teacher agency as only something extraordinary, and only accessed by extraordinary teachers, limits the usefulness of the concept of teacher agency.

In addition, characterizations of agency as extraordinary action imply that teacher agency is exclusively limited to *action*, which fails to recognize that non-action can be a powerful choice. What a teacher chooses *not* to do is nearly as significant as what s/he chooses to do,⁴ and to look only at specific actions as examples of agency is to examine only a cross-section of teacher exertions of power. Furthermore, highlighting “action” as agency can distort the relationship between discourse and agency, and minimize the role that language plays in

⁴ See Eisner (1979) for a discussion of the significance of non-action, or the *explicit*, *implicit*, and *null curriculum* in the context of curriculum.

impacting our world.⁵ Given these concerns, reframing teacher agency as the power to “impact” rather than “act” would allow for non-action and discourse to be included in conceptualizations of teacher agency.

An “exceptional action” narrative of teacher agency can be particularly harmful for novice or preservice teachers, whose insecurities and lack of experience can keep them from seeing themselves in tales of extraordinary educators making identifiable change. The implication that teacher agency is something “special” that special teachers “do,” can make agency appear to be an intimidating and perhaps unreachable goal, something that is reserved for the distant future when they have their own classrooms (and are no longer student teachers) or when they have a few years of teaching experience, if ever. The “exceptional” narrative does not encourage novice teachers to recognize the power inherent in every interaction between teacher and students, student and curriculum, teacher and community, for example, or provide them with the tools to examine their own choices as educators.

Therefore, this study approaches the concept of teacher agency more broadly, looking beyond exceptional acts of agency, and characterizing agency as the capacity to *impact* rather than the capacity to *act*. While “special” acts of agency will not be ignored in the literature or the data, teacher agency is understood to encompass non-action and discourse, as well as the daily and mundane choices that proliferate teacher practice.

Teacher agency as a “positive” phenomenon? Priestley et al. (2012) raise a related concern of *agency* appearing in the literature in only “positive”⁶ contexts. They particularly

⁵ A lengthier exploration of the relationship between language and agency can be found in chapter two.

critique policy that discusses teacher agency in light of “successful” educational reform, arguing that “such policy can tend to construe agency as solely a positive capacity—as a factor in the ‘successful’ implementation of policy—whereas one might legitimately take the view that agency could equally well be exercised for ‘non-beneficial’ purposes” (p. 192). Teachers can choose to exert their power in an infinite number of ways, including to deliberately maintain the status quo, or to act in ways that might disrupt a stated agenda of educational reform.

Yet the literature on teacher agency sometimes leaves out the negative, or the choices of teachers that might impede intended “progress.”⁷ In Castro et al.'s (2010) examination of resiliency strategies among new teachers, for example, their findings include the resiliency strategies of “help-seeking,” “problem-solving,” “managing difficult relationships,” and “seeking rejuvenation and renewal.” All of these strategies are characterized as positive moves to survive as new teachers in high-needs areas, with these teachers “demonstrate[ing] agency in the process of overcoming adversity” (p. 622). Not highlighted were other potential resiliency strategies such as “impersonalizing work, students, and colleagues,” “transferring blame,” “becoming callused to the challenges of teaching,” or “becoming desensitized to students’ circumstances.”⁸ The researchers have made a (deliberate or inadvertent) choice to only highlight strategies that promote a narrative of teacher agency as a positive force.

⁶ “Positive agency” is defined in this context as action that contributes towards a desired outcome.

⁷ “Progress” as defined by the researcher, policy-maker, funder, or administration, for example

⁸ These are my hypothetical “negative” strategies, and were not identified by the study.

If *teacher agency* is understood as the capacity to make an impact or exert power, then agency is neither “positive” nor “negative.” Although the trend in the literature is to omit examples of agency that appear to impede “progress” as defined by the researcher, the positive/negative distinction itself is actually not relevant to developing a framework for understanding how teachers exert agency. Priestley et al. (2012) argue that the material question in studies of agency should be “agency for what?” (p. 210-211), as it is the *intention* for the exertion of power that is of particular import. In this dissertation study, the focus is on theorizing how teachers fulfill their intentions within their professional contexts. *Evaluation* (making a value judgment of what is “positive” and what is “negative”) in regards to the intentions and choices of the teachers is not relevant to the development of a theory for understanding teacher agency.

Teacher agency “despite” the context? A third tension in the study of teacher agency is the tendency of some literature to present teacher agency as existing *despite* or as *resistance* to the social conditions of schooling. As illustration of this trend in the literature, Michie (2012), as the editor of the book *Agency through Teacher Education*, introduces a section on “contextualized activism” with this language: “Teachers can, and do, resist the pressure to conform ... but their activism and work as change agents are sometimes met with harsh rebukes” (p. 105). Not only does this language imply that teachers who exert agency are “special,” and their agency is exerted for “positive” change, but it also implies that agency is primarily conceived as *resistance* to the context.

This narrative on teacher agency is problematic given a sociological understanding of the relationship between schools and society. If schools and society are understood to have a symbiotic, dynamic, and dialectic relationship as Labaree (1997) argues, teacher agency is

therefore exerted *within* the context of schooling, not *despite* the context. While resistance to the status quo is a critical concept in the study of agency, resistance is a response to specific contextual circumstances, and avenues of resistance are informed by the context. Therefore, the social conditions of teaching and schooling should play a critical role in any examination of agency, and not be discussed only as a limiting factor that teacher agents struggle to rise above. Treating agency as something that happens *despite* the context belittles the significance of the context, and blurs our understanding of how teacher choices are both limited and enabled by their contexts.

A more nuanced discussion about the context of teaching and learning within discussions of teacher agency is significant when considering the preparation of novice teachers. Without a well-developed understanding of the relationship between context and agency, novice teachers may be unprepared to be resilient and adaptable to the specifics of their teaching contexts. If agency is consistently characterized as resistance, then choices or actions that use the structures of the context to enable power can be missed or ignored as powerful possibilities for agency. For example, an exclusive focus on a “resistance” narrative may lead novice teachers to consider only how to resist the pressures placed on them by their administrators, instead of considering how building a strong relationship with their administration might result in powerful opportunities to impact school policy. In addition, if the context of teaching is consistently characterized as something that teachers have to “get past,” teachers who are limited by their context (as all teachers arguably are) have in a sense “failed” in their exertions of agency. Characterization of agency as something that happens “despite” the context can leave preservice teachers feeling hopeless and disempowered. Contrary to expectation, a deeper understanding of

the limits to teacher power can be empowering for novice teachers, as it allows discussions of teacher agency to feel more grounded in reality.

This study takes the stance that any discussion of teacher agency must be rooted in discussions of the general and specific context of teaching, and that agency happens *within* a context, not *despite* a context. In addition, agency is not something “special” that only extraordinary teachers enact, and it is not necessarily always exerted for “positive” change. With these clarifications on the perspective on teacher agency advanced by this dissertation, the next section will articulate how this study will contribute to the study of teacher agency, given the social context of teaching and teacher education.

Toward a Theory for Understanding Teacher Agency (Contributions of the Study)

Matthew Crawford (2009), in his book *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, explores the nature of what Aristotle calls “stochastic art.” *Stochastic* is an adjective that describes things characterized by conjecture or random variables, and *art* is craft or craftsmanship. Thus, a *stochastic art* can be interpreted as a craft that requires conjecture and dealings with random variables. Random variables necessitate agenic choices by each individual artist, as no formula or method can predict or fully guide the work. Each artist must constantly make choices based on his or her values, beliefs, depth of understanding, context, and more. In his writing, Crawford uses mechanical work and medicine as examples of stochastic arts, yet his descriptions resonate deeply for me as an educator. Teaching, I would argue, is a stochastic art, a craft of conjecture, with acts of agency fundamental to practice.

Masters of stochastic arts, Crawford (2009) says, deal with failure every day, because they work with things that “are *not of their own making*, and are therefore never known in a comprehensive or absolute way,” and this experience “tempers the conceit of mastery”

(emphasis in original, p. 81). Teachers work with other humans, each one unique in his or her history, personality, culture, circumstances, and much more. No matter how much experience a teacher has, every child is different, every context is different (and changes moment to moment), and therefore to teach requires conjecture, daily and mundane acts of agency.

Yet teaching is frequently not treated as a craft, let alone a stochastic craft, but as a technical process that can be replicated and perfected (H. Giroux, 1988; H. A. Giroux & McLaren, 1986).⁹ Of particular concern is “the devaluation of critical, intellectual work on the part of teachers and students for the primacy of practical considerations” (H. Giroux, p. 123). Rarely in public discourse on educational issues is the work of teaching treated as an intellectual craft.¹⁰ Good teaching is not just about executing “best practices” as defined by experts, but a process of evaluating the learning challenges of particular students in a particular moment, matching a “best practice” with a specific learning goal, evaluating the context of the learning environment, deciding which of dozens of conflicting pedagogical intentions to prioritize, and thousands of other intellectual puzzles.

For novice teachers, whose conceptions of teaching are frequently firmly grounded in popular discourses, this mismatch between common discourses and the realities of teaching blurs their understanding of what it means to teach, and poses a serious problem of practice for teacher educators (Shulman, 1986; Strahan, 1989). I propose that a better understanding of the choices teachers make, specifically how teachers navigate structural contexts and exert their agency, will help illuminate the nature of teaching, particularly critical in teacher education contexts. A

⁹ See “Teacher Evaluation Dispute Echoes Beyond Chicago” (2012) or Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox (2006)

¹⁰ See “Teacher Evaluation Dispute Echoes Beyond Chicago” (2012)

theory for understanding teacher agency can provide a structure for discussions on the nature of teaching, and help novice teachers reflect on the mundane and powerful acts of agency that are inherent in the practice of teaching.

Through this study, I seek to develop a theoretical model for understanding teacher agency that helps scholars, teacher educators, and teachers themselves understand the spaces and avenues for teacher empowerment. Teaching is deeply complex work, and examining this phenomenon through the lens of choice and agency will help to highlight that there is power within this work, despite and because of the challenges inherent to the practice of teaching. Teachers are empowered (and constrained) to act, as every human is, and building a theory of teacher agency will contribute to speaking against discourses of derision (Parker, 2011) that characterize teachers as automatons who execute curriculum dictated to them by local, state, and federal policy (H. Giroux, 1988; H. A. Giroux & McLaren, 1986). In addition, a theory for understanding teacher agency should not only push back against discourses of derision, but be a resource for teacher educators who are responsible for (re-)educating novice teachers about the nature of the profession they have chosen to enter.

Genesis of the study and problem statement. I entered the development stage of this research study with one primary research question: *How do teachers exert agency within practical contexts and constraints?* In order to collect data for this question, I needed access to a practical context, with real teachers engaged in real work. An opportunity was presented to me in October 2012, to facilitate the self-study project of a group of 17 teachers in a middle school co-taught inclusion program.¹¹ Throughout the eight months in which I collaborated with this group of teachers to develop six action research projects studying their co-taught inclusion program, I

¹¹ More details on the development of this study can be found in Chapter 3.

used the grounded theory research process to build a theory of teacher agency. As my theory emerged, I was able to test its components through my continuing work with these educators. In addition, my work as a teacher educator allowed me to incorporate this emerging theory into social foundations coursework for novice teachers, an important audience that helped me refine the theory.

Neither the teacher participants nor the site of this research were chosen for their exceptionality. The teachers and co-researchers of this study are passionate, committed, overwhelmed, frustrated, and intelligent, but they are not exceptional. Teachers everywhere negotiate their agency daily, in an infinite number of contexts. While the specific struggles, questions, and discourse of the teachers would be different depending on the context, teacher agency can be found anywhere and everywhere.

The narrative that characterizes teacher agency as exceptional and positive action which is employed to resist oppressive structures is a companion to a broader discourse of derision that belittles the work of public schools and public school educators (Parker, 2011). For if only a few exceptional teachers are exerting agency, this implies that the remainder and the bulk of practicing public school teachers lack agency or fail to exert agency. As a practicing teacher, as a teacher educator who is regularly in classrooms with novice and experienced teachers, and as a researcher working closely with practicing teachers, I have never been able to resolve the incongruity of the discourse of derision with the reality of the work being done in our public schools. This dissertation study seeks to directly address this incongruity, to build a theory for understanding teacher agency through the study of teacher agency in a practical context.

Preview of the Dissertation

The writing of this dissertation has been structured with the intention of exploring the need for and the emergence of a theory for understanding teacher agency. This includes the conceptual and methodological grounding, the participatory action research data and findings at the heart of the study, and the significance of this work to teacher education. Chapter two reviews the literature on the social context of teaching and teacher education, considering the need for a deeper understanding of *teacher agency* within this literature. Chapter three will describe the methodological stance of this study, the development of the participatory action research project, and the methods of data collection and analysis. With this conceptual and methodological foundation, the theory for understanding teacher agency that emerged from this study will be introduced through theoretical and historical literature in chapter four. Chapter five will share the findings from the empirical research study, using the theory for understanding teacher agency as an analytical frame to investigate the findings. The discussion of these findings and their significance to teacher education are explored in chapter six. Chapter six ends with areas for future study.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature on the Social Context of Teaching and Teacher Education

Liston and Zeichner (1991) claim that, “teaching is a messy affair, and learning to teach seems even messier” (p. 60). As a teacher educator, the desire to find a tidier, or at least less messy, way to facilitate learning to teach has guided much of my scholarship and research. My own interest in teacher agency stems in large part from my work with novice teachers in the area of social foundations of education, as I struggled with my students to understand why the literature they encountered in social foundations courses often felt too distant from their daily work as teachers, or made some students feel disempowered and overwhelmed. The concept of *teacher agency* emerged as a salient concept for me concurrently as a scholar and as a teacher educator, as a necessary counterpart to studies in the social foundations of education.

As there is not yet a robust body of literature on teacher agency as a distinct phenomenon, the review of the literature for this dissertation must take a step back, and examine the existing literature from a different lens. Because of the salience of teacher agency to literature on the social context of teaching and teacher education, this chapter undertakes to review this body of literature, while highlighting a need for more scholarship on teacher agency. The chapter is organized around topics that commonly appear on syllabi for social foundations courses (Beadie, 1996), reviewing literature with which I have personally instructed. Student reactions to these texts have helped me clarify how a concurrent analysis of teacher agency is beneficial to novice teachers, and my analysis here seeks to communicate this understanding. I begin with a review of literature on the purpose of public education, and then move to an examination of literature on the sociopolitical context of teaching, the nature of teaching, and current debates in

teacher education. Each section will review the significant literature while highlighting the importance of teacher agency to the analysis.

The Variety of Purposes for Public Education

What is the purpose of schooling? This deeply philosophical question is pertinent precisely because there is no easy answer. Are schools to impart a society's knowledge and values to the young? Should schools help youth realize their potential? Or should school prepare youth for the responsibilities of adulthood, including participation in our democracy and effective contribution to our economy? Labaree (1997) broadly categorizes these different purposes into three groups: (1) democratic citizenship, (2) social efficiency, and (3) social mobility, yet each of these categories of purpose can be and has been interpreted differently by individuals in education and educational policy.

For example, *democratic citizenship* refers to the belief that our schools should help us both maintain and improve our democracy. Civic and democratic education scholars like Parker (2003), however, describe a scope of interpretations for democratic education. Traditional citizenship education advocates believe that there is a canon of civic knowledge that is the responsibility of schools to impart, including the workings of the political system and processes and developing citizens who hold dear the values of American democracy. Progressive citizenship education advocates, in contrast, do not dismiss the need for a knowledge base, but prefer to stress the *doing* of democracy, which they envision as participatory democracy with direct forms of citizen action. The purpose of schools then is to provide opportunities for students to practice participatory democracy rather than to simply be suppliers of knowledge. (Parker, 2003)

While the traditional civic educators and progressive civic educators already envision the purpose of education differently, there are even more extreme views that could also claim to believe in a democratic citizenship purpose of schooling. For example, the Texas Republican Party platform of 2012 included the statement that, “We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (values clarification), critical thinking skills and similar programs ... which focus on behavior modification and have the purpose of challenging the student’s fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority” (as cited in Strauss, 2012). Such a position could be interpreted through a democratic citizenship perspective, arguing that the school’s role is to support the transmission of home knowledge to the young, with the strength of our nation dependent on this successful transmission.

On arguably the opposite extreme is a belief that it is the role of education to help us *realize* our democracy (Parker, 2003). Inherent in the belief that education is integral to our expression of democracy is a conception that the society and government we have now is as yet insufficient, and that the role of education is to teach students how to be agents of change.

This entire spectrum of beliefs about education, from schools as the reproducers of home knowledge to schools as producers of agents of change, only begins to describe one of the three categories of purposes that Labaree (1997) has identified, *democratic citizenship*. The other two categories of purposes, *social efficiency* and *social mobility*, have historically also been interpreted and enacted very differently.

Social efficiency broadly speaks to the belief that the role of schools is to support our society economically, or to create more efficiency in the production of our workforce. Kantor (1982) chronicles the successful rise of vocationalism in public education around the turn of the 20th century, and argues that this rise was due to support from a diversity of voices, including

business leaders, organized labor, and social activists. These three groups all advocated for more vocational education in schools, yet from three very different perspectives. American business leaders believed that schools should fulfill the need for specialized skill training and socialize students to “adapt more readily to the nature of industrial work” (Kantor, p. 27). Organized labor support for vocationalism was more conflicted, but Kantor suggests that a combination of a desire to have a voice in changing what they believed was previously irrelevant curriculum for working class students and a desire to ensure their children’s economic future led to their position supporting vocationalism. Social activists, on the other hand, supported vocational education because they believed this type of education had the potential to help workers “see the full dimensions of their labor, and thereby restore meaning and dignity to work that had been fractured and deskilled” (Kantor, p. 29). Within these three perspectives, therefore, are the beliefs that schools should prepare workers for our economy, school activities should be relevant to the working future of students, and that schools should help future workers understand the broader context and meaning of their individualized labor.

While these were debates at the turn of the 20th century, the social efficiency purpose of education is alive and well in 21st century schools. Briefly, modern examples include advocates for increasing students’ technological versatility in this digital age, as well as people like Gerber (2012), who claim that liberal arts curriculum is outdated, deficient, and should be replaced by programs emphasizing entrepreneurship in the curriculum. With a variety of rationales supporting a diversity of opinions, schools are regularly discussed as a means for supporting our economy and preparing the workers in our society.

Labaree's (1997) final category, *social mobility*, refers to the belief that schooling should result in a personal benefit for students, particularly a rise in individual status. Labaree separates

this purpose from the previous two due to this vision of education as a private good compared to a public good: education should benefit private individuals, not just be good for society or the nation as a whole.

The impact of a belief that public schools exist to serve a private good directly impacts how the work of teachers is conceptualized. Teachers are viewed as responsible to the consumers, who are the students and the families of the students, and not primarily responsible to the state or broader society. This responsibility leads to an expectation that choices in school curriculum should stem from what is most needed by the individual, not what might benefit the common good. This emphasis on individualism also results in a more competitive view of schools, for if school is seen as a private commodity, then the consumer who gets the most exclusive, the “best” schooling, has the most advantages. The rise of viewing education as a private good has led to a long history of concerns about credentializing and competitiveness among students (Dewey, 1915/2008; Labaree, 1997).

Social mobility beliefs, however, also include advocates who believe strongly that education should be a way out of poverty for students who come from economically disadvantaged homes. Education has long been viewed as an important means for altering one’s circumstances and social class in the United States (Baker, 2006; Brumberg, 1986; Kantor, 1982; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008), and this hope is often framed in a very individualist manner, characterizing education as a private good. Equal educational access, or a chance to compete based on merit, is often a component of arguments for social mobility (Labaree, 2010).

While considering how conflicting purposes of education have shaped public schools and education policy, the existence and history of special education systems is a provocative and

informative example. Powell's (2011) comparison of special education systems in Germany and the United States helps to highlight how societal values shape educational policy. Powell reminds us that both “ideologies of merit and equality guided interests” (p. 235) in the development of special education policy, as the inception of both countries’ special education systems coincided with compulsory education. Using Labaree’s frame of *democratic citizenship*, *social efficiency*, and *social mobility*, the history of special education systems can be traced to all three purposes of education. Compulsory education laws have deep roots in democratic citizenship arguments, with a desire to capture all children, particularly in the immigrant-rich United States, during their impressionable, educable years, and impart the morals, language, and knowledge of the dominant culture (Kaestle, 1983). The special education systems in both Germany and the United States also trace their develop to social efficiency philosophy, with the desire for an ordered and efficient organization of societal groups resulted in elaborate classification systems that sorted and categorized the in/educable, the ab/normal, and the dis/abled (Powell, 2011). Laws like the USA’s Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, however, also frame special education as necessary in order to increase educational access, a typical social mobility argument which emphasizes the right to equal access rather equal outcomes (Labaree, 2010). From this array of conflicting purposes, we can trace the history of the development of special education systems.

Given this vast spectrum of possible interpretations of the purpose of public education, the role of human agency and individual choice is highly relevant. The public school is contested ground, as this diversity in beliefs about the purpose of education demonstrates, and the work of teachers naturally and frequently becomes the focus of conflict. For novice teachers, an introduction to this vast array of interpretations and conflicts over the purpose of their work can

be intimidating and overwhelming, particularly without tools to understand their own role in the interpretation of the purpose of education.

While not all of these different beliefs about school are incompatible, and in fact believing in multiple purposes of schooling tends to be our natural mode, the work of teaching inherently requires teachers to be adept at negotiating a vast number of conflicting visions of what their work should be. The pressures and challenges of society, the context within which teaching occurs, fundamentally impact the work of teaching. In addition, a confusion of purpose leads to confusion in policy, or policies that often contradict each other and compete for the attention of the teacher. The following section explores the sociopolitical context of teaching, including the impact of policy on the work of teachers.

The Sociopolitical Context of Teaching

A common ideal of teaching, held by many teachers as well as non-educators, is that a teacher is in full control of what happens within the classroom. Teachers can just shut the door, metaphorically and practically shutting out other voices and conflicting perspectives on how to teach. However, this image of total control and agency for American teachers is a fallacy.¹²

In opposition to discourses that blame schools and teachers for inequity of outcomes among different American student populations, Berliner (2013) argues that underlying societal issues are at the root of different levels of educational achievement in public schools. He points out that analysis of the variance in standardized test scores reveals that schools account for only 20% of the variance, “and teachers are only part of that constellation of variables associated with ‘school’” (Berliner, 2013). Out of school factors account for the majority of variance in

¹² And arguably a false ideal, as teaching should be responsive to the community and the context of teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2004, among others).

educational achievement, factors such as family income, the neighborhood's sense of collective efficacy, violence rate, and average income, medical and dental care (availability and use), level of food insecurity, number of moves a family makes, languages spoken at home, and others.

Inequity in the distribution of resources across school districts across the US is well documented, another factor that classroom teachers are generally unable to influence. Kozol (2005) details that in New York City, schools spent \$11,700 per pupil in 2005, while the Long Island town of Manhasset spent over \$22,000. The median teacher pay in New York City in 2002-2003 was \$53,000, yet \$87,000 in Manhasset, and over \$97,000 in Scarsdale, NY (Kozol, p. 10). This pattern of disparity can be found in urban areas all over the United States (Kozol). Along side these inter-district resource differences, disparities within a single district can also be observed.¹³

In addition to these social and economic realities, Cuban (1993) points out that “the basic decisions directly affecting instruction ... for decades have been made by authorities outside the classroom” (p. 263), including which students and how many of them are in the classroom, how long a school day and class period are, how much planning time a teacher has, the grade, subject, and courses the teacher is teaching, and the standardized tests given. Policy decisions made at every institutional level, from school-based policy, district policy, state policy, to national policy, all shape the context of a teacher's working environment.

However, because schools are such contested grounds, the philosophies behind these different levels of policy are rarely consistent. A national policy of standardized testing can be based in the belief that the purpose of schooling is knowledge acquisition, and therefore tests

¹³ See Rosenthal (2012) for an examination of how Parent Teacher Association (PTA) fundraising creates dramatic disparities within the Seattle School District.

should assess students on their acquisition of knowledge. Yet this might directly conflict with a school level belief in experiential learning, or perhaps a district focus on developing problem solving entrepreneurs. Teachers not only cannot shut out these policies, but also must figure out how to negotiate the contradictions within them.

Cuban (1993) describes teachers as having “situationally constrained choice,” that their authority in a classroom is constrained by the context and policies that they may have little control over, but that within those constraints, they still have the power to make choices over how they teach. Ahearn (2001) reminds us that the existence of conflicting ideas or contradicting ideologies provides space for agency, as there are no obvious answers directing or controlling an individual’s choices. Situationally constrained agency is fundamental to teaching in a context rife with contradictory policies, yet it presents another layer of complexity to the profession of teaching. If individual teachers have agency (even if it is situationally constrained), then the stance and personal motivations of individual teachers, shaped by the society in which they live, have a powerful impact on the work they do with students.

Grumet (1988) argues that the experience and process of reproduction is fundamental to human lives (p. 4), and that this elemental desire to reproduce ourselves profoundly shapes our educational institutions and the teachers who are the institution. This overriding pressure toward reproduction, despite discourses of change within education, is a major challenge to educational reform efforts (Cuban, 1993; Kennedy, 2005). While teachers have and continue to play a crucial role in societal and school change, teachers have also worked actively and consciously to reproduce and maintain the status quo. Many historians of education have described reproduction as fundamental to the American conception of the role of teachers, from the earliest colonial schools through today. Teachers were and are expected to teach and reinforce social mores, the

importance and value of American democracy, socially acceptable ways of speaking and acting, and in ways large and small, support and maintain the dominant perception of what American society ought to be (Brumberg, 1986; Kaestle, 1983; Pak, 2002; Tyack, 1974; Weiler, 1998).

Nieto (2010) uses a four-level schema to describe the sociopolitical context of education, asserting that the individual, collective, institutional, and ideological levels of the sociopolitical context are distinct in their impact on the experience of education. Nieto argues that individual teacher perspectives, attitudes, and choices in their professional work can only partially explain the experience of students, but we must also consider the impact of collective attitudes and the institutional policies on education in the US. In addition, ideologies that exist at a societal level, such as veneration of competition, also contribute in fundamental ways to American education. Individual teachers are neither the cause of all problems in US education, nor should they be considered the only avenue for effective educational reform.

Arguably, the significance of the context for teachers and teaching is nearly impossible to overstate, and therefore active negotiation of the context is fundamental to the work of teaching. Therefore, while studying the sociopolitical context of education, novice teachers would benefit from direct discussions of teacher agency and ways to help them understand how teachers work daily to negotiate their context. A closer look at the nature of teaching also highlights the ways in which teachers inherently negotiate conflicting purposes and the sociopolitical context in order to teach.

The Nature of Teaching

Kennedy (2005), in researching how teachers think about their work in order to understand why reform ideals are frequently not assimilated by teachers, offers some important insights into the nature of teaching. She discovered a variety of teacher concerns that impacted

her participants' instructional choices, highlighting the deep complexity that is inescapable to the work of teaching. For example, Kennedy describes that a singular teacher move rarely has a singular intention. In other words, every action by a teacher is intended to accomplish multiple things. A summarizing statement might be intended to drive a content point home, maintain the lesson momentum, model note taking, and maintain the teacher's authority in the classroom. These multiple intentions and areas of concern interact in different ways depending on the teacher and the context (what is prioritized differs for different teachers at different moments, and emotions around these intentions factor into prioritization). Because these different intentions can conflict with each other (clarifying a content issue could conflict with ending a lesson by the time the bell rings), teachers must constantly make trade-offs and compromise with competing intentions.

Labaree (2004) argues that teaching is an extremely complex job that appears easy to those outside of the profession. He identifies five facets of the nature of teaching that make the work very challenging, what he calls the problems of client cooperation, compulsory clientele, emotional management, structural isolation, and chronic uncertainty about the effectiveness of teaching. Being successful at teaching is dependent on the cooperation and the success of students who are required to gain a certain level of education (client cooperation and compulsory clientele), and teachers are required to build emotional relationships with students while balancing a professional relationship (emotional management). Teachers also are expected to work in isolation, as single adults interacting with groups of 25-40 children (structural isolation). This culture of isolation leads to the creation of "a norm against asking one another for help: to do so admits of failure" (Liston & Zeichner, 1991, p. 97) and a working environment where teachers "have peers but no colleagues" (as cited in Liston & Zeichner, p. 97). Finally, teachers

must constantly live with the reality that there are no clear findings regarding effective teaching practices because of the complex nature of teaching.

Teaching is irreducibly complex, Labaree (2004) argues, because there are an immense numbers of variables at play in the education of every child. This means that effective teaching is completely dependent on the context of learning, or as Labaree states,

It depends on the subject, the grade level, and the community; on the class, race, gender, and culture of the students; on the pedagogical skills, academic knowledge, personality, and mood of the teacher; on the time of day, day of the week, season, and barometric pressure; on the content of the students' last meal and the state of their parents' marriage; on the culture and the structure of the school; on the available curriculum materials, the teacher they had last year, and their prospects for getting a job when they graduate, and so on. (p. 53-54)

Measuring what is effective in teaching poses inescapable challenges, and sometimes the impact of good teaching cannot be judged until many years later (did the child grow up to be a "successful" adult? How do we measure "success"?). Teachers operate daily with the emotional challenges of uncertainty regarding their effectiveness, but have to consistently make micro and macro decisions regarding the education of their students despite the uncertainty. Novice teachers being introduced to the profession would benefit from direct support to help them understand their agency within their chosen profession.

Despite the complexity of teaching, Labaree (2004) asserts that this work looks simple for those observing the profession. Nearly everyone critiquing the work of teachers has had the opportunity to observe multiple teachers at length during his or her own educational experience. In addition, Labaree argues that because teachers teach "things that average adults know" (p. 58)

and are not considered experts in their discipline (they may teach science, math, and reading, but they are usually not scientists, mathematicians, or linguists), teachers do not receive the respect that other professionals engender. As a concluding argument to his claim that teaching looks easy to non-teachers, Labaree points out that teachers strive to give away their knowledge for free, to make themselves obsolete. As he says, “teachers demystify their own expertise and thus willingly abandon the source of power over the client that other professions guard so jealously. The best teachers are the ones who make learning look the easiest, who make the learner feel smart rather than working to impress the learner with how smart the teacher is” (p. 61). Despite the “irreducible complexity” of teaching, it is a profession that looks easy (Labaree). The fundamental nature of teaching results in complex challenges for teacher preparation.

Current Debates in Teacher Education

Given the significance of education to society, conflicting beliefs in the purpose of public education, and the irreducible complexity of teaching, it is hardly a surprise that teacher preparation in the United States endures in a space of conflict. In his book, *The Trouble with Ed Schools*, Labaree (2004) describes what he sees as a common discourse of disdain aimed at university- and college-recommending teacher preparation programs, stating,

Both teacher candidates and educational observers berate these programs for making a simple induction process unnecessarily complicated. Only a relentlessly wrongheaded institution like an education school, say the critics, could mess up something as easy and natural as learning to teach. (p. 38-39)

This discourse of disdain, Labaree argues, is historically rooted in a long-standing status issue, with schools of education residing at the bottom of the academic hierarchy.

Why do schools of education suffer from such low status? Labaree (2004) offers several possible explanations for this reality. Gender is a significant factor in the history of teaching in the US, and Labaree suggests that the low status of schools of education work can be linked to their work with a stigmatized group (women) to teach a stigmatized population (children). Labaree also points out the relative newness of teacher preparation requirements contribute to skepticism regarding the necessity or value of preparation programs. If the only teaching requirement 150 years ago was knowledge of the subject you wished to teach, what do schools of education really have to offer? This skepticism, Labaree argues, is linked to the complex nature of teaching, which appears (erroneously) uncomplex to those outside of the profession.

Regardless of the reasons for the low status of schools of education, being at the bottom of the academic hierarchy, Labaree (2004) argues, has been “a critically important fact of life for this institution” (p. 11). Labaree elaborates, stating,

The consequences of its status have been enormous—shaping the quality and duration of its programs, the kinds of students and faculty that it can recruit, the way the university and public respond to the knowledge it produces, its impact on schools, and its ability to shape its own destiny ... [Low status institutions’] most prominent organizational and programmatic characteristics are frequently imposed on them by a variety of interested parties in the social environment who feel no need to yield to the authority of an institution that has been drastically enfeebled by its position at the bottom of the academic status order. (p. 11)

This analysis, identifying the vulnerabilities of schools of education to other “interested parties in the social environment,” can help us understand why teacher educators have had to consistently defend themselves and their work.

In November 25, 2015, the US Department of Education issued a press release proposing a plan to “strengthen teacher preparation” nationally through the development of an accountability system that would tie the scores of public school students on standardized tests back to the teacher preparation programs that prepared their classroom teachers (US Department of Education, 2014). Quoting Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, the press release states that, “New teachers want to do a great job for their kids, but often, they struggle at the beginning of their careers and have to figure out too much for themselves. Teachers deserve better, and our students do too” (as cited in US Department of Education, 2014). Clearly implied is that preparation programs are at fault for current challenges in education, inadequately preparing teachers to help all children pass standardized tests. Yet if Labare's (2004) analysis of the impact of low status on an institution is to be believed, “the quality and duration of its programs” is not fully within the control of schools of education (p. 11), but is fundamentally impacted by the (low) amount of power schools of education exert over their own fate.

Given a context of a high demand for teachers,¹⁴ as well as high scrutiny and steady critique for US teacher education, a variety of alternative routes into teaching have developed in the past several decades. Proponents of these alternative routes into teaching have begun referring to these programs as “Teacher Prep 2.0” (Gastic, 2014), claiming that these new reforms (with the implication that this is in contrast to preparation programs that came before) “put students first and are unrelenting in their commitment to making sure that all children have

¹⁴ The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) has been projecting an increasing need for newly hired teachers since 1994. Their report published in February 2014 projects that the annual numbers of public school teacher hires to be 367,000 in 2022 (Hussar & Bailey, 2014, p. 13).

access to educators who can teach, inspire creativity and curiosity, and lead by example” (Gastic, 2014, p. 91).¹⁵ Increased and prioritized clinical experiences are a common element in “Teacher Prep 2.0,” grounded in a belief that novice teachers will learn best through consistent opportunities to practice.

While Gastic (2014) does not directly suggest that clinical opportunities should fully replace other teacher preparation experiences but merely advocates for prioritization of and emphasis on clinical opportunities, other supporters of alternative paths to teaching like Walsh (2004) have explicitly proposed to excise the parts of teacher preparation that are not clinical practice. Walsh is particularly critical of college coursework requirements, arguing that these regulations are generally irrelevant and oppressive, serving as a barrier to recruiting high quality teacher candidates. Instead, Walsh argues for raising the requirements for standardized tests such as the Praxis I, arguing that educational research by James Coleman in the 1960s has shown that the most critical attribute of a teacher is his or her “verbal ability,” which Walsh claims is simply “vocabulary knowledge” (p. 238). With higher standardized test requirements in place along with subject-area coursework requirements, Walsh then advocates for giving teacher candidates provisional licenses for one year, and those who are hired for a job (not screened out by school personnel) and complete one successful year are then fully certified to teach. Essentially, Walsh

¹⁵ Teacher Prep 2.0 programs, according to Gastic (2014), include Relay Graduate School of Education, High Tech High Graduate School of Education, and Sposato Graduate School of Education. Gastic also says that “traditional institutions are demonstrating how Teacher Prep 2.0 is not limited to those efforts that are able to design programs from scratch without structural encumbrances” (p. 106), listing education programs at the University of Michigan, Hunter College-CUNY, and the University of Washington as examples).

is arguing that any necessary pedagogic theory can be (and should be) learned in the classroom, not in university courses prior to entering a classroom.

Calls for reform in teacher education do not only stem from outside the academy. Arthur Levine, in his report for the Education Schools Project, entitled, “Educating School Teachers” (2006), points to many failings in traditional college-recommending teacher education programs.¹⁶ The evolution of the majority of schools of education from normal schools to teachers colleges to schools of education within a state college (Fraser, 2007; Levine, 2006) has contributed to a deliberate divorcing of schools of education from K-12 schools in an effort to gain respect and legitimacy within research-focused universities (Goodlad, 1994; Levine, 2006). This has had widespread implications, leading to teacher education programs staffed with the least prestigious faculty members, teacher education programs with short, under-supervised, and under-utilized clinical components, and repetitive and low-rigor coursework (Goodlad, 1994; Levine, 2006). Among other critiques, Levine concludes that an imbalance between theory and practice is a serious fault in a majority of teacher education programs.

A blue ribbon report (2010) on clinical preparation and partnerships commissioned by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has also concluded that the approach to the clinical component of teacher preparation must be reconsidered and re-envisioned. In their call for action, they seek to support “the transformation of the education of teachers to a clinically based, partnership supported approach” (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, p. v). They admit that theory, practice, and subject-matter

¹⁶ “College-recommending” refers to teacher preparation programs that rely on colleges or universities to recommend teacher candidates for certification (Grossman & McDonald, 2008).

preparation have previously been isolated from each other in teacher education, and that clinical practice has the potential to align these critical components of teacher preparation to produce more effective teachers, prior to becoming teachers-of-record.

Social foundations, an area of traditional university or college coursework required for teacher certification, has appeared particularly vulnerable to pressures to excise and remove “unnecessary” theoretical course requirements in favor of more robust clinical practice (deMarrais, 2013; Tinkler, hannah, Tinkler, & Miller, 2015). Current literature in the social foundations of education frequently speaks from a defensive stance, arguing for the continuing relevance and significance of studies in social foundations within teacher preparation programs (Cohen et al., 2013; deMarrais, 2013; Lewis, 2013; Tinkler et al., 2015). Lewis (2013), for example, ends her article describing the social foundations principles of her teacher preparation program with this call to action: “Given the current political and social climate regarding school success, teacher effectiveness, teacher preparation, and the value of social foundations programs, the importance of envisioning new roles and new relationships [for social foundations] is heightened” (p. 180). Like teacher education critics in general, critics of the current state of social foundations can be found inside as well as outside the field, with a range of proposed directions for future efforts and reform.

Novice teachers who have chosen to join this profession do so cognizant (at least on some level) of the tensions and challenges within the field of teaching and the field of teacher preparation, and they look to their teacher educators for coherent and intentional responses to criticisms and tensions in the field. There is a clear need for a response that both addresses the legitimate critiques aimed at teacher preparation while providing our teacher candidates with preparation that empowers them to meet the challenges they will face in their professional lives

(Stillman, 2011). Teaching is deeply complex work, embedded in our social context, fundamentally dependent on the time, place, and circumstances of the act. Yet our understanding of *how to* support novice teachers in learning to navigate these complex waters continues to be open question (Cohen et al., 2013; Philip, 2013; Stillman, 2011; Tinkler et al., 2015). This dissertation proposes that a deeper understanding of teacher agency can contribute to our understanding of the social context of teaching and teacher education.

Chapter Conclusion and Preview of Chapter Three

This chapter strove to highlight the need for a deeper discussion of teacher agency through a review of literature on the social context of teaching and teacher education. The review of the literature was structured around topics frequently addressed in social foundations courses, including the conflicting purposes of education, the sociopolitical context of teaching, the nature of teaching, and current debates in teacher education.

In the following chapter, I will explain the methodology for the grounded research study that led to the development of the theoretical model of understanding teacher agency. I will begin with the rationale behind the use of co-generative research approaches and emergent methodologies, and then explain the study design and data analysis.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As I have articulated in the prior two chapters, there is a critical need for a deeper understanding of how teachers negotiate their agency given the social context of teaching. This chapter describes the methodological choices I made as I designed a research project that allowed me to observe teachers negotiating their contexts, opportunities, and constraints.

Because I was interested in *observing* agency rather than *discussing* agency with practicing teachers, I needed to find a practical teaching context in which I could integrate myself as a researcher. However, because I am cognizant of the power inherent in the relationship between *the observer* and *the observed* and of *the researcher* and *the researched* (Bishop, 2008; Clifford, 1988; Greenwood & Levin, 2008), I also sought a research methodology that would allow me to honor the agency and intellect of teachers who agreed to work with me. I wanted to design a research project that would allow me to conduct research that was important in terms of the scholarship on teacher agency, but in addition, be a productive use of time for the teacher participants.

The research study described in this chapter sought to honor the intellectual needs of the participating educators through the research design, who had their own interests and motivations for their professional development, while also allowing me to observe teacher agency in context. My hope and their hope was that my work with them would facilitate the deepening of their theoretical understanding of inclusion, resulting in improvement in their craft and their ability to serve all students. While I acted in my role as facilitator of their research agenda, they allowed me to observe teacher agency in a practical context.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the methodological literature that inspired the design of this study, co-generative research approaches and emergent methodologies. The study

design is then explored in more detail, including the participants and context, and the data collection methods. A description of the methods for data analysis follows, and the chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of this study.

Co-Generative Research Approaches

Greenwood and Levin (2008) argue that the disconnect between social science research and society at large is due to the use of methodologies that promote distance and a power differential between the researcher and the researched, privilege the knowledge of the university, and separate praxis and theory. Instead, they propose that all social science should be “action research,” which they define through two central parameters: “knowledge generation through action and experimentation in context, and participative democracy as both a method and a goal” (p. 71). They use the term “co-generative inquiry” to refer to research that aims “to solve pertinent problems in a context through democratic inquiry in which professional researchers collaborate with local stakeholders to seek and enact solutions to problems of major importance to the stakeholders” (p. 72). Local stakeholders should define the problems, ask the research questions, and participate in seeking answers and solutions to their own questions and self-defined problems.

The deliberate effort to break down the boundaries between the researcher and the researched is also one of the tenets of research methodologies that are frequently termed “postmodern.” As described by Bishop (2008), in Kaupapa Māori research, questions of researcher positioning and power are paramount. Bishop has developed a series of critical questions to evaluate researcher position, including questions such as, “Who initiates the project? Who is the researcher accountable to? What happens with the results? Who defines what is accurate, true, and complete in a text? How were the goals and major questions of the study

established? What benefits will there be?” (p. 174). Root’s description of a feminist communitarian model for research also emphasizes the participation of participants, “including a voice or hand in deciding which problems should be studied, what methods should be used to study them, whether the findings are valid or acceptable, and how the findings are to be used or implemented (as cited in Christians, 2008, p. 201). A commitment to collaborative research is likewise present in action research (Greenwood & Levin, 2008), participatory action research (McTaggart, 1997), and local strategies research (“Local strategies research,” 2011). All of these research methodologies can be categorized as “co-generative” research approaches.

The design of this research study was similarly grounded in a commitment to develop a truly collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants. The participants approached me with a plan for a self-study project and asked for my support as a facilitator in executing their self-defined research agenda. In return, I had access to the process of their decision-making, a chance to observe teacher thinking and agency in a practical context. However, I wanted to do more than describe teacher thinking or reveal issues significant to this particular group of educators. In order to cultivate a more robust analysis that would enable the development of theoretical models, I turned to literature on emergent methodologies for educational research.

Emergent Methodologies: Using Grounded Theory In A Co-Generative Study

Emergent methodologies are research approaches that are committed to theory development, rather than the gathering of data to test preexisting theory (data-driven as opposed to theory-driven research) (Dick, 2007; Holton, 2007; Wells, Hirshberg, Lipton, & Oakes, 1995). Wells et al. (1995), for example, argue that case study methodology “facilitates ‘theory

building,’ or the process of developing new propositions and generalizations about how and why a phenomenon ... unfolds” (p. 19). Dick (2007) argues that action research is also emergent, as,

at the beginning of a study, not enough is known either to develop good theory or to design the research methods in detail. Action research builds its theory and fine tunes its methods and develops its plans of action gradually as it proceeds. (p. 400)

In qualitative research, grounded theory is the most widely recognized, developed, and utilized of the emergent methodologies (Charmaz, 2001; Holton, 2007).

Charmaz (2001) describes grounded theory as a “logically consistent set of data collection and analytical procedures aimed to develop theory” (p. 335). Holton (2007) builds on the idea of theory development by separating *description* from *conceptual abstraction*, clarifying that conceptual abstraction “directs attention to and isolates a part or aspect of an entity or phenomenon for the purposes of contemplation” (p. 272). A grounded theory, argues Holton, “must explain, not merely describe, what is happening in a social setting” (p. 272). While this study could also be considered a case study of teacher agency, the design of the data collection methods was more inspired by co-generative methodologies than case study methodology. Grounded theory methodology is frequently used in both case studies and co-generative research studies (among others) as a method for data analysis (Dick, 2007; Holton, 2007).

Dick (2007) makes a strong case for the compatibility of emergent and co-generative methodologies, arguing that grounded theory is more explicit about how theory is built from evidence than other emergent methodologies, while the stance of co-generative research methodologies towards action, change, and participation makes it useful as a “meta-methodology.” Dick cites a variety of research studies across disciplines that have successfully incorporated grounded theory methodology into action research or co-generative research

studies, with grounded theory methodology providing a rigorous model for data analysis. Given my interest in developing theory on teacher agency, grounded theory methodology was a strong fit for the analysis of the data from this study, and was compatible with my meta-methodological stance toward co-generative methodologies. Following these models of methodological hybrids, this research study is a grounded theory research study embedded in a participatory action research project. The next section will provide more specific research design details for the study.

Co-Generative Grounded Theory Study Design and Data Collection

A group of teachers from Bernstein Middle School approached me in the fall of 2012, looking for an educational researcher to participate in and facilitate a self-study research project on their co-taught inclusion program. Their inclusion program was of long-standing and had been highly regarded in the local area, but the teachers were also continuously working to improve their instruction and increase the effectiveness of their inclusion program. They were seeking support from an educational researcher to help them define, design, and execute a self-study research project. I proposed to use co-generative research methodologies to collaboratively design a research project around questions that they defined as significant. While facilitating their project, I proposed to collect and document all aspects of our collaborative work, and use emergent research methodologies to better understand teacher agency in a practical context.

Classic grounded theory methodology has been established on the preconception that the researcher is able to enter the research study with a “clean slate,” with no preconceived notions of what will emerge from the data (Holton, 2007). Because I have had a lengthy relationship with the study setting (the specifics of my relationship will be described later in the chapter), this methodological requirement for a “clean slate” was immediately violated. However, the “clean

slate” prerequisite is one of the primary critiques of grounded theory methodology (Holton, 2007; Olesen, 2007), with Olesen summarizing Locke’s argument that classic grounded theorists were “not merely passive observers; they knew something about those clinical settings where they did their basic work and perhaps had a point of view about these settings” (p. 423). Therefore, a “clean slate” is inherently unattainable, and my knowledge of the site did not keep me from designing a grounded theory study.

In addition, the cyclical nature of grounded theory methodology is critical to contextualize my preconceived notions of *teacher agency* prior to the start of this research study. Of particular relevance is the step of “theoretical sampling,” which Holton describes as “the process whereby the researcher decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to continue to develop the theory as it emerges. As such, the process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory” (p. 278). I completed an earlier research study at this same site in 2011, a year and a half prior to being approached to facilitate the self-study of the inclusion co-teachers at Bernstein. My interest in teacher agency originated during this earlier research study (Gourd, 2012), also a grounded theory study embedded within a participatory action research project with two inclusion co-teachers. The research study described here can be understood as a theoretical sampling move, a second study designed to collect more data on my emerging theory on *teacher agency*.

Essentially, the co-generative self-study project that had three phases. First, a preliminary phase allowed for context and knowledge building, as the participants and I got to know each other, engaged in discussions of their thinking and beliefs about inclusive education and the challenges of being inclusion educators, and formulated a broad research question to guide their collaborative research. In the second phase, the teachers and I designed and executed six

collaborative investigations, gathering and analyzing data to answer research questions identified by the teacher participants. The final phase of this study consisted of sharing the data generated by the collaborative investigation, and group and individual reflection on the research process and results. All three phases of the study were closely documented for grounded theory analysis of teacher thinking and agency.

The next sections explain the study design in more detail, with a closer examination of the participant-researchers and their context, myself as the researcher and participant-observer, and the data collection strategies and procedures.

Participant-researchers and their context. The participants in this study were the teachers who taught in the *co-teaching inclusion program* during the 2012-2013 school year at Bernstein Middle School, an urban middle school in Seattle, WA. *Inclusion* is a term that is widely used to refer to policies and programs that place students who have been identified as needing specialized educational services, or Individual Education Programs (IEPs), in classrooms with peers who have not been identified as needing such specialized services (a population commonly referred to as “general education”) (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). “Inclusion” programs are extremely varied, and as Duhaney & Salend (2000) describe, there are a diversity of interpretations of how to best “educate students with disabilities in high-quality, age-appropriate general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools with their peers without disabilities” (as cited in Xu, 2006, p. 1500). One interpretation of *inclusion* includes the implementation of *co-teaching*.

Co-teaching is an educational model where “two or more professionals deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space” (Cook & Friend, 1995). Currently, the most common use of this teaching model is in special

education inclusion classrooms, although the literature on co-teaching includes research on co-teaching in ELL (English Language Learner) inclusion classrooms (Friend et al., 2010; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008) and teacher preparation programs (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009; Tobin & Roth, 2005). Within this heterogeneous space, two (or more) teachers are co-responsible for the academic growth of all the students. This model of teaching is theorized to improve outcomes for students with diverse learning needs, but the collaborative relationship between co-teachers is also theorized as an opportunity for significant professional growth for the teachers (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 2007; Friend et al., 2010).

Bernstein's co-teaching inclusion program, designed and implemented in 2004, includes co-teaching between teachers certified in special education and those certified in general education. The 17 teachers who taught within this co-taught inclusion program, with the support of their administrative team, had committed to work together during the 2012-2013 school year to complete an unspecified collaborative research project on their work as an inclusion program, and invited me to facilitate their work. While this group did not have a formal name, I have called them the Co-Taught Inclusion Research Team (CTIRT) for the purposes of this study. The specific members of the CTIRT can be found in Table 3.1, organized by grade level, subject matter, and classification as a general educator or a special educator.

Table 3.1

*The Co-Taught Inclusion Research Team, by grade, subject matter, and educator classification**

	General Educators	Special Educators
6th Grade Humanities	Willis, Ester	Erica, Aline
6th Grade Mathematics	Drew	Luke
7th Grade Humanities	Chuck, Regina	Dolley
7th Grade Mathematics	Madelaine	Felipa
8th Grade Humanities	Ella, Jasper	Bea, Raya
8th Grade Mathematics	Jim	Kristopher
Administrative Liaison	Crysta	

* All names are pseudonyms

This group of educators included teachers who had been a part of the co-teaching inclusion program at Bernstein from its inception, teachers who had taught at Bernstein for 10 years or more, and teachers who were in their first or second year teaching at Bernstein.

In addition to this group of 17 teacher participants, the administrative liaison, Crysta, was a critical participant in this study. Crysta's title was vice principal, and supervising CTIRT was one of her assigned responsibilities. She was present at most of the CTIRT meetings, and advised me regarding the agenda of each CTIRT meeting. Crysta had been an administrator at Bernstein for multiple years prior to the year of this study, and had worked with the teachers to make this self-study project happen. Her role in this study will be discussed more in chapter five, during the sharing of the findings.

The researcher as participant-observer. I was another crucial participant in this project, as the researcher as participant-observer (Merriam, 2009). I have had a long-term relationship with the site of the research and many of the individuals on the CTIRT, as I taught in the co-taught inclusion program at Bernstein from 2004-2009 as an eighth grade social studies teacher, part of the original cohort of co-teaching inclusion teachers. Many of the members of the CTIRT were therefore former colleagues, and three were former students (a former student teacher and two former teacher education students). In addition, I conducted a separate research project with two members of the CTIRT, Ella and Bea, in 2011-2012. This long-term relationship explains why I, in particular, was approached to facilitate the self-study of the CTIRT, and my history with the site and participants provided me with critical contextual information that another researcher would not have had. As participant-observer for the self-study of the CTIRT, my role included facilitating reflection, leading the process of identifying of

a researchable problem, participating in the gathering of data, contributing to the analysis of data, organizing the sharing of results within the CTIRT and with the full staff, and communicating with the administrative team. With input from Crysta, I created the agenda for all meetings of the CTIRT, and designed and implemented all activities during the meetings.

Given my history with the teachers at Bernstein and my role as facilitator of the CTIRT's self-study project, it is important to explore issues of subjectivity and objectivity, topics well explored by a variety of postmodern and interpretive theorists. Rosaldo (1993), for example, does not define objectivity as the opposite of subjectivity. Objectivity is not detachment, not neutrality, not passionate detachment, not cognitive distance. Instead, for Rosaldo, objectivity is a synonym for "social analysis." The ability to examine and make sense of the social world (objectivity) is still the goal of the interpretive researcher, yet Rosaldo argues that *it is subjectivity that makes objectivity possible*. As he points out, "If distance has certain advantages, so too does closeness" (p. 169). Subjectivity can result in seeing more, being more analytical in ways that matter, particularly allowing a researcher to see power more readily. Subjectivity, therefore, allows a researcher to get closer to the "truth." Therefore, while my role as participant-observer and my close relationship with the members of the CTIRT has made my perspective very subjective, it is arguably that very subjectivity that allowed me to discern teacher agency in this practical context with more objectivity.

I did not enter into this research study with a "clean slate," but rather with a conviction that teachers have and use power, and with a desire to develop my understanding of how power plays out in a practical context. I also entered this research study as an experienced teacher educator, convinced that novice teachers need support from their teacher educators to help them understand and discuss the concept of teacher agency. As I collected and analyzed data for this

study, I did not keep my developing thinking around teacher agency separate from my work as a teacher educator, but instead allowed my developing thinking to influence and be influenced by my work with novice teachers. Because of my subjective understanding of this practical context as well as my consistent contact with an audience to test my emerging theory for understanding teacher agency, I argue that my ability to understand the nuances of power and agency were enhanced.

My *reflexivity*, which Olesen (2007) describes as “the manner and extent to which the researchers present themselves as imbedded in the research situation and process” (p. 423), will be addressed directly throughout this study. In particular, my hybrid roles of facilitator, researcher, and teacher educator are directly relevant to the choices I have made in developing my theoretical model for understanding teacher agency. I have addressed the significance of my reflexivity through the design of the study and the analysis of the data. In addition, reflexivity will be directly addressed through the discussion of the limitations at the end of this chapter.

In the next section, I describe the specific activities of the CTIRT that I facilitated and observed.

Participant observation and document collection. Over the course of this project, there were six full group meetings of the CTIRT (see Appendix C for a list of all meetings of the CTIRT, including date and activity). As a participant-observer, my observations focused on what the inclusion faculty chose to discuss during these meetings, what they identified as problematic and possible, the outcomes achieved, and patterns of who spoke, when s/he spoke, and what was said. I took field notes, recorded audio, and collected documents including emails as part of these participant observations. I also archived any presentations, activities, and handouts that I produced in my efforts to facilitate this self-study.

In the second phase of the project, I also met with smaller groups of teacher researchers to help them design smaller independent investigations for each grade level discipline group, and to facilitate their collection and analysis of data (the six groups can be seen in Table 3.1. See Appendices G and L for summaries and comparisons of these research projects). In these investigation design meetings, I asked questions such as, “Given the research question articulated by the full inclusion faculty, what types of data are you interested in collecting?” “Given the types of data you are interested in seeing, what research methods might be the most appropriate?” As these projects took shape, I participated in data collection and data analysis for the six independent projects. Field notes were taken and documents collected during all of these meetings, and, when appropriate, the meetings were audio recorded. All documents produced as part of this work were archived, including research design plans, raw data summaries, statistical tests using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), and summaries of findings that I created on behalf of the teacher researchers.

Once the collaborative investigations were completed, in the third phase of the project I facilitated the sharing of investigation design, data, and data analysis within the CTIRT and to the broader school. As a participant-observer, I asked the inclusion co-teachers to consider questions such as, “What does this data demonstrate?” “Given your research questions, did this investigation help you answer your questions?” “What questions do you still have?” “Given this data, what next steps can you envision?” I also created slide templates to facilitate the communication of this information to the full staff. The planning meetings were audio-recorded, and documents and presentation materials generated were collected. The full staff presentation was video-recorded and audio-recorded, and an exit ticket given to the audience was collected.

Semi-structured interviews: Group and individual. Patton (2002) says, “we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe” (p. 340), but we also co-construct realities through dialogue (Ahearn, 2001). Two forms of semi-structured interviewing were an important part of this project. In the first phase of the study, as part of revealing the participants’ thinking around inclusion and co-teaching, I conducted a group interview with all of the participants of the CTIRT. At the start of the interview, participants were asked to individually reflect on questions such as, “What does it mean to you to be an ‘inclusion teacher’?” “What would an ideal inclusion program look like?” “What are the biggest challenges for you in being an inclusion teacher?” “What are the biggest challenges facing the new inclusion department?” “Do you have any ideas about how to meet these challenges?” After participants reflected on these questions individually in writing, I then facilitated the group interview. The purpose of the group interview was for participants to build on and consider the thinking of their peers, and to begin the process of dialoguing about researchable problems appropriate for our collaborative investigation. This group interview was audio recorded, and I took field notes and collected documents such as written responses to the prompts.

After the collaborative investigation was conducted and the data analyzed and shared, this sequence was repeated at the end of the third phase of this study. During the post-investigation group interview, I asked questions such as, “Given the stated intent of our collaborative research project, what is your reflection on the work that we did?” “Which part of this process was most memorable or helpful for you personally? Explain.” “Was there any part of this process that was unhelpful or particularly challenging for you? Explain.” “Do you have any suggestions for me as a researcher and co-researcher?” “Is there anything else that you think I should know in order to better understand your experience with inclusion? With this research

process?” All participants again had an opportunity to reflect on these questions individually in writing and then engaged with each other regarding their responses. This group interview was also audio recorded and written responses were collected.

As the final step in this study, I conducted six individual interviews. Because I was confident that I had nearly reached data saturation (Holton, 2007) and due to time constraints for both the teacher researchers and myself, I chose to interview only six of the 17 participants. However, because I wanted a diversity of perspectives despite not being able to interview all participants, participants were first sorted into six groups, by grade level taught (6th, 7th or 8th) and by classification as a general education teacher or special education teacher. Each participant was then given a number and a random number generator used to select a single individual from each of the six groups to be interviewed. This mixed sampling strategy was chosen to allow maximum variation in individual interview participants, while reducing bias in the sample selection through use of the random number generator (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). During the individual interviews, I asked participants questions such as, “Did your thinking about inclusion and inclusion teaching change during your participation in this study?” “After participating in this entire process, how are you thinking about the role of research in education?” “What challenges remain for this inclusion program?” I recorded audio for these individual interviews and also took field notes.

The next section considers how the data for this grounded theory study embedded within this participatory action research project was analyzed and the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency was developed.

Data Analysis

As described earlier in this chapter, this particular research study can be understood as a theoretical sampling move, linked to a previous grounded theory study conducted at this same research site. In the previous research study (which is described in detail in Gourd, 2012), I developed three conceptual codes related to teacher agency through an open-coding process: a) the significance of structural constraints, b) agency for change, and c) agency to maintain the status quo. This section will explore the process of data analysis for the current study, which began with these already identified conceptual codes. In the following sections, I trace the development of new conceptual codes and the constant comparison of all conceptual codes through the facilitation process and exploration of theoretical and historical literature, then discuss the role teacher education played in theoretical sorting and the development of the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency. I end with a brief description of how discourse analysis contributed to the analysis of data.

Facilitation as a means of “constant comparison.” My role as facilitator of the self-study project of the CTIRT made listening and transcribing data immediately after it was collected a necessity, as initial data gathered was used immediately to inform the design of protocols for subsequent data gathering events. Open coding was used to identify descriptive themes, which were used in the design of activities such as a handout of potential research questions and data collection strategies during the third session. (Later in the analysis of data, these descriptive themes were also used to test the emerging theory for understanding teacher agency, and provide the structure for the organization of the findings in chapter five.) The immediate analysis of data to inform subsequent data gathering events is also the data analysis process for a grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2001; Holton, 2007). While much of the open

coding was done for the purposes of the self-study project (and therefore rarely related specifically to issues of teacher agency), analytic notes and memos were used to record on-going observations of teacher agency in this practical context and to track the development of conceptual codes. A sample of analytic notes and memos from 1/21/13 to 3/19/2013 can be found in Appendix E.

Analytic notes and memos were the logical choice for data analysis of teacher agency as grounded theory methodology supports the researcher relying on field notes and his/her “theoretical sensitivity,” or the ability to “generate concepts from data and relate them according to normal models of theory in general” (Holton, 2007, p. 274). Given my previous experience with coding data for conceptual codes related to teacher agency, I was sensitive to the emergence of conceptual patterns in the data, and I was able to constantly compare the emerging conceptual codes with the steady stream of data collection opportunities presented through my facilitation of the CTIRT’s self study research project. For example, the conceptual code “ambiguity leads to agency” emerged in my analytic note from 1/21/13, and subsequent data was compared to this emerging conceptual code. As my concepts were confirmed and saturated (Holton, 2007), a conceptual core emerged, consisting of three interrelated concepts of teacher agency (agency within constraints, agency within contested and ambiguous spaces, and structures enabling agency), as well as a fourth conceptual category I called “challenges to teacher agency.” As this conceptual core emerged, I was able to selectively code new data and revisit previous data with the conceptual core to guide my analysis.

Coding theoretical and historical literature as a means of “constant comparison.”

Holton (2007) distinguishes between the roles of literature in a grounded theory study compared to “traditional training in qualitative research methodology” (p. 271). In traditional qualitative

methodology, an extant theory contributes significantly to the data analysis process and influences the development of codes, or what Holton calls “the preconceiving practices ... that condition the researcher to know in advance” (p. 271). In comparison, in a classic grounded theory study, Holton argues, a thorough examination of the literature does not happen prior to the study, but rather after initial codes have emerged, as part of constant comparison process. As she describes, “the literature is just more data to be coded and integrated into the study” (p. 272).

As the study described in this dissertation was a theoretical sampling move, following up on an earlier grounded research study in which *agency* had emerged as a critical theoretical concept, I began this study with some theoretical grounding in the core concept of *teacher agency*. However, as conceptual codes emerged from the data as part of the facilitation process, I returned to theoretical literature on *agency* and empirical research on teachers’ professional work to compare my emerging codes to existing literature. In addition, historical literature on the professional lives of teachers was a very important source of data during the data analysis process. Because of the significance of theoretical and historical data to the process of theoretical elaboration and saturation in this grounded theory study, chapter four uses this literature to introduce the theoretical proposition for understanding teacher agency.

Teacher education as a means of “theoretical sorting.” The process of selective coding, delimiting data, and eventually sorting data theoretically was helped immeasurably given my work in teacher education, which happened simultaneously with data collection and analysis. As I described in both chapter one and two, I believe issues of teacher agency are deeply relevant to teacher preparation, and in my work to support novice teachers, I naturally drew on my emerging understanding of teacher agency to support my students. Particularly as an instructor in

a social foundations course,¹⁷ I introduced students to the concept of teacher agency, and asked them to use this concept in their study and reflections on the relationship between schools and society. In seeking to help others (novice teachers) understand teacher agency, I pushed myself to understand how my conceptual codes integrated into a theory that could be more easily understood by my students. This process was also aided by the successive feedback from multiple cohorts of students regarding the usability and usefulness of my emerging theory for understanding teacher agency.

Holton's (2007) discussion of the importance of conceptual or theoretical sorting is helpful in understanding why the process of teaching with an emerging theory was productive. Holton says that theoretical sorting of memos helps the research see

where each concept fits and works within the theory, its relevance, and how it will carry forward in the cumulative development of the theory. Sorting prevents over-conceptualization and pre-conceptualization, since these excesses fall away as the researcher zeros in on the most parsimonious set of integrated concepts. (p. 284)

In framing the theory for understanding teacher agency for my teacher education students, I naturally sought the “most parsimonious set of integrated concepts.”

The most significant example of how teaching impacted my emerging theory is in regards to my conceptualization of “challenges to teacher agency.” While the three interrelated avenues of teacher agency (agency within constraints, agency within contested and ambiguous spaces, and structures enabling agency) emerged early in the conceptual coding process, my coding also included a less well-defined category of codes I referred to as “challenges to teacher agency.”

¹⁷ EDTEP 571: Topics & Tensions in School and Society, for UW Seattle STEP. I have been a teaching assistant (2010) or instructor (2011-2014) for this course for five years.

Through attempting to articulate the significance of this category of codes to my teacher education students, my theoretical conceptualization underwent a rapid transformation. This category of codes was initially conceptualized on 6/26/14 as a set of challenges that teachers responded to with acts of agency, as demonstrated in Figure 3.1.

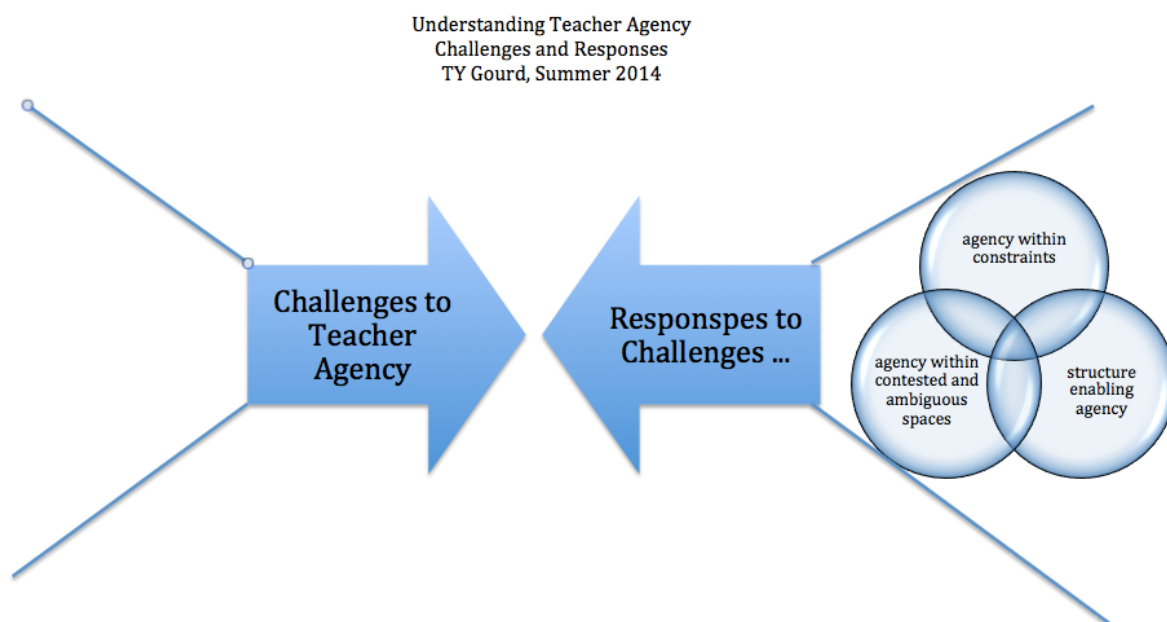


Figure 3.1. An early conceptualization of the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency, shared with teacher education students in June 2014.

Confusion and questions from my students regarding this early theoretical conceptualization resulted in a reconsideration of the relationship between concepts, and by August 2014, I had developed a new version of the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency, the one used in this dissertation (See Figure 4.1 or Figure 5.1). “Challenges to teacher agency” had been split into two separate conceptual concepts, (i) the macrosociological context and (ii) context-specific opportunities and constraints, along with the three interrelated avenues for teacher agency, (iii) agency within constraints, (iv) agency within contested or ambiguous spaces, and (v) structures enabling agency.

Discourse analysis in a grounded research study on agency. The analysis of the data from this study was also informed by discourse analysis methodology. Indeed, given that Gee (2010) describes discourse analysis as concerning “how we use language to say things, do things, and be things” (p. 3), discourse analysis appeared necessary as well as useful, if I hoped to arrive at a deeper understanding of teacher agency. The “situated meaning” of discourse was particularly important to identifying conceptual categories in the data. Gee’s seven building tasks ((1) significance, (2) activities, (3) identities, (4) relationships, (5) politics, (6) connections, and (7) sign systems and knowledge), which he describes as the “the seven components of any situation,” were used as a starting place to understand the situated meanings of the actions and speech of the participants (p. 101-102). In addition, Johnstone’s (2002) heuristic, a discovery procedure for understanding how discourse is shaped by its context, and how discourse shapes its context, was also particularly useful as I sought to understand discourse patterns that emerged repeatedly in the data.

Integration of the theory for understanding teacher agency. I began this research study with a desire to develop my understanding of *teacher agency*, a concept that had emerged in an earlier research study. Through the close examination of the empirical data generated by this study and facilitation of the co-generative research project, use of extant theoretical and historical literature as a means of constant comparison, and using my instruction in teacher education as a means of theoretical sorting, I integrated a theory for understanding teacher agency. Chapter four will introduce this integrated theory using theoretical and historical research. While I considered using the empirical data generated by this research study to articulate each significant concept within the integrated theory for understanding teacher agency, the empirical data is more evocative as a rich example of the usefulness of the integrated theory

as an analytical tool. Therefore, extant theoretical, current empirical, and historical literature is used to introduce the theory in chapter four, and in chapter five, the empirical research from the co-generative research study is analyzed with the theory for understanding teacher agency to illustrate the significance and usefulness of the integrated theory.

Limitations of the Study

As a grounded research study embedded in a co-generative self-study project, this study had many natural limitations. Classic grounded research methodology includes deliberate “theoretical sampling,” or choosing the subsequent data gathering events based on emerging conceptual codes (Holton, 2007). However, the series of data collection events in this study was dictated by my responsibilities as a facilitator, not the needs I perceived as a researcher. While this is a limitation of the study design, this study itself was a theoretical sampling move, as I had completed a similar grounded theory study at the same site the previous year (Gourd, 2012). Furthermore, theoretical sampling happened during the data analysis step, when I allowed my theoretical sensitivity to guide the depth of analysis of particular data sets versus others (Holton, 2007).

A study of teacher agency in this context could also be viewed as suspect because I, as the researcher, was actively enabling the agency of the participants. The members of the CTIRT did what they did partly because I helped them do it, as the facilitator of their project. Can I really claim to have studied their agency when I was part of the resources that enabled it? While this is a legitimate question, the credibility, rather than “validity” (Merriam, 2009), of the interpretation of the data was sought through multiple strategies. First, I utilized *reflexivity* as a strategy, reflecting on myself as the “human as instrument” (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 219) throughout the data collection and analysis. Data was triangulated as well, with data sources

ranging from audio recordings of session meetings, documents and data produced by the self-study project, email communication, and individual interviews. In addition, the emerging theory was tested through use with teacher education students, as a form of peer review (Merriam, 2009). Most importantly, however, my role as an enabler of agency is incorporated into the theory for understanding teacher agency: a critical avenue of agency is to utilize the structures available. Given my skills as a researcher and facilitator and my close relationship to the members of the CTIRT, the teacher researchers saw me a resource to be utilized for their own purposes.

This study identified a theoretical proposition, or a “working hypothesis,” and did not seek to draw conclusions (Merriam, 2009), or seek to generalize the teachers’ statements to different contexts. To increase *transferability* (rather than *generalizability* (Merriam, 2009)), I have utilized *thick description* in the presentation of the findings, which is the best way, according to Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Merriam, 2009), for “someone in a potential receiving context [to] assess the similarity between them and ... the study” (p. 227). The transferability of the theory is also enhanced through descriptions of how it has already been used with teacher education students, as is further discussed in chapter six.

Chapter Conclusion and Preview of Chapter Four

A variety of co-generative and emergent research methodologies inspired the design of this project, and influenced the specific data collection and analysis strategies. This study is a hybrid, a grounded theory study embedded within a participatory action research project. The Co-Teaching Inclusion Research Team, a group of 17 teachers and one administrator engaged in a self-study research project, provided me with a practical context within which I was able to study teacher agency using grounded theory methodology. Through the analysis of the empirical

data and theoretical and historical data on teachers and teaching, a theory for understanding teacher agency was integrated.

Chapter four will use extant theoretical, current empirical, and historical research to introduce the integrated theory for understanding teacher agency that emerged from this research study. The chapter will begin by developing the theoretical concept of *agency*, and then articulate each significant concept within the integrated theory for understanding teacher agency.

Chapter Four: Introduction to the Theory for Understanding Teacher Agency

Labaree (1997) says that schools “occupy an awkward position at the intersection between what we hope society will become and what we think it really is, between political ideals and economic realities” (p. 41). Neither of the paths that Labaree refers to is uncontested (we do not all agree on what we hope society will become, nor do we agree on what we think society really is), and their disputed meanings are only magnified when the paths cross at the public school. This intersection is filled with both challenge and possibility, and navigating these is part of the reality of being an educator, requiring consistent exertions of agency.

This chapter traces the literature that contributed to the development of the theory for understanding teacher agency, using the extant literature to introduce the theory. While the grounded theory emerged from constant comparative analysis of the empirical research data and existing literature, the literature will be used to introduce the theory, allowing the empirical data to be analyzed via the theory in chapter five.

Chapter four begins with an introduction to the theoretical literature for understanding human agency. In this study, *agency* can be understood as the capacity to make an impact or exert power, and this understanding developed out of sociological and discourse theory. After a general theoretical exploration, I will introduce my grounded theory for understanding teacher agency (see *Figure 4.1*) by connecting each of the significant concepts to the theoretical literature. Each component of my theoretical model will also be examined through historical and current research on the experience of teachers.

The Relationship Between Structure and Agency

What power do we humans have to impact the society in which we live? This question captures a central tension within sociological theory often described as the relationship between

structure and *agency*. A variety of sociologists have attempted to illuminate the relationship between these concepts, to help us understand both the limits of human action as well as the possibility for change and resistance.

A structuralist conception of *structure* and *agency* is rooted in a Marxist understanding of power and the reproductive nature of societal institutions (Althusser, 1971). In structuralist theory, power is centralized in the state and the “ruling ideology,” and humans are functions of this structure; our actions sustain and reproduce the structure of society, and we are ascribed very little personal agency.

The deterministic nature of structuralism has inspired many critics and theoretical responses, including Giddens, credited with the articulation of structuration theory, and Foucault, a leading post-structuralist. Structuration theory proposes a more prominent role for agency in relationship to structure, recognizing that “human beings are purposive actors, who virtually all the time know what they are doing ... and why” (Giddens, 1989, p. 253). Giddens conceptualizes *structure* as rules and resources that are recursively used by humans and reconstituted through our actions. Structure and agency are thus symbiotically related.

Many post-structuralist theorists like Foucault (1977) critique structuralism because they disagree with how power is conceptualized. Power for Foucault is diffuse, not centralized, and works through *subjects* being disciplined by other subjects, discourses, and themselves. In Foucault’s conceptualization, structure and agency cannot be separated; we are our society. We enact structure through our actions, our discourses, and through our bodies.

The Relationship Between Language and Agency

Ahearn (2001) argues that all language is a form of social action, and linguistic anthropologists “consider language, whether spoken or written, to be inextricably embedded in

networks of sociocultural relations” (p. 110). Gee (2010) also claims that discourse is inherently political, as “grammar simply does not allow us to speak or write from no perspective at all” (p. 4). Our choices of words, as well as how we construct our sentences and employ grammar, convey our perspective on the world. Words are never neutral, and language and power are intimately bound together.

This understanding of the role of language in our sociocultural experience posits a crucially agentive role for language. If *agency* is defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112), and language use is always a form of social action, then all language can be understood as a form of agency. All speech “establishes the speaker as a being whose existence must be reckoned with” (Duranti, 2004, p. 455), and speech creates a social reality for anyone who happens to be listening, including the speaker (p. 451). Importantly, Duranti emphasizes that language is not an actor in of itself, but rather a means for human action.

Duranti's (2004) definition of *agency* is more complex than Ahearn's, defined as “the property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behavior, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities' (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose actions are the object of evaluation (e.g. in terms of their responsibility for a given outcome)” (p. 453). This definition expands on Ahearn's to include the idea that agency means one could have acted differently (control), as well as an aspect of evaluation. Stated differently, someone with agency gets to choose his/her words, and the impact of that choice of words is the responsibility of the speaker.

Duranti (2004) also proposes that a speaker is always engaged with an audience, either real or imaginary, and this audience evaluates the speaker's actions and words morally,

culturally, and for linguistic competence. Discourse is social behavior, and its purpose is always engagement with other social entities, even if the audience is not physically present. Therefore, agency in language has two dimensions according to Duranti: *performance* and *encoding*.

Performance is the enactment, the event itself that establishes the existence of the speaker, while encoding is the specific linguistic means that communicate the performance. These dimensions are clearly interrelated. As Duranti says, “performance ... relies on and simultaneously affects the encoding ... Conversely, encoding always serves performative functions, albeit in different ways and with varying degrees of effectiveness” (p. 454). It is important to consider both what language does (the performance), such as the social reality constructed and the interrelationship of different speakers, as well as how it is done (the encoding), or what is actually said or not said.

The power of discourse for shaping reality is particularly critical in ambiguous or contradictory spaces. In Ahearn's (2001) review of the literature on the role of language in sociocultural theory, she briefly summarized the work of Ortner in highlighting the role of agency in society. Ahearn explains that, “Ortner emphasizes the existence of inherent structural *contradictions* that keep a simple reproduction of the hegemonic social order from being a foregone conclusion” (p. 120, emphasis added). The existence of conflicting ideas or contradicting ideologies provides space for agency, as there are no obvious answers directing or controlling an individual's choices. It is in these ambiguous spaces that words can have the most powerful impact on the shaping of reality.

Integration of the Grounded Theory for Understanding Teacher Agency

All of these theorists, while offering different perspectives on the concept of agency, can contribute to the understanding of the relationship between schools and society, and the role of educators in the intersection of school and society. Sociological and discourse theory is

foundational to my theoretical model for understanding teacher agency, the conceptual framework for the analysis of the empirical research data (see *Figure 4.1*). The theoretical literature was part of the constant comparative analysis process of this grounded theory study, and therefore, the connections to broader sociological and discourse theory will be explicated for each component of the theory. In addition, examples from historical literature and current research will be included in order to clarify the significance of the conceptual framework to the experience of teachers and teaching.

A Theoretical Proposition for Understanding Teacher Agency

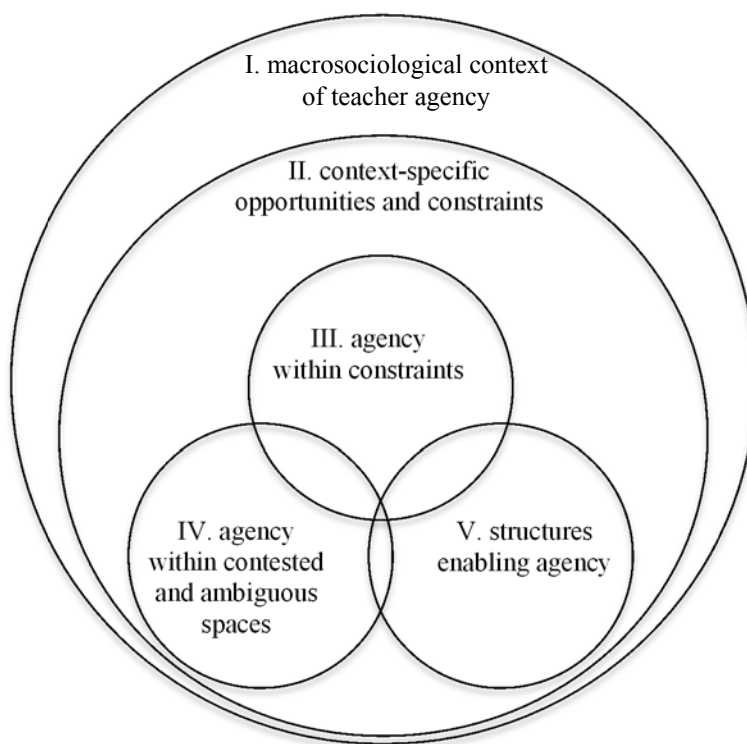


Figure 4.1. Gourde's theoretical model for understanding teacher agency. This figure visualizes the conceptual framework for this study, which is the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency.

I. Macrosociological context of teacher agency. If agency is understood as “the capacity to impact,” then it is important to understand what might contribute to an individual’s *capacity* to impact as well as the *significance* of individual choices. A structuralist perspective,

generally understood as a macrosociological analysis, claims that an individual's capacity to impact is limited primarily to maintaining or reproducing the status quo. Althusser (1971), restating Marx, reminds us that "a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year" (p. 127). As employees of a large bureaucratic institution, teachers are part of a social institution that is invested in reproducing itself, and Althusser characterizes most teachers as little suspecting "that their own devotion contributes to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the School" (p. 157). While individuals can impact a situation by helping to maintain the status quo, arguably thoughtless and unaware reproduction is not the full expression of an individual's *capacity* to impact.

Yet thoughtless and unaware reproduction can still cause *significant* impact. Lipsitz's (2006) exploration of what he calls the "possessive investment in whiteness" provides an example of how reproduction, whether fully conscious or not, can significantly impact human experience. Lipsitz uses historical evidence to demonstrate that despite the stated intentions of civil rights policy, "resistance, refusal, and renegotiation" have resulted in a failure to realize equal opportunity in the United States. Social hierarchy and inequity are reproduced because humans actively seek to protect their privilege and pass it on to their descendants. "Whiteness" as a label has accompanying privileges, and those who can lay claim to "whiteness" and the associated privileges have a vested interest in maintaining the significance of "whiteness." Thus, social hierarchy and inequity are maintained and reinforced as the already-privileged (those with more power) make decisions that do not harm their own status. Teachers, whether among the privileged or the disempowered, are not immune to the desires that all other humans experience,

and may not exert their agency in ways that fundamentally alter the sociological phenomenon of the privileged acting to protect their own privilege.

Labaree (2010), in his book *Someone Has to Fail*, also makes a fundamentally structuralist argument regarding the dominance of the underlying ideology of consumerism and individualism within the American public education system. He argues that public education in the United States has developed into a system that allows the private desires of consumers to dictate policy, resulting in the unsuccessful fulfillment of the public school's proclaimed social agendas. As Labaree states, "We want an institution where we can express our social goals without violating the principle of individual choice that lies at the center of the social structure, even if this comes at the cost of failing to achieve these goals" (p. 243). Entrenched as we are to the fulfillment of private desires, schools can never fully succeed in meeting public good agendas. Labaree would argue, for example, that teachers may articulate a passionate belief in a public good purpose for public education (e.g., teaching for democratic citizenship), but the pressure to provide the means for individual students to fulfill their private good agendas (e.g., pass the AP Government test with a high score) will dictate many teachers instructional choices.

Both structurationist and post-structuralist analyses also emphasize the significance of macrosociological forces on individuals. For example, Parker (2011), using a structurationist analysis, contends that the widespread belief that "public schools are broken" is a relatively new narrative within US society, constructed and continually reconstructed since World War II. Despite the relative newness of this narrative on public schooling, it has permeated deep into the American consciousness, with federal policy and local commentators alike shaping a perception that public schools are "on the verge of disaster" (as cited in Parker, 2011, p. 418). In post-structuralist theory, macrosociological discourses are critical to understanding how an individual

is disciplined (by him/herself and others) through a web of symbols and ideas (Cannella, 2000; Foucault, 1977). Cannella (2000), for example, describes how a scientific discourse on childhood disciplines a child's body (and "adult" bodies), shaping perceived acceptable, appropriate, and "normal" behavior. Macrosociological discourses are critical for understanding the choices, values, and perceived avenues of agency for individuals.

While the macrosociological context of teacher agency is critical to understanding teacher choices, context-specific circumstances dictate the opportunities available and the constraints that define a teacher's agency. This next section will explore the theoretical rationale for the significance of the specific context.

II. Context-specific opportunities and constraints. While the macro structure of society is significant to understanding human action and behavior, such broad scale views cannot fully capture individual behavior. As Cherryholmes states, "Our choices and actions, in their totality, are pragmatic responses to the situations in which we and those around us find ourselves" (as cited in Morrow & Torres, 1995, p. 135). Discourse analysis is also very conscious of the significance of context and the choices of individuals, with Johnstone (2002) reminding us that the context shapes discourse while discourse also shapes context. Correspondingly, structuration theory foundationally conceives the context as significant to human action, as the "rules and resources" available to a given actor defines the limits of his or her choices (Giddens, 1989). In reinterpreting structuration theory, Parker (2011) says, "Human actors find themselves enmeshed in conditions not of their choosing, as objects succumbing to them, and also as subjects playing, in their own way, the hand of cards they are dealt, taking practical action with and against the surround of structures" (p. 415). Context-specific

opportunities and constraints shape the choices and actions of teachers, and a nuanced understanding of teacher agency must consider the specific context.

School funding policies provide a rich example of the significance of the school context to the experience of teaching and schooling. Because of the long history of local control over US schools, the school, district, region, and state within which an individual teacher teaches in will dictate the possibilities available. Most American public schools continue to raise some portion of their revenue from local property taxes (Reynolds, 2008), and despite litigation attempting to prove that reliance on local property taxes violates the principle of equal protection or a state's education clause, most states have not severed this reliance on locally generated revenue for local schools. Instead, states seek to make-up the difference between poorer and wealthier districts through additional funding and revenue raising caps. However, make-up funding is often one of the first budget items cut when tough economic times hit (Reynolds, 2008; Rural School and Community Trust, 2009), and local funding caps frequently have a variety of inequities built into the policies. For example, in Washington State, the state levy lid is set at 24%,¹⁸ yet there are many districts that have grandfathered lids that are considerably higher, including Mercer Island at 33.7%, Tukwila at 33.5%, Seattle at 32.9%, and Bellevue at 30.6% (Tuinstra, 2006). In addition, this funding lid only limits levies that fund operational costs, but special levies for capital improvement (including buildings and technological improvements) are uncapped. Washington State does have a levy equalization provision designed to help a poorer district reach at least 12% of the 24% allowed local contribution, yet because of the lower property values of

¹⁸ This means that a district may raise additional funds through local levies, but the amount that can be raised is limited to 24% of the state and federal funding that the district receives.

poorer districts, local property tax rates have to be much higher in order to reach these funding goals,¹⁹ further straining already poverty-impacted districts.

Within-district inequity is also quite common in states like Washington, where there is a strong Parent Teacher Association (PTA) presence along with few restrictions on how much money an individual school can raise to benefit only the students at that school. In a climate of severe budget cuts to education, many affluent parents and families are responding to fundraising requests in Seattle, WA, and individual public schools are able to raise as much as \$393,950 in a single school year, to fund additional teachers, specialists for art, reading, and computer training, and counselors (Rosenthal, 2012). Schools without such affluence are left without the capacity to offer such resources and educational supports to their students.

The inequities described here are all dependent on affluent students and students who come from poverty challenged families and communities attending different schools, and frequently residing in completely different school districts. This deep educational segregation along socioeconomic and racial lines has only become starker in the 21st century despite the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KN* in 1954, which found separate schools to be “inherently unequal” (Grant, 2009; Kozol, 2005; Lipsitz, 2006). In fact, “white flight,” or the movement of white and affluent residents from urban to suburban areas intensified during the era of desegregation post-*Brown*, and when the US Supreme Court ruled in *Milliken v. Bradley* that neighboring districts could not be required to engage in cross-district desegregation

¹⁹ As a comparison, a wealthy district like Bellevue only had to tax \$0.72 per \$1,000 assessed value of a piece of property to reach the 24% levy lid in 2008. The very poor Granger school district would have required \$8.80 per \$1,000 to reach the 24% levy lid that same year. (Rural School and Community Trust, 2009)

policies unless they were found to have deliberately engaged in segregation practices (Grant, 2009), the stark discrepancies between neighboring districts were strengthened. Private education and residential segregation also contribute to the dramatic differences within a single district (Grant, 2009; Kozol, 2005; Lipsitz, 2006).

The impact of this educational segregation is intense for educators. Truly diverse schools along racial and socioeconomic lines are becoming increasingly rare, particularly in urban areas (Kozol, 2005). Thus, in metropolitan areas like Seattle, there are basically two types of schools for teachers to work in: poverty-impacted schools or affluent schools. Teaching primarily students impacted by poverty intensifies an already deeply complex job, and this challenging work usually must be done with fewer resources and support systems compared to those available to teachers in affluent schools.

While macrosociological patterns and context-specific circumstances shape the choices of individual teachers, within those opportunities and constraints, teachers still have power to play their own “hand of cards” (Parker, 2011) or to act given their own available “rules and resources” (Giddens, 1989). While the literature on the microsociological context and structuration theory are foundation to work on teacher agency, they do not sufficiently capture the working lives of teachers in their classrooms. How do teachers respond to their context? How do they express their agency? Or, as I have termed the concepts, what avenues for agency do they find? The next three sections will explore the three interrelated avenues for teacher agency identified through this grounded theory study: *agency within constraints*, *agency within contested and ambiguous spaces*, and *structures enabling agency*.

III. Agency within constraints. Teachers in public schools do their work within a never-ending interconnected web of contextualized opportunities and constraints, both large and small,

macro and micro. The existence of constraints may limit teacher power, but they do not eliminate the sphere of teacher influence, only define the boundaries. What happens within specific constraints is dependent on the individual teacher. Morrow and Torres (1995), in their examination of social and cultural reproduction theories, chose to study the intersection of social theory and education because, as they argue, “Classrooms do not implacably construct or reproduce subjectivities but become a vehicle for confrontation of ideologies, common sense, scientific knowledge, and (social, political, and ethical) action” (p. 419). While teachers can choose to use their agency to defend or maintain the status quo, they can also make choices that confront ruling ideologies and discourses. Examples of teachers deliberately disrupting the status quo exist in both historical examinations of education and modern narratives.

A range of historians have taken on the task of exploring the experiences and working lives of teachers, and their research provides important insights into understanding how individual teachers struggled to reconcile their vision of what society could and should be and the reality of their contexts. Baker's (2006) *Paradoxes of Desegregation* is full of such examples, as is the work of Walker (1993; 2001). Baker (2006) explores segregated and desegregated schooling in Charleston, South Carolina, and identifies many black schools that he characterizes as sites of black resistance to white supremacy and educators “who made educational institutions agents of uplift in the Jim Crow South” (Baker, p. 2). Working in poor, rural Carolina County, Mamie Fields was still able to educate her students in ways that enabled them to move onto high schools in Charleston and become part of the desegregation movement. Her curriculum focused on literacy, Standard English, and “racial pride and self-respect” (p. 15). Fields actively taught her students to resist social conditioning that told them they were not a “superior person,” refusing to let students “lower their eyes, curtsy and shuffle, and hang your head” when they

came up to ask her a question, and explicitly taught students that “black isn’t a cuss” word (p. 15).

In another example, Walker's (1993) research on Caswell County Training School (CCTS) also demonstrates that African American educators created effective educational environments for their students in (and perhaps because of) segregated environments. Walker describes a close relationship between school and community with a shared sense of purpose, and that close relationship gave CCTS a “good school” reputation within the community. Walker’s research follows CCTS into desegregation, and the stark differences after desegregation in community attitude and community participation in school activities support the conclusion that during segregation, African American educators made the most of their segregated context to provide educational opportunities that were of value to their communities.

There are innumerable examples of modern teachers exercising agency despite the constraints on their practice (for a variety of teacher narratives that address this subject, see Au, 2014; Nieto, 2005; Vilson, 2014). Kennedy's (2005) research seeks to discover why there is a gap between school reform ideals and everyday teaching, and she discovers that teachers must interpret reform ideals and new standards through their own values. As she writes, “Even if policymakers were able to completely influence teachers’ decisions about *what to teach*, they could have little influence over the important question of *how to teach*” (p. 132). Powell (2011) points out that “the loosely coupled structure of schools restrict the impact that top-down reforms have on state and local educational administrations and local schools” (p. 241), allowing space for innovative programs and teachers to challenge the status quo in special education policy. Allaf (2006), a student teacher in two different “inclusive” special education elementary classrooms in New York City, attests to exactly what Powell describes. She spent her practicum

year with two cooperating teachers at two different schools, allowing her to personally see how teachers can have radically different interpretations of how to include students identified as needed individualized education plans (IEPs) into a general education classroom, despite teaching within the same school district. While there are resource and other structural constraints on education, the choices an individual teacher makes regarding what might appear to be the smallest of decisions can greatly impact the learning experience for students.

IV. Agency within contested and ambiguous spaces. Discourse theory proposes that a critical space for agency exists in contested and ambiguous spaces (Ahearn, 2001), as the existence of multiple and competing avenues of action or speech (or uncertain avenues of action or speech) makes the choices of individuals particularly significant. This concept is supported by Foucault's (1977) proposition that power works through subjects. While we are disciplined into a subjectivity by our historical and cultural context and our relationships, Foucault theorizes, power is not exerted by an outside force, but works through individuals shaping our own (and each other's) subjectivity. When conflicting "disciplining" exists, an individual theoretically has more opportunity to choose, to exert agency in this contested space. Ambiguity in structures provides a similar opportunity, for without clear and direct disciplining, an individual has more power to shape his/her own subjectivity. Examples of these types of agency abound in education, due the proliferation of contested and ambiguous spaces.

The history of African American education provides many examples of how ambiguity and lack of structure have made space for individual choices. Baker (2006) is particularly interested in the fact that exclusion from the mainstream became a source of strength for many African American educational institutions. He states, "As blacks were driven to the margins of southern life and forced to turn inward, they built a network of schools and colleges that played a

crucial role in advancing the race” (p. 4). The ambiguity of the margin allowed for individuals to shape that margin. Baker particularly explores Burke Industrial School in Charleston, “the only publicly supported secondary school for African Americans in the rural South Carolina lowcountry” (p. 20), as a site of black resistance. Baker contends that Burke was able to have the influence it did because white administrators, who technically were responsible for supervising the school, routinely and explicitly ignored Burke. This isolation from the dominant gaze resulted in more independence for black educators, who Baker contends were political despite not overtly challenging white supremacy, through their insistence “on the sanctity of knowledge and the innate humanity of black children” (as quoted in Baker, p. 39).

Other educators have also used the ill-defined nature of educational policy to improve the educational experiences of their students based on their own convictions and philosophy of education. Andrews (2002) describes Clarence Three Stars, an Oglala Lakota educator at reservation day schools around the turn of the 20th century, as an educator who rearticulated the purpose of his students learning English. Instead of approaching the instruction of English as “a way to obliterate antiquated tribal languages and replace them with the keystone of Anglo-Saxon civilization,” Three Stars “emphasized English proficiency not because it allowed Indian children to be incorporated into the American mainstream, but because it gave them the strength to remain apart and persist as Oglalas in a nation controlled by whites” (p. 425). English proficiency was the stated goal of the educational policy, yet how students were to reach this proficiency was left open to interpretation by individual teachers. By not opposing the dominant ideology of English language education wholesale, Clarence Three Stars was able to keep his job for over 20 years, yet through subtle modifications was also able to subvert the dominant agenda.

I discovered a similar situation in my 2012 work with a pair of inclusion co-teachers, who described a lack of clarity from their district regarding exactly how co-teachers were to “co-teach,” resulting in “people just end up doing whatever they want” (Gourd, 2012, p. 18). While sometimes “whatever they want” resulted in the reproduction of the status quo, there remained space for others to take up the reins of leadership and shape the meaning of the term “inclusive co-teaching.”

V. Structures enabling agency. While structure, including rules, policies, and institutions can frequently be portrayed in a negative light in discussion of individual agency, structure is also the enabler of agency. Giddens's (1989) structuration theory is contingent on exactly this concept, for without the preexisting rules and resources, individuals would not be able to produce the next generation of structures. Many historical and present day examples can be examined to help clarify this avenue of agency.

Weiler (1994), in her study of California rural supervision in the early 20th century, discovered that the gendered nature of education led to the exclusive appointment of women to the new commissioner of elementary education position in California, a position established as part of the movement to increase oversight of rural (primarily female) teachers. The structures of gender discrimination can be seen in the fact that no male ever held this position (created in 1914, it was eliminated in the early 1960s), and Weiler says, “from its inception, [the position] provided an opportunity for women’s leadership and the furthering of women teachers’ interest” (p. 30). The existence of discrimination based on gender was the means of gaining leadership opportunities for these Californian women.

In a similar example, California began appointing “rural school supervisors” in 1921, and although the initial vision was to hire men for these positions, lack of suitable male applicants

resulted in the majority of rural supervisors being experienced rural women teachers. Led by a female commissioner of elementary and rural education (Helen Heffernan after 1926), the role of rural supervisor developed into a position that sought to support and enrich the work of “capable rural teachers” (Weiler, 1994, p. 35). Weiler concluded that while increased supervision was motivated by a desire to exert more control over (female) educators, this movement “made possible the institutional support for women’s leadership and women teachers’ work” (p. 43). This is another example of how the structures of discrimination enabled leadership by a marginalized group.

In a more modern example, while the discourse of derision aimed at public school teachers has resulted in a variety of reforms that intend to “fix” the problems of incompetent or inadequate educators, some educators have taken the opportunities and resources presented by these reforms to improve their own practice and the educational experiences of their students. O’Donnell-Allen (2004) and Fairbanks and LaGrone (2006) describe teacher research groups that were formed as part of the movement to increase ongoing professional development for practicing teachers. Both research groups chose to use the push for increased professional development to create opportunities for the collaborative construction of knowledge among teacher colleagues. Similarly, many teachers working in inclusive co-teaching relationships have used this opportunity to push and develop their own practice, learning professionally from the experience of having a teaching partner (Allaf, 2006; Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 2007; Gourd, 2012). O’Donnell-Allen argues that such professional relationships “can enable teachers to raise their voices in broader arenas” (p. 51), resulting in more powerful expressions of teacher agency.

Teacher agency is complex, multi-layered, and fundamental to teaching. Teachers navigate the macro- and microsociological contexts of their work with daily and mundane acts of

agency, and deeper understanding of these choices will help us arrive at a more nuanced understanding of what it means to teach.

Chapter Conclusion and Preview of Chapter Five

This chapter endeavored to introduce the theory for understanding teacher agency through extant theoretical literature, current research, and historical data on the professional lives of teachers. While there is compelling theoretical evidence for the theory for understanding teacher agency, the full analytical power of the theory is more evident through use as a multi-dimensional analytical tool. Therefore, the theory for understanding teacher agency is used as the conceptual framework for the analysis of the empirical data from the co-generative research study conducted with Bernstein's Co-Taught Inclusion Research Team. The analysis of this empirical data is undertaken in chapter five, with the five dimensions of the theoretical model tested through use as a multi-dimensional analytical tool to examine three descriptive themes that emerged from the empirical data.

Chapter Five: Empirical Research Findings

During the first meeting of the CTIRT, Ella, in response to her colleague's concern about the lack of clarity on inclusion and special education from leadership both at the building and district levels, responded,

My feeling is that they're struggling [at the district level] with a new superintendent, to figure out who's going to be in that position [of Director of Special Education] and then to develop a vision for special ed again. But ... I would love for Bernstein to be able to say [regarding inclusive special education], "This is what we do *here*, these are what our outcomes are, this is the work we've been doing." (Ella, Session 10/31/12, lines 425-431)

How can we understand a comment like this? What contextual factors motivated this statement of vision? How does Ella view her professional agency? What is she trying to motivate her peers in the CTIRT to do? These are the kinds of questions that the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency seeks to unpack, to provide a multi-dimensional analytical tool that will enable educational researchers and educators arrive at a more nuanced understanding of teacher agency in practical contexts.

As described in chapter four, five dimensions of a theoretical model for understanding teacher agency were identified through this grounded research study, and can be viewed in Figure 5.1. (i) Macrosociological context of teacher agency and (ii) context-specific constraints and opportunities are critical to understanding the choices made by the teachers in this project. Within their macro- and micro-context, the teacher participants found ways to (iii) exert agency within their perceived constraints, (iv) take advantage of ambiguities and contested spaces to exert agency, and (v) use available structures to exert agency. While these five dimensions are

described as distinct phenomenon, in practice they are closely interrelated, as the intersecting circles of Figure 5.1 indicate.

A Theoretical Proposition for Understanding Teacher Agency

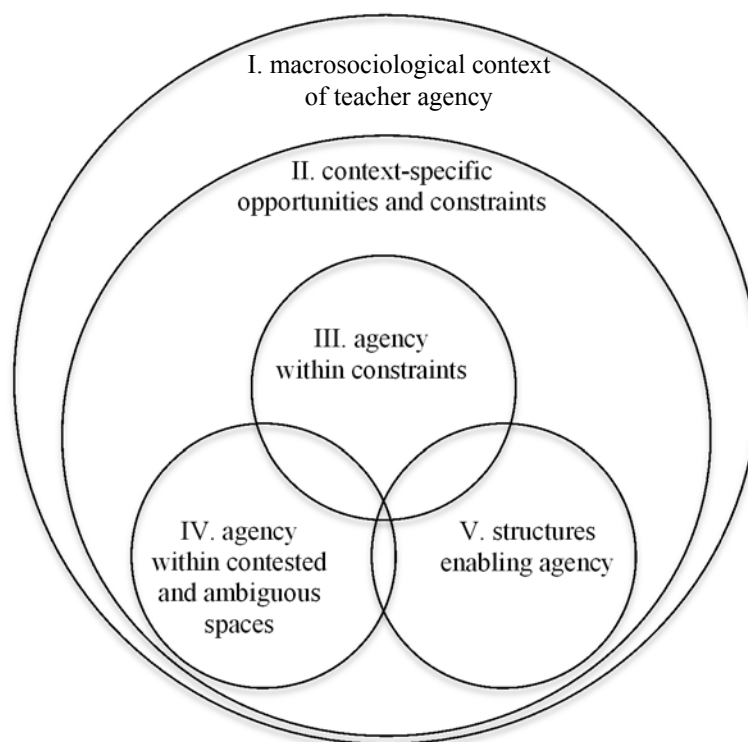


Figure 5.1. Gourd's theoretical model for understanding teacher agency. This figure visualizes the conceptual framework for this study, which is the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency.

Therefore, the organization of this chapter is structured around three significant descriptive themes that emerged from the data. The theory for understanding teacher agency will be used as a multi-dimensional analytical tool to deepen understanding of the significance of each of the three descriptive themes. For example, the first theme, (a) the constraint of time, will be analyzed through examining the relevance of temporal pressures on a macrosociological scale to the teachers of this project, as well as the impact of time constraints unique to inclusion co-teachers working at Bernstein Middle School in 2012-2013. Within this macro- and microsociological context, the choices and decisions made by the teachers in regards to their

self-study project will be examined, considering how they found agency given the constraint of time and how they used ambiguous spaces and the available structures to enable their choices. The second and third descriptive themes, (b) inclusion: philosophies and school policies, and (c) the supremacy of data, will also be analyzed using the theory for understanding teacher agency as a multi-dimensional analytical tool.

The Constraint of Time

Time emerged as a theme from the inception of this collaborative research project. When the inclusion faculty at Bernstein approached me to facilitate their self-study, their project was proposed as something that they had never had the time/taken the time to engage in. As Regina said at our first session, “We’ve had this program for a long time, and we’ve never really looked at: What are the outcomes?” (Session 10/31/12, lines 160-162). During this first session, the issue of time emerged so consistently that I felt obligated to address it myself in the concluding moments of the session, saying, “I hear you about the time issue ... that’s a consistent theme. And one thing I want you guys to understand is that what I’m interested in doing is what you need me to do” (Tina, Session 10/31/12, lines 1227-1232). The issue of time consistently factored into the discourse and choices of the teacher researchers of this project, both on a macrosociological level as well as in context-specific decision-making.

Macrosociological context: “Any teaching job has enough work for two people.”

Time was not just discussed by these teacher participants as a challenge for themselves as individuals, but also consistently raised as an issue with broader significance in the field of education. Time was related to issues of respect for teachers and the work of teachers, as well as salient to issues of equity and bureaucracy.

While pointing out that all teachers including Bernstein's co-teachers are overworked, Regina said, "Any teaching job has enough work for two people to be doing it all of the time" (Session 10/31/12, lines 117-119). Her comment captured both a desire for the work of teachers to be recognized as intellectually complex as well as a desire for a more equitable working environment, one where teachers either have more time to complete the work expected of them, or have less work to do in the time available. Many others echoed her description of the overwork experienced by teachers. Kristopher's comment emphasized what he feels is lost when teachers are so stretched for time, saying,

I end up doing so many other things that are away from the students that I'm always constantly feeling like I'm not putting enough direct time, and quality time to the students. I'm not being creative with it. I know I could be with my students, but I don't have time to do it. And I think they're getting the short end of the stick. And sometimes the parents are as well. (Kristopher, Session 10/31/12, lines 385-390)

Kristopher highlights the perspective that unreasonable working conditions negatively impact students and their families, as well as teachers.

Another time-related issue of inequity raised by the research participants concerned compensation. Drew, when asked to explain what "inclusion" meant to him, said, "[inclusion is] making a commitment to spend more time for the same amount of pay" (Drew, Session 10/31/12, lines 40-41). While he immediately apologized for the negativity of his comment, Drew was not alone in making connections between time, compensation, and professional respect. While the teacher researchers believed that the work they did with all students (with and without IEPs) was effective and important, there remained a sense that they were being exploited, asked to spend more time and effort in their work without sufficient additional

compensation, compensation that would have communicated that their labor and time was valued. Regina, once again articulating that she perceived these issues as stemming from a context far broader than their specific school, pointed out that, “This is kind of a district issue, but ... the fact that special ed department chairs get the same or less than other department chairs when they are responsible for so much legality is *ridiculous*” (Regina, her emphasis, Session 10/31/12, lines 445-450). Compensation frustrations were linked by the teachers to issues of inequity in the field of education beyond their specific context, as they expressed kinship to broader sociological struggles for equity and respect in their profession.

The constraint of time was also linked to dissatisfaction with the high levels of bureaucracy and frequent policy and administrative turnover in the field of education. While the teacher researchers approached this research project with evident enthusiasm (they had invited me to work with them, not the other way around), many also expressed doubt that this work would have a long-term impact given a constantly shifting bureaucratic climate, including the rollout of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Washington State, a state audit of Seattle School District’s delivery of special education, and a principal beginning her first year at Bernstein. Teachers appeared to struggle between a more idealistic desire to participate wholly in this work with a more cynical conviction that the time spent on this project could potentially be for naught. Chuck captured this undercurrent of frustration by questioning the potential impact of this project at multiple points during our research year, such as when he asked during the development of a mission/vision for the inclusion co-teaching department, “Does that mean that the research we do runs the risk of being irrelevant because the building vision will already have been established?” (Chuck, Session 1/16/13, lines 55-57). Working within the large, multi-level bureaucratic institution of the public school can leave individual teachers feeling powerless and

“irrelevant.” If they and their work are “irrelevant” anyway, then why should they spend precious time trying to improve their program and their practice? As Chuck said, it is a “challenging thing to look at the immediate time that you put into something if you’re not sure that it’s even going to be around next year” (Chuck, Session 10/31/12, lines 410-413). While these feelings of discontent did not halt this project, the teacher researchers’ discourse consistently referenced these salient issues in the sociopolitical context of teachers’ professional work.

Context-specific opportunities and constraints: “It’s meetings, emails, and paperwork.” While it is possible to trace the salience of these macrosociological issues through the discourse of the teacher participants, they, as actors, were bound by their context-specific opportunities and constraints. Given the significance of time, context-specific temporal issues directly shaped many of the choices of the teacher researchers in this project.

Meeting time was a critical and scarce resource, and a source of deep tension at Bernstein. Teachers both saw the necessity of meeting with a variety of configurations of their colleagues and deeply resented having to take time away from their classrooms. As Kristopher said, “I know these have to happen, so I’m not saying they can be cut out, but it’s meetings, emails, and paperwork. And that’s what just drives me batty. And I feel like I am shirking the students because of it” (Kristopher, Session 10/31/12, lines 391-394). Yet most discussions of how to solve school-related challenges raised the necessity of finding meeting time. In the 10/31/12 session, the teacher participants argued about the relative value of “House” meeting time versus “Team” meeting time versus “Department” meeting time versus “Full Staff”

meetings,²⁰ with a variety of voices chiming in regarding the significant work that happened in each of those configurations. Whether they resented the amount of time they spent in meetings or not, finding meeting time was generally recognized as the first necessary step to any kind of progress or change.

The existence of this research project was naturally dependent on finding regular meeting time for this new configuration of staff as well, a grouping that had previously never met together consistently. Because of the relationship between time, compensation, and professional respect, the teachers insisted that these research sessions take place within paid and contracted professional development hours. Prior to approaching me to serve as facilitator to this self-study, the co-taught inclusion research team (CTIRT) had gotten a commitment of meeting time from the administrative team at Bernstein, who had promised a selection of professional development time spaced evenly, approximately once a month, throughout the 2012-2013 school year. However, the CCSS rollout across the district and state emerged as a new factor in late

²⁰ The “house” included faculty for an entire grade level, i.e. all of the faculty that taught primarily 6th graders, 7th graders, or 8th graders. A “team” at Bernstein refers to a smaller group of teachers who work with a group of approximately 150 students, which was a smaller division within a grade level. Bernstein’s size resulted in either two or three “teams” per grade level. The core representatives of a “team” usually include language arts/social studies and math, with some inclusion of science teachers depending on grade level. On the “Inclusion Team,” the special education co-teachers were also included in a “team.” A “Department” divided the faculty across content regardless of grade level, such as the Social Studies Department, Mathematics Department, and the Special Education Department.

2012/January 2013,²¹ competing for the scarce resource of paid professional development time. Several outside facilitators were brought in to work with the Bernstein staff on CCSS integration, and the expectation was for these facilitators to meet with the full faculty regularly throughout the year. The amount of full group meeting time for the co-teaching inclusion research team was suddenly significantly constricted.

Agency within constraints: “We’re still playing with the timeline.” The completion of this project was fully dependent on the constraint of time, for without full group paid professional development time, the envisioned self-study could have fizzled in January 2013. If it was to continue, actions and decisions had to be made within the bounds of the shifting time constraints. The choices of the teacher researchers, the supervising administrator, and the facilitator in this critical moment are illustrative examples of how individuals exert agency within constraints.

Crysta, the assistant administrator who worked with the CTIRT as part of her administrative responsibilities, broke the news of the lost full group meeting time to the research team in the 1/16/13 Session, and in her statement, she did her best to communicate (a) the necessity for making accommodations to the previous schedule, (b) the potential value of the CCSS professional development (PD), and (c) express her continued commitment to the co-taught inclusion research team’s self-study project. She said (regarding the outside facilitators, who were in the building that day),

²¹ I was alerted to potential changes to the original envisioned project via an email from Crysta, the administrative liaison, on 1/2/13, when she stated, “Tina, we may need to cut down on the days we have with the team because we need the whole staff to do PD on common core and content area literacy.”

They are going over briefly Common Core, and then delving deep into that. And then the rest of the time we're going to be looking at Common Core and tying it to content area literacy for the rest of the year. Which is part of the reason why, talking with Tina, I said, "We [the research team] have this January date, then we need to let all of you guys be with the rest of the staff for more of what they're going to be doing." And then we'll come back [as a research team] to analyze data and then revisit mission/vision. (Crysta, Session 1/16/13, lines 719-725)

When pressed by a teacher researcher about how both the self-study project and the Common Core PD were going to be accommodated, Crysta said,

We'll still have to excuse ourselves from some of the Common Core pieces. So I'm working closely with them so that ... like, today's one [example]. I said, "This is a great day for us to miss, because it's an overview of Common Core, and I know that math and literacy has done some work around that." Now, as we get a little bit deeper in, we also have a math person that's going to be coming in ... And so that's why it's probably going to be February that we're going to be back with them. When we want to look at the data [for the self-study project] again, it will probably be more like March-ish? Then April we'll be back with the rest of the staff, and then ... so, we're still playing with it. (Crysta, Session 1/16/13, lines 741-751)

Through Crysta's efforts to find compromises and components of the Common Core professional development from which the CTIRT could be excused, in the end, we were able to meet as a full research team six times, in addition to a presentation to the full staff on the results and significance of our research data. (See Appendix C for a list of CTIRT meetings, by date. Note the gap in full group meetings between January and April 2013.)

While not all meeting time was lost, how was a research project to be completed in the time remaining to the research team? Collaborative research requires time for collaboration, and the team could no longer meet together during the middle of the project window, in February and March. Through an email exchange with Crysta in early January, Crysta and I agreed that during the 1/16/13 session, the team would “decide on research questions and data collection methods.” Then I (separate from the full group, in February and March) would “do the data collection decided upon, and then we can meet much later, like in April(?) to review data and analyze. Then [meet] one more time before the end of the year to revisit mission/vision based on data” (email summarizing plan from me to Crysta on 1/5/13). While the facilitator and the administrative supervisor had crafted a theoretically feasible plan, the 17-member CTIRT had to act to make the plan successful in the limited time frame.

Agency within contested and ambiguous spaces: “We just got hung up.” At the start of the 1/16/13 Research Session, I still envisioned that this self-study project would consist of a singular collaborative research project, with one research question and one set of data to be gathered and analyzed. A PowerPoint slide prepared by me articulating the end goal of the session stated: “After all groups have shared, Tina will facilitate a compromise to decide on a research question (plus sub questions) and data collection strategies for 2013” (“13-01-16 ID Meeting,” slide 6). The constraint of time contributed to my assumption that a singular project would be the most feasible option. Yet my original vision of a singular project did not necessarily fit the interests and needs of the teacher researchers, as their discussions throughout the session indicated. While the project *timeline* was constrained, the *configuration* of the project was much more ambiguous (we had not yet decided what the self-study would consist of), and the teacher researchers took advantage of that fact, as their actions and choices during the

1/16/13 research session demonstrates. The process of defining this collaborative research project is a good example of how an ambiguous space (i.e. “defining our collaborative research project”) can provide opportunities for individuals to exert their agency.

By the end of the 1/16/13 research session, our hypothetical singular collaborative project had morphed into six individualized research projects, all linked by one overarching research question, “Are our students making academic and social-emotional progress?” (summarized by me in the 1/16/13 session, lines 1264-1281). This question was broad enough to capture the wide range of research interests of our group, for without the time to come to full group consensus over the design of a singular research project, the 17 teacher researchers responded by splitting themselves down to grade level/subject teams. (See Appendix F to compare the research design choices of the six grade level/subject research teams.) As Ella said, “We just got hung up” (1/16/13 Session, line 992), and smaller groups allowed for more individual control on issues over which the full group did not have time to come to consensus. These smaller groups (of two or four) had more (paid) opportunities to discuss the design of their individualized project and come to agreement over particular design aspects. In addition, because they worked closely together as grade level teaching teams, research design questions (such as what research measures to use) were simpler to answer, as their history of past collaboration worked to their advantage.

To illustrate the diversity of perspectives that led to the shift to six individualized research projects, I will describe one research design principle that generated a range of discussion on 1/16/13. In order to move forward on their project, the teacher researchers interested in learning more about student academic progress needed to decide on appropriate

sources of data. However, Kristopher immediately raised the issue of how to control for teachers delivering instruction differently. As he said,

When you're comparing co-teaching and not co-teaching ... well, maybe you can look at grades and see a difference between the two different types of classes, but that might be based on the teachers or those particular students, not whether the effectiveness is actually co-teaching versus [non-co-] teaching. I don't know how they would be able to separate that. (Kristopher, Session 1/16/13, lines 293-299)

Kristopher and his co-teacher, Jim, remain skeptical of whether student data across different teachers could be compared, and they eventually chose to design their research project to reflect this concern (see Appendix F). When asked by a peer as to whether or not data from other 8th grade math students (not taught by them) had been included in their data analysis, Jim defended their research design by explaining,

One of the variables I really wanted to cut out, was [variations in teachers]. I know this is the curriculum that we're using, and this is the way we're teaching it, so we can kind of cut that variable out, and just use my non-inclusion and then our four inclusion [to compare student scores]. (Jim, 4/3/13 Session, lines 863-867)

Another research team, Drew and Luke, also elected to collect data only internally, within their own classes (See Figure 4.2, "6th Grade Mathematics"). Drew's rationale for this decision also included a concern for professional relationships. As he said, "I'm concerned about the word 'compare,' because sometimes after compare comes judgment" (Drew, 1/16/13 Session, lines 962-963). These two grade level/subject teams solved these research design issues by designing projects that could be completed with data only from their own students.

Other teacher researchers felt that comparisons across different teams in the building were critical in order to answer the types of questions they had about their own instruction.

Jasper captured this perspective most clearly when he said,

[An 8th grade Humanities teacher not part of the CTIRT] teaches the Spectrum group, and we have the inclusion [group]. And I do expect my kids to – if we’ve done a good job scaffolding the lesson – to meet the same learning target as those spectrum kids. And that’s kind of the high expectation we’ve set for our inclusion program. (Jasper, 1/16/13 Session, lines 359-363)

For some grade level/subject research teams, they deliberately chose to reach out to colleagues outside of the CTIRT, which gave them access to student data beyond their individual classrooms (see Appendix F).

While there are many constraints that appear immutable in the profession of education, individuals can respond to defined constraints by identifying less defined spaces in which they can exert agency. For the teacher researchers in this study, a less-defined space was the configuration of their self-study project. In response to their loss of full group meeting time, they chose to adjust the configuration of their research study, individualizing and multiplying their research agendas, rather than agreeing to a single joint project that would have required a great deal of compromising by a variety of teacher researchers.

Structures enabling agency: “That’s work that Tina and I could do.” In exerting agency over the configuration of this project and the timeline for its completion, the teacher researchers relied on a variety of structures (policies, rules, resources, institutions) to defend and support their choices. While structures can create constraints, they can also enable agency.

This project would not have come to fruition without the active support of the administrative team, led by Crysta as the administrative liaison working with the CTIRT. Given that Bernstein had a new principal as of fall 2012, the teacher researchers relied on Crysta to advocate on their behalf with the new principal, to communicate the value of their research efforts and the importance of following through with the commitments made by the previous principal to the research team. While the teachers sometimes presented Crysta with challenging questions,²² these verbal challenges can also be interpreted as acts of trust. The teachers chose to share regarding their concerns because they knew that if they convinced Crysta of the seriousness of their concerns, then she would be in a position to advocate for them. They knew how to use the existing administrative structures to protect and advance their interests. Indeed, their trust in this administrative structure proved well-founded, as Crysta was instrumental in identifying meeting time for the CTIRT while accommodating the mandated CCSS professional development, served as a primary contact for me as the outside facilitator, arranged for an opportunity for the CTIRT to present their research findings to the full Bernstein staff, and negotiated many large and small details to make this project feasible and relevant.

²² For example, Chuck's question, "Does that mean that the research we do runs the risk of being irrelevant because the building vision will already have been established?" (Chuck, Session 1/16/13, lines 55-57) was directed specifically to Crysta. In another example, Madelaine, in an email protesting a suggestion by Crysta to complete project development within only two weeks, stated, "I can't give any more of my own time this week for anything extra in terms of data planning and am guessing that is true for many team members" (1/31/13 email from Madelaine to Crysta and Tina).

In addition, without reaching out for additional resources, specifically a neutral facilitator and researcher from the University of Washington, collaborative action research would have been a much more daunting and possibly unreachable goal. As time constraints became more rigid for the teacher researchers, my role in data collection and data analysis for the six action research projects expanded. As Crysta articulated during the 1/16/13 Session, the resolution to many of the project's time constraints was to identify parts of the project for which she and I could assume responsibility, or as she said, "That's work that Tina and I could do that maybe you guys [the teachers] wouldn't have to" (Crysta, Session 1/16/13, lines 1208-1209). The teacher researchers were conscious that I was also invested in the realization of their research agendas, and took advantage of many of my offers of resources, including my time, my modest expertise, and analytical tools to which I had access as a student at the University of Washington.

With the loss of full group meeting time for the CTIRT, the research team also fell back on other existing professional structures, including existing professional learning communities (PLCs), common planning time, and common formative and summative assessments which had been developed through their PLCs.²³ PLC meeting time was particularly important for research projects that intended to use student data from teachers who were not part of the CTIRT, as the teacher researchers designing these projects needed an opportunity to explain the goals and purpose of their research project to their non-CTIRT colleagues. In addition, the teacher

²³ PLCs at Bernstein had been developed in response to new Washington State regulations regarding the maintenance of professional certification, which require certified teachers to develop and complete a Professional Growth Plan (PGP) each year in order to renew their teaching certificates. See <http://program.pesb.wa.gov/professional-growth-plan-pgp-t> for more information regarding PGPs.

researchers were able to “sell” the research project to their peers because they chose to incorporate instructional measures (common formative and summative assessments) that had been previously developed by the PLCs. Since the measures already existed, the teacher researchers could present their CTIRT project to their colleagues as necessitating very little additional work. Once teachers had agreed to participate, all teachers (members of the CTIRT and those who were not) provided their student data to me, and I completed the student coding and the data analysis on behalf of the CTIRT.

Making the most of available resources is a significant component of teacher agency. While structures like limited time and funding can constrict options, other structures enable proactive choices. The teacher researchers in the CTIRT relied on other rules, resources, and relationships to enable their project, even as their paid full-group meeting time evaporated.

Inclusion: Philosophies and School Policies

From our very first session, the concept “inclusion” emerged as contested ground, and it remained a flashpoint for discussion for these teacher researchers through to our final research session in June. Given our desire to complete a successful collaborative research agenda, how the members of CTIRT exerted agency given the diversity of thought around “inclusion” and special education school policy is fertile ground for understanding teacher agency. Using the theory for understanding teacher agency as an analytical tool, I will first examine the broader sociological discourses related to inclusion and special education referenced by the teacher researchers, and then describe a context-specific school policy that emerged as a reoccurring tension. Teacher agency within this macro- and micro-context is then examined, specifically how teachers used the contested nature of the debate to get their voices heard.

Macrosociological context: “What do we mean by ‘inclusion’?” Institutionally and colloquially, the co-taught inclusion program and co-taught classes at Bernstein were referred to as the “Inclusion Program,” and “inclusion” classes, with the teachers of these classes known as “inclusion teachers.” Yet, when asked, “What does it mean to you to be an “inclusion teacher?” one teacher researcher responded,

It’s how I think about what a teacher’s job is. And so I would love it if we moved away from the notion that there are “inclusion” classes because we don’t call other classes “exclusion” classes. And we said that the responsibility of a socially just, moral teacher is to teach the student that walks through that door, from the level that student enters in. And that’s just non-negotiable, institutionally. Whether or not you have a co-teacher in the room, that’s still the teacher’s responsibility regardless of the difficulty of that task. (Chuck, Session 10/31/12, lines 94-102)

Embedded in this comment is awareness of significant macrosociological tensions in education and special education, including disputes over student legitimacy, institutional responsibility, and equity in access to education. Why are some students considered “special,” implying that their education is not necessarily as legitimate as those whose educational needs are deemed “normal?” Is it an institution’s responsibility to meet the needs of all students, regardless of the financial cost of providing the needed staff and materials? Why is the inclusion of students with special identified needs considered an exceptional educational circumstance, and not the rule? Chuck’s comment communicated a frustration with uncritical acceptance of the discourse of exceptionality embedded in the concept label of “inclusion.”

Despite Chuck’s critique, however, for many of the teacher researchers participating in the study, the term “inclusion” had deep positive significance, critical for their understanding of

their work and how students with IEPs should be supported. “Inclusion” is the label applied to a fundamental shift in how students with special needs are served in public schools, specifically policies and programs that support students with IEPs while they are instructed with their peers in “general education,” rather than separated into “self-contained” classrooms. The belief that every child has a right to a seat in a general education classroom is not universal, and the teacher researchers spoke and made research choices that demonstrated their daily struggle against intentional and unintentional messages that students with IEPs, and by association, the teachers of students with IEPs, are not equal to their peers. One teacher researcher compared her experience teaching in a self-contained special education program with her experience in a co-taught inclusion program, saying,

When I had IEP meetings or meetings with teachers, it felt like my desire to know more and collaborate with others was a nuisance, or another thing for them to do. Inclusion changed that. I imagine that this is how many of our students feel: isolated, a nuisance, or a burden. And I think inclusion changed that, too. (Bea, Session 10/31/12, lines 56-61)

“Inclusion” for Bea and others signified a substantial shift in access to more equitable education for students identified as needing special education services, a shift that had had positive outcomes for students and teachers. These positive associations with the term made it challenging for many members of the CTIRT to assimilate Chuck’s critique regarding the exceptionality discourse inherent in the term “inclusion.”

Another teacher, Willis, pushed back against descriptions of all classes at Bernstein as “inclusive” by saying, “I don’t know if I’d call that inclusion when they’re not getting direct support.” He further clarified his thinking by saying,

Because I feel that's more of what traditional "mainstreaming" is: when kids are in a classroom and they are not necessarily directly supported. And I don't want to ... let the word "inclusion" be watered down to just mean that the kids are there. I think it needs to specifically mean that they are directly supported by a special ed professional. (Willis, Session 12/12/12, lines 2021-2031)

These differing perspectives on inclusion exemplify how macrosociological discourses and tensions emerged in the discussions of the teacher researchers. All of the above philosophical comments were made with emotion and passion, yet represented very different and sometimes conflicting, perspectives on the meaning of "inclusion." In order to make progress on a collaborative research agenda, the CTIRT had to find a way through philosophical disagreements, especially when school policy conflicted with strongly held philosophies.

Context-specific opportunities and constraints: "Why aren't the science teachers here?" These debates on the meaning of "inclusion" were not just rhetorical or philosophical, but were particularly salient for the teacher researchers because the very composition of our research team had been impacted by the local, school-based interpretation of "inclusion." There were no science teachers at our research sessions, and their non-presence was a contentious issue for many research participants because the exclusion of these teachers symbolized a significant friction within their building and program.²⁴ Science teachers had long been the only "academic"²⁵ educators to be unsupported with a designated special education co-teacher within

²⁴ The make-up of our research team was decided by the administration.

²⁵ While the term "academic" was also heatedly debated, the term was used to distinguish between classes such as mathematics, language arts, social studies, and science (the "academic" classes), and "elective" classes, such as music, art, and world languages.

Bernstein's co-taught inclusion program, and thus, science teachers were also excluded from "inclusion" professional development and activities such as the CTIRT. The policy that excluded science teachers was rooted in a scarcity of resources argument, with the limited special education faculty teamed with teachers of subjects identified as most important by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, specifically teachers of reading and mathematics (for a description of NCLB, see Ravitch, 2011). Because social studies had historically been "blocked" with language arts, co-taught classes at Bernstein from the inception of the program through the 2012-2013 school year were mathematics, language arts, and social studies.²⁶

The exclusion of the science teachers from the CTIRT was tangible evidence of the boundaries that had been defined by school policy, and such boundaries made teachers "a little bit nervous" to discuss their research with non-CTIRT colleagues, because, as Erica articulated, "[science teachers] teach every student that comes in the room. [Art teachers] teach every student that comes in the room ... I think the whole school should be here, you know? Should be a part of this?" (Erica, Session 10/31/12, lines 105-111). Yet school policy dictated the exclusion of all but 17 humanities and mathematics co-teaching teachers.

Finding agency within constraints and contested spaces: "I know we've had this conversation, but ..." This contested space (Should science be part of the inclusive co-teaching program at Bernstein and this research team? How should science teachers and students be supported by Bernstein's inclusion program?) was repeatedly raised as a critical issue by a

²⁶ Ella summarizes this program history in Session 10/31/12, lines 628-640. Regina then goes on to clarify that Individual Education Plans (IEP) goals are written with state and national policies in mind, and focus on reading, writing, and mathematics as academic areas, not science (Session 10/31/12, lines 644-648).

diversity of participant researchers over the year of this study. (See Appendix F for a tabulation of the number of discourse events by date.) The number of discourse events that involved science indicates that the teacher participants found this issue significant, *and that they wanted to make it a significant issue for others*. Discourse analysis methodology reminds us that while discourse is shaped by its context, discourse also shapes its context (Gee, 2010; Johnstone, 2002). A variety of participants chose to exercise their agency in this contested space by bringing up the subject, which forced others who did not necessarily agree with their position to spend time and effort wrestling with these thorny issues. In the 12/12/12 Session, Crysta, the assistant principal present at the meeting, joined in the conversation around science by saying,

I know that we've had that conversation about, "Why isn't science [at these meetings]...", and I think [that] ideally yes, that's what we are going to do as a staff, eventually ... That we, as a Bernstein, huge community, need to revisit what our mission and vision is ... [But] science right now does not have a co-teaching model ... And so, right now, if we're going to take a deeper look, I think we take a deeper look at the model that we have right now, which is a co-teaching model [that science is not part of].

(Crysta, Session 12/12/12, lines 1945-1967)

In this speech event, Crysta has acknowledged that the teachers who repeatedly raised the issue of science as a contested issue cannot be ignored, even as she is attempting to find a resolution that will satisfy these voices in the present moment.

The teacher participants of CTIRT were aware that there were constraints on their ability to change school policy around which subjects were targeted for specific instructional support from the special education faculty. Certainly, no policy change would have any impact on the composition of the CTIRT during the 2012-2013 school year. Yet the frequency of these types of

discourse events in the data demonstrate that the teacher researchers felt empowered to raise their voices on this contested issue, agitating repeatedly to compel the administrators present at these sessions to confront, defend, and possibly reconsider school policy. While the teacher researchers did do as Crysta proposed, and put aside their frustrations with the exclusion of science in Bernstein's co-teaching inclusion program long enough to meaningfully complete this self-study project, they also rarely let a chance to protest or pushback pass them by (see Appendix G). This type of discursive activism strove to shape the debate around the definition of the inclusion program at Bernstein, a means of exerting agency within constraints as well as within a contested space.

The Supremacy of Data

Different perspectives on philosophy and policy influenced many of the conversations in the CTIRT, but much of the discourse naturally centered on the work we had come together to do: a self-study research project on Bernstein's co-teaching inclusion program. Rationalizations for this project and articulations of its significance were naturally found throughout the data collected through the year of this study, as teachers explained to me, to their administrators, to each other, and to their peers why their larger research agenda and their individual research projects were important. An analysis of the wide range of discourse on this subject reveals that *data* held a vital significance to the teachers in this study. The role of data in their professional lives was something they contended with on a daily basis, and they also chose to take an active role in data collection on their professional work through this self-study project.

The theme of "data" will be analyzed using the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency, beginning by examining the macrosociological discourses that the teachers referenced in their rationales for their project and their context specific constraints and

opportunities. Teacher choices within this macro- and micro-context are then discussed, to better understand how teachers acted within the constraints they perceived, and how they sought to use ambiguous spaces and available resources to attempt to shift the discourse on “student progress” and “inclusion” in their building.

Macrosociological context: Discourses of accountability and legitimacy. This self-study project took place during the 2012-2013 school year, and the discourse of the teacher participants reveals that one of prevalent conversations in the educational world in 2012-2013, particularly in Seattle, was the legitimacy of standardized testing data and the accountability movement. As the this project began at the end of October 2012, only a few miles away, teachers at Garfield High School in Seattle were organizing to formally protest the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), a protest announced in January of 2013 (Micucci, 2013).²⁷ This protest got national attention, adding fuel to conversations across the country regarding standardized testing (Wolfgang, 2013). At Bernstein in 2012-2013, the teacher researchers of CTIRT were also grappling with the testing and accountability movement, and how this movement impacted perceptions of their professional legitimacy.

The teacher researchers expressed wide-ranging frustrations and anxieties that they attributed to the high-stakes and standardized testing movement. One frustration was the perceived mismatch between the tests and curriculum. As Drew said,

²⁷ The MAP is required by the Seattle School District as a reoccurring formative assessment measure, which in 2012 was required two to three times a year for grades kindergarten through high school (until students tested as proficient). The Garfield protest is credited for Superintendent José Banda’s May 2013 decision to reduce the MAP testing requirement in Seattle to grades kindergarten to eighth grade (Micucci, 2013).

The MAP score is an easy score, but there's a lot of discussion about how does the MAP curriculum, if there is any, or the little objectives in each of the ranges, how does that relate to what we're doing in the classroom in the first place? If we're teaching to the MAP, let's put away the other stuff, and we'll focus on that!" (Drew, Session 10/31/12, lines 1099-1104)

This comment echoes a common critique of the testing movement, that high-stakes testing will result in teachers narrowing their instruction to ensure success on a single measure of "progress." It also demonstrates professional anxiety over whether standardized tests scores are used to determine a teacher's effectiveness. If it is to be the measure of how well I am doing, says Drew, then he'll "put away the other stuff," and "focus on that!"

Other teachers on the project expressed similar concerns, such as the MAP test in particular failed to reflect the curriculum movements in the Humanities department which valued sustained and rigorous reading and writing. As Regina expressed,

The problem with MAP, the things that kids are being asked to do, and I can speak only for reading, is *nothing* like what we teach. And it's ridiculous that we're asking kids to take tests that are things that they haven't learned, like poetic terms and really, things that are not a part of our curriculum if we think about Readers' and Writers'" (Regina, Session 10/31/12, lines 1153-1157)²⁸

Recognition of "poetic terms" did not match Regina's vision of the goals of her reading curriculum, and attempts to judge her students (and her own legitimacy as an educator) with this measure was deeply frustrating.

²⁸ Regina is referring to Columbia University Teachers College Readers and Writers Workshop curriculum, which was a significant component of Bernstein' Humanities curriculum.

While the general education teachers expressed frustrations with testing due to curricular mismatch, special education teachers also raised issues of inequity in connection to standardized testing of students identified as needing individualized educational programs (IEPs). Erica recounted a particular event from several years previous that was vivid in her mind, describing,

We, as special ed team, [were asked to] look at the special ed kids and see how much growth they have or have not made on the MSP²⁹ and [asked,] “What does that tell you?”

And we were like, “[scoffing noise]!” (Erica, Session 1/16/13, lines 654-656)

Erica was clear that these test scores did not contain, for her, useful information regarding her students’ academic growth. As Regina and Aline chimed in, students are “not being assessed on their goals,” and “tested above their level” (Session 1/16/13, lines 657 and 659). Standardized testing that does not account for student educational goals and legally required accommodations is not a valid measure for these educators, of either their students’ progress or of their own effectiveness as educators. In Aline’s words, “[Students are] taking a sixth grade reading and math test for the MSP, and they’re second grade level. That’s not a fair test” (Aline, Session 1/16/13, lines 541-542).

The accountability movement has other facets beyond high-stakes and standardized testing of students, such as the increased scrutiny of teachers and a focus on developing teacher evaluation systems (see US Department of Education, 2014). The need to provide data that demonstrates student learning because of accountability pressures was a consistent factor that appeared to dominate the thinking of these teacher researchers. For example, during time provided to discuss the design of this study, the conversation of a small group of primarily

²⁹ MSP stands for Measures of Student Progress, the Washington State standardized test for grades 3-8.

special education teachers took a somewhat lengthy detour to share knowledge around how to collect the data required for their yearly teacher evaluations. Their discussion covered confusions over the policy and expectations (What kind of data are they supposed to collect? Which students should they be collecting data on? How should that data be compiled and then reported?) as well as frustrations with the time required for the data collection (Session 1/16/13, lines 546-588). The need for data on student learning appeared to influence many of their professional choices, for their professional reputations were dependent on this data.

A few minutes later, this same group of women began discussing the challenges they saw with standards-based grading systems when working with students with IEPs. Erica recounted a story of being in a special education workshop on autism and the reaction of the facilitator when she mentioned standards-based grading. In her words,

I raised my hand, and said, “Well, we have students who, you know, are being graded based on standards,” and she was ... she like, freaked out! “Who’s standard is that? What standard is it? Is it their standard?” I was like, “Okay! I’m sorry!” (Erica, Session 1/16/13, lines 674-677)

This recounted interaction demonstrates the tensions and pressures these teachers experience in trying to navigate a larger system obsessed with “proving” comparative growth while also fulfilling their responsibilities to individualize instruction for their students.

At this moment in the macrosociological landscape of education, standardized data appears to reign supreme. The teachers of the CTIRT repeatedly articulated, implicitly and explicitly, that the pressure to gather data on student learning was a constant presence in their professional lives. Whether they liked it or not, positive student growth data was linked to their

professional legitimacy. In their specific context, teaching in a co-taught inclusion program, particular types of data became the focus of their interests and conversations.

Context-specific opportunities and constraints: “I don’t know where we stand.” In a climate of accountability, shrinking educational budgets, and a new principal, the teachers of the CTIRT frequently expressed anxiety over the longevity and sustainability of their co-teaching inclusion program. As Chuck expressed,

I’m not really sure what the building-level vision for inclusion is right now. I don’t know that co-teaching is valued; I don’t know that this is something that the building [values] – because of the district, I think, and pulling back resources and because in a shift of focus towards standards, outcomes as opposed to a model that looks more holistically at a child – all of those things being changed in the bigger educational picture, I don’t know where we stand. (Chuck, Session 10/31/12, lines 403-410)

Teaching in a non-mainstream program meant that the teachers of the CTIRT felt particularly vulnerable and anxious to demonstrate their legitimacy.

In a climate where data was highly valued, their focus from very early in this project focused on asking questions and gathering data regarding the legitimacy of their professional work as co-teaching inclusion teachers. Regina’s statement at our first meeting clearly captured what became the undisputed goal of this self-study project:

We’ve had this program for a long time – we’ve never really looked at: what are the outcomes? What are they, in terms of data? And I’m not like, the biggest data person, but I do feel like, I think we have a lot of anecdotal data, we’ve got a lot of sense from kids and from parents, things like that. But, to really look at: What are the goals, what are the big parameters for inclusion, and then how do we measure if we’re meeting those? I

mean, I have a sense that we are in a lot of ways, but I'm sure there are places where we really need to work. And so, figuring out what are the things we can assess and look at across time, and then how do we know if we're meeting what we're trying to do?

(Regina, Session 10/31/12, lines 260-272)

The choices of the teachers of the CTIRT were grounded in this context of programmatic uncertainty and professional anxiety, and the designs of their self-study projects can be seen as a reflection of these concerns.

Agency within constraints: “What is the data that *you* want to gather?” While the teachers of the CTIRT complained about the pressures of accountability movement, their choices and actions show that their energies were focused not on directly opposing the movement, but rather on shifting accountability expectations in ways that felt more appropriate and relevant to their professional experiences. In some ways, they can be understood to be playing within the rules of the accountability movement with the design of their broad research question, “Are our students making academic and social-emotional progress?” This question focuses on collecting data regarding “student progress,” and the data collected would presumably say something about the professional effectiveness of the co-teaching inclusion program. Despite staying within the constraints of the accountability movement, however, the teachers of the CTIRT used their agency to decide (a) what data was collected, (b) what measures were used to collect their data, and (c) for what purpose the data was to be used.

What data? Given their ever-present anxiety over their programmatic legitimacy, the teachers of the CTIRT were very interested in collecting data that would speak directly to what they saw as lingering questions and suspicions regarding the efficacy of the co-taught inclusion program. The most evident example of this desire to address concerns of the wider community

was the choice of half of the individual research projects to design projects that allowed them to discuss how the co-taught inclusion program served students without IEPs (the majority of their students, and the majority of the population at Bernstein). (See Appendix F for a comparison of all projects.) Whether the co-taught inclusion program served special education students well (or was at least more effective than previous models of special education delivery) was not perceived as a source of tension. Rather, the teachers of the CTIRT appeared to think that the open question was whether general education and honors students in inclusion classes suffered academically due to their placement. As Aline articulated, “I don’t think the community is fully aware or informed about co-teaching ... gen ed parents might be wary of SPED [special education] kids affecting the learning environment” (Aline, Session 1/16/13, lines 503-506). Jim articulated these concerns as well, saying in reference to the 8th Grade Mathematics research project,

We’re kind of curious if inclusion helps all the groups. So the honors students who are in inclusion, are they getting pushed as hard as the honors students who are not in inclusion? ... Hopefully the honors kids in the regular classes will be doing just as well as the honors kids [who are] in the inclusion classes, and there won’t be a big significant difference there. But, we kind of want to see if there is. (Jim, Session 4/3/13, lines 834-855)

The gathering of this data can be understood as an act of agency to provide the type of data that the teachers hoped would legitimate their co-teaching inclusion program in the eyes of the wider community. As Aline said, “I want the gen ed kids to feel like they’re getting the same education as everybody else [not in the co-taught inclusion program], but with extra” (Aline, Session

12/12/12, lines 1704-1704), and these projects sought data that would address context-specific professional anxieties regarding programmatic legitimacy.

What measures? To answer questions regarding the academic progress of students without IEPs in the co-taught inclusion program, the teachers of the CTIRT could have chosen to use existing data, such as comparing MAP or MSP scores of non-IEP students in the co-taught inclusion program versus in non-IEP students in the regular program. However, the teacher researchers were adamantly against using standardized testing measures to answer their research questions, and unanimously preferred to design and use their own measures of “progress.” Whether they used individually designed measures or collaboratively designed measures, the teacher researchers were in consensus that standardized measures alone provided insufficient information on their students’ progress.³⁰ While they continued to use the discourse frame of the accountability movement, which emphasizes the importance of data on student progress, the members of the CTIRT chose to use their teacher-built assessments instead of standardized assessments.

While all the teachers pushed back against standardized measures through their design choices, only one project, 7th grade humanities, rejected the accountability movement’s preference for numbers or quantitative data.³¹ As Chuck articulated to the rest of the CTIRT, the design of their qualitative project was motivated by a desire to

³⁰ The one use of standardized measures was Madelaine’s use of MSP data to compare the progress of Bernstein’s IEP students with IEP students across the state of WA. She presented this data during the CTIRT’s presentation to the full staff on 5/22/13.

³¹ While 8th grade humanities also focused on social-emotional data, they chose to write a survey, which let to a quantitative analysis of responses.

get away from quantifiable data a little bit, just because I have such a skepticism over quantifying these things that seem to include so many variables that we're picking kind of random things, and then we push so hard into it, and there's so much behind that one data point that could be specious, that we wanted to look more at how kids think, talk about their classroom experience. (Chuck, Session 4/3/13, lines 386-392)

Chuck was passionate on the subject and convinced his small research team to follow his lead to resist the discourse that elevates quantitative data over qualitative data. Instead, this group of teacher researchers, inspired by Kohlberg's moral dilemmas (Kakkori & Huttunen, 2010), chose to write a scenario on empathy and groupwork. As Chuck described, they constructed a "story that poses some sort of dilemma that a student in a classroom would face" (Session 4/3/13, lines 398-400) and then asked a cross section of students within inclusion and non-inclusion classes a series of questions regarding their responses to the scenario. However, the five other research teams stayed within the discourse frame of the accountability movement in their interest in generating quantitative data, while preferring to analyze numbers generated from their own research measures.

For what purpose? The discourse of the accountability movement includes a consistent questioning of teacher effectiveness and legitimacy, and the teachers of the CTIRT did not act to resist or deny the existence of pressure to "prove" their effectiveness. Instead, within this constraint, the teachers choose to view their self-study research project as a proactive and perhaps preemptive move that would collect data on their professional effectiveness on their own terms. In critiquing what he saw as a lack of leadership from the district in resisting the accountability movement's overvaluing standardized testing data, Drew said,

I think there's something that has to come from the district level that says, "We encourage you to have these other ways of showing improvement. We value that! And no matter what the public – we're going to put out this other information that gives important information about how we're doing." ... We can't be dependent on the MAP and what they're telling us that way. (Drew, Session 10/31/12, lines 1119-1125)

In a show of support for the research design choices of the CTIRT, Crysta, the administrative liaison for the CTIRT, said, "What it comes down to ... data talks. And we want to make sure that when we're looking at data we're not looking at just one isolated piece, but that we have multiple measures" (Crysta, Session 10/31/12, lines 1137-1140). Regardless of whether the district supported or required "multiple measures," the teachers of the CTIRT chose to collect data that they hoped would supplement the narrative on the effectiveness of their teaching.

Agency within contested or ambiguous spaces: What is "student progress"? While the discourse frame that prioritized data on student progress was mostly accepted as a fixed constraint by the teacher researchers of the CTIRT, they still found ambiguous or contested spaces in which to resist parts of the discourse that they found particularly problematic. One such ambiguous and contested space was the meaning of the concept label, "student progress."

Common rhetoric (as evidenced by the No Child Left Behind legislation, see Ravitch, 2011) predominantly defines "student progress" as synonymous with "academic achievement," yet this term is open to different interpretations. What does "progress" look like for students in middle school? What about for a middle student in a co-taught inclusion environment? What about such a student who also has an IEP? In a context that has increasingly prioritized quantitative academic progress over affective progress, the teachers of the CTIRT consistently articulated concern that *social* and *social-emotional growth* was becoming devalued and excised

from common understandings of “student progress.” Regina articulated this concern early in our work, saying,

As the push for meeting standards have gone up, students’ ability to interact socially has gone down ... “What does it mean to be a student?” “What does it mean to interact with someone positively?” “What does it mean to be in a community?” ... These are middle school kids, they’re 12, 13, 14 ... They’ve got to build a lot of things in them that has nothing to do with whether they meet the standard in writing. I mean, we all know that that’s important work; we believe that there are things that they need to know. But we need to make sure we really are addressing the whole child, and not just being all about standards, standards, standards. (Regina, session 10/31/12, lines 893-908)

Regina was not alone in a desire to broaden the interpretation of “student progress” beyond quantitative academic achievement scores, and choices were made at various points in the self-study project that reflect this desire to shift the meaning of the concept label.

Part of the work we engaged in, as the CTIRT, was to draft a mission/vision statement for Bernstein’s Co-Teaching Inclusion Program, and this work clearly demonstrates the desire for social-emotional growth to be valued, arguably on par with academic growth. This collaboratively designed document, titled, “The Mission, Values, and Vision of the Co-Taught Inclusion Program at Bernstein Middle School,” opens with this statement,

We are a community of professionals dedicated to an inclusive, nurturing, safe, and supportive learning environment, which honors individuality, encourages self-advocacy, values pride in our school, and *where ALL students are able to achieve academic, emotional, and social growth and success.* (emphasis and italics in original; see Appendix H for full document)

When drafting their overarching research question for the CTIRT self-study project, the inclusion of social-emotional growth was also deliberate, asking “Are our students making academic and social-emotional progress?” (summarized by me during the 1/16/13 session, lines 1264-1281). The teachers of the CTIRT were cognizant that the current climate of accountability has a narrower definition of “student progress,” but they were also aware that conflicting interpretations for the term existed. In what I would call an exertion of their agency in a contested and ambiguous space, the teacher researchers chose a more inclusive definition for “student progress.”

In an even more overt move to subvert the narrowing of the definition of “student progress,” two grade level/subject research teams chose to gather data on the social-emotional progress of their students in their co-taught inclusion program. The 8th grade humanities research team created a survey that asked their students and families a series of questions concerning if students felt “safe, nurtured, supported, and academically challenged” in their co-taught inclusion classes.³² The 7th grade humanities research team, as described previously, chose to design an “empathy dilemma,” as they were curious as to how their students “conceptualize ‘fairness’ and ‘equity.’” (See Appendix J for the scenario for the 7th grade Humanities research project.) While their colleagues focused on academic growth data, these two teams of teacher researchers choose to spend their intellectual energy gathering data on aspects of “student progress” that have not been in the spotlight within the accountability movement.

Structures enabling agency: “This is the work we’ve been doing.” Throughout the year of our work together, the desire to communicate and engage with colleagues outside of the

³² Two versions of the survey were made, electronic for students, and a hard copy for families, found in Appendix I. See Appendix F to see research questions for all projects.

CTIRT was repeatedly expressed. Erica was not alone when she said, “I think the whole school should be here, you know? Should be a part of this?” (Erica, Session 10/31/12, lines 109-111).

The concern that the work they did in the co-teaching inclusion program was invisible or unacknowledged by their community was so consistent that I presented “community understanding” as a possible focus for self-study research at the 1/16/13 CTIRT meeting (see Appendix D). While this research focus was rejected in favor of examining student academic and social-emotional progress, the desire to improve the perception of co-taught inclusion within the wider community continued to contribute to many decisions of the CTIRT. We can examine the actions and choices of the teacher researchers through considering the structures they used to enable them to exert agency over how their professional work was perceived by others.

This project was conceived and organized based on a desire to gather data that would help the teachers of the CTIRT communicate from a place of more power. As Crysta articulated, “What it comes down to ... we know data talks” (Crysta, Session 10/31/12, lines 1137-1138), and the teachers of the CTIRT wanted data to help them speak more powerfully. As described earlier in this chapter, they used a variety of structures to collect this data and justify the collection of the data, including but not limited to administrative structures, contacts in academia (me), existing structures for professional growth and development like Professional Growth Plans (PGPs), and the prevalent discourses of accountability. Once they got their data, they strategized to share it.

The intention of sharing their data with the full staff was built into the initial structure of the project. As Regina articulated during our first session, the CTIRT was

planning to bring data and those results, anecdotal or whatever, to the entire staff, and sharing that as a staff. And posing other questions, at that point, to the staff, about how

[that data] might change ourselves – not just us in this room, but the entire staff. (Regina, Session 10/31/12, lines 947-950)

Regina’s intention is clear: to provide data on their co-taught inclusion program that would help the Bernstein community “change ourselves.” The full staff presentation was eventually planned for 5/22/13, when all six grade level/subject research teams shared their research questions, procedures, and findings, and engaged in a brief discussion of the significance of the findings. (See Appendix K to see summarized research questions and findings for all six projects.)

After the presentation, feedback from the full staff was collected, and an examination of the data indicates that the CTIRT had had good instincts about the kinds of assumptions and perceptions held by their peers who were not part of the co-taught inclusion program, as well as the type of presentation/data that would be the most effective in shifting the discourse around the program. The most common response to the exit ticket prompt, “What information was new or surprising or interesting to you?” was that there was “little or no statistical difference in scores in inclusion and non-inclusion classrooms.” (See Appendix L to see the compiled data from the full staff exit tickets.) Three of the six research projects had been intentionally designed to gather data regarding the difference between the academic progress of students in inclusion and non-inclusion settings because the teacher researchers felt that the wider community was uncertain about the quality of education received by students in the inclusion program, particularly non-IEP and honors students. The discovery that there was no significant difference between the academic progress of students in inclusion and non-inclusion across all three of the studies made an impression on the full staff.

The second most common response to the prompt of what was new/surprising/interesting to the audience was that they “appreciated the use and analysis of so much data.” As Crysta

stated early in the work of the CTIRT, “data talks” (Crysta, Session 10/31/12, line 1138), and a presentation that was unmistakably centered on the sharing of data was very well received. The use of one of the most prominent discourse frames of the accountability movement (the veneration of data on student progress) for their own agenda was arguably a successful strategic move by the CTIRT.

The CTIRT hoped to make an impact on their building, to influence discussions regarding inclusion, co-teaching, and the support of students with IEPs. While this study did not include an evaluation of their long-term impact, the teacher researchers were satisfied and pleased with their efforts to leverage their agency on behalf of their students and the co-taught inclusion program. After examining the exit ticket data, Bea summarized the observations of her group by saying,

There were not as many comments of saying, “Oh, this is not useful,” or “This isn’t interesting,” but more on, “This is interesting, and I have questions and I have reservations, but I’m willing to listen and I want to know more information.” (Bea, Session 6/17/13, lines 605-608)

The staff’s openness to learning more about the work of the CTIRT was a mark of professional respect that was very pleasing to the teacher researchers.

Their pleasure at this positive response led many of the teacher researchers to think about next steps and further leadership opportunities. Drew began thinking about the possibilities of action research, saying,

One of the nice things I thought about this was the idea of modeling that there’s things that we can all be doing to gather information, that gives us more informed decisions to analyze and evaluate our program that we’re running, whether it be the inclusion

program, or the inclusion program inside of an inclusive school. (Drew, Session 6/17/13, lines 640-645)

Ella, however, had a broader vision of how this data could impact the future of inclusion at Bernstein. She said,

With the focus now on special ed in our district, I think this type of work is really important for us to do. They say they're going to be sending teams into each building, to see what they're doing with special ed. It would be nice for us to say something other than, "Um ..." when they ask us, "What is inclusion at Bernstein?" [We will] have work that we were doing, kind of heading in the direction of assessing our program, and really understanding what we do. (Ella, Session 6/17/13, lines 658-668)

This comment is reminiscent of the statement that Ella made at our first session back in October, the statement that opened this chapter. The work of the CTIRT, from the gathering of data, the presentation of findings to their peers, and the discussions that this work generated, placed the CTIRT in a position to be able to say to their community and the wider district, "This is what we do *here*, these are what our outcomes are, this is the work we've been doing" (Ella, Session 10/31/12, lines 430-431). Data does indeed talk, and the teacher researchers of Bernstein's co-taught inclusion program were now prepared with data to do their talking.

Chapter Conclusion and Preview of Chapter Six

This chapter was organized around three significant descriptive themes that emerged from the data, (a) the constraint of time, (b) inclusion: philosophies and school policies, and (c) the supremacy of data. The theory for understanding teacher agency was used as a multi-dimensional analytical tool to deepen understanding of the significance of each of the three descriptive themes. Within the macro- and microsociological context, the choices and decisions

made by the teachers in regards to their self-study project were examined, considering how they found agency given constraints, and how they used contested and ambiguous spaces and available structures to enable their choices.

Chapter six will discuss the significance of these analyses, considering the usefulness of the theoretical model for teaching in practical contexts and in teacher education. Areas for future study are considered as the chapter concludes.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

Parker Palmer (1998) argues that, “In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resources called the teacher on whom so much depends” (p. 4). Public school educators, more than 3.7 million strong (Hussar & Bailey, 2014), make choices every day that critically impact the experience of schooling for millions of students. Understanding teacher agency, both the limits and opportunities that define that power, as well as the possible avenues for expressions of power, is the challenge taken up by this study. Instead of taking a well-traveled path of demeaning and disheartening educators, I began with a conviction that power and agency exist, and with a desire to conceptualize the functioning of teacher agency in a way that would be useful for educational researchers, teacher educators, and teachers themselves, both novice and experienced. This chapter addresses the usefulness of the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency presented in this study.

I begin with a discussion of the implications of this theory to understanding teaching in practical contexts, considering the importance of understanding the macrosociological and microsociological context, and then the significance of the three avenues of teacher agency identified by this grounded theory study. The three tensions in the study of teacher agency, introduced in chapter one, are then reassessed in light of the empirical research study. A discussion of the implications of this theoretical model to teacher education follows, considering how the theory is helpful for anyone learning about teaching as a profession, and the particular usefulness of this theory for novice teachers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of directions for future research.

Implications of the Theory to Understanding Teaching in Practical Contexts

Palmer's (1998) sentiment that began this chapter highlights a reoccurring tension in the field of education: the treatment of teachers as technicians by educational policy. Policy that presumes that teachers can and should mechanically execute policy fails to understand the nature of teaching, to recognize that an individual stochastic artist inhabits the role of teacher. How are we to support teachers to improve the profession, if we deny that individual choices and actions are fundamental to practice? The focus of this study was to better understand teaching, to develop a theory that would allow me to help others to better understand the nature of teaching.

A theory “is not an ‘absolute truth’ but rather a tentative explanation of a phenomenon” that seeks to “facilitate comprehension of a social world” (El-Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014, p. 7-8). Each dimension of the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency seeks to explain the nature of teaching in ways that acknowledge the wisdom, experience, and commitment teachers bring to the profession. The proposed theory, although not an absolute truth, captures several significant concepts in the study of teacher agency.

Understanding the macro- and microsociological context. This study is not the first to articulate the importance of examining the sociopolitical context of teaching (see Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Nieto, 2010, among others). However, before seeking to understand a specific teaching moment or choice, this study suggests that both the macro- and microsociological pressures on the teacher or a group of teachers should be explicitly analyzed. The teacher researchers of the CTIRT regularly brought attention to the macrosociological discourses in which they were immersed, even as they made choices contingent on their specific microcontext. For example, it is important to consider that the teachers of the CTIRT were deeply aware of discourses that linked time, compensation, and professional respect before trying to understand

why they refused to engage in work for their self-study project outside of paid professional development time. Without a close analysis of the relationship between the macro- and the micro-context, we might miss that their specific actions (demands for compensation) were entwined within a complex network of discourses and structures that demean the work of teaching and contribute to arduous working conditions for teachers, a situation which directly impacts the quality of teachers' interactions with students.

Similarly, how can we understand the teachers' desire to ask research questions regarding the progress of their non-IEP and honors students (in addition to the progress of their students with IEPs) if we do not consider wider discourses of accountability and the pressures to "prove" teacher effectiveness through standardized test scores of students? As the meaning of "serving students well" narrows to "can you show that your students are making academic progress?" the teachers of the CTIRT responded in their microcontext as teachers in an inclusive special education program by seeking to show that they could compete with those in general education. The study of both the macro- and microcontext of their agency helps us arrive at a nuanced understanding of teachers acting within a complex web of structures.

Three avenues of teacher agency. As we examine teachers within their macro- and microcontexts, it is essential to understand that many structures create constraints that teachers may be unable or unwilling to resist with direct action. The rollout of CCSS resulted in required building-level professional development activities. Administrators had the power to decide who was a part of the CTIRT and who was not. Quantitative data speaks more convincingly in our society than anecdotal, qualitative data alone. These were constraints and discourse frames that the teacher researchers in this study did not try to or could not shift, but that does not mean they had no agency. Constraints do not dictate action, but simply define the boundaries of choices.

CCSS professional development was required, but these teachers could have responded to the new constraint in a variety of ways. The teacher researchers did not give up on the self-study project entirely, or limit the scope of their project, or adjust their self-study into a multi-year project. Instead, they found ways to complete their original vision of a yearlong self-study project despite the new constraints. How teachers choose to interact with and within the structures of schools is a fundamental avenue for teacher agency, and critical to any discussions of educational reform or school change.

The concept of “contested spaces” can also be useful in understanding why, how, and where teachers push against macro- and micro-structures. Camicia (2008) distinguishes between “open” and “closed” issues based on the multiplicity of perspectives, with issues tipping towards “closed” as the numbers of differing perspectives diminish. When issues appear “closed,” without differing perspectives, teachers may not see the need or the opportunity to use their power to change the relevant structures. But “open” controversies provide different opportunities. The meaning of “inclusion” at Bernstein appeared to be an open controversy, with competing perspectives on how to interpret the term, and how to translate that meaning into school policy. Is “inclusion” a term that is part of the exceptionality discourse that privileges “general” education to “special” education? Or is “inclusion” a term that centralizes the needs of students with IEPs within the responsibilities of a school community? Or, is “inclusion” a term that refers to a model in which students with IEPs receive direct support from special educators in general education classrooms? The open nature of the controversy around the meaning of inclusion seems to have empowered the teachers of the CTIRT to consistently bring up the issue of how inclusion was implemented at Bernstein. This type of agency, which I have termed *discursive activism*, was a means to challenge what could have appeared in some contexts as a

fixed constraint (“inclusion” school policy), using the power of their voices to keep the possibility of alternate policies at the surface of the community’s thoughts. In fact, one could argue that the issue was “open” precisely because of teachers who had used their voices to contest school policy.

Discursive activism may be less visible than direct action, and therefore may be seen as less powerful. Yet daily and mundane speech can be critical in making direct action possible. For example, Mallory Clark, when asked what led her to be a critical leader in the Garfield High School MAP protest, described being a part of many conversations at staff meetings where she and her peers had raised their voices in protest to the MAP test (Mallory Clark, personal communication). This discursive activism during staff meetings allowed her to hear and contribute to arguments for and against the MAP test while gauging the passion of her peers and clarifying her own position, and motivated her willingness to take direct action to organize a protest. While direct action is sometimes venerated, discursive activism is arguably a necessary prelude and companion to direct action.

Ambiguous spaces also can provide an opportunity for agency. While a lack of common understanding for concepts such as “inclusion” and “student progress” can cause tensions, ambiguous concepts also provide opportunities for teachers to craft their own meaning for critical terms. The teachers of the CTIRT describe doing this partly out of self-preservation, as they needed to form common understandings of ambiguous terms like “student progress” in order to approach their work, but many also articulated a preference to define meaning for themselves rather than be informed of how to understand their work by others. If a teacher disagrees with the way “student progress” is being interpreted, the very ambiguity of the term can allow for an individual interpretation. In addition, if we understand concepts as social

constructs (Larson & Keiper, 2011), it is theoretically possible to shift the meaning of a concept through discursive activism, particularly at a specific site or school.

The third avenue for teacher agency that this theory addresses is considering how teachers use available structures to enable their agency. Educators may tend to characterize structures in the negative, for example focusing only on the limits administrators place on teachers' agency. While administrators at Bernstein did decide who participated in the CTIRT, how much paid professional development time the research group had, and oversaw all aspects of the work that the teacher researchers engaged in, they also played a critical role in enabling the teachers' agency. In structuration theory, current rules and available resources are critical to enable social actors "to express themselves *as* actors" (emphasis in original, Giddens, 1984, p. 2). Administrative structures (and many other structures) were part of the rules and resources that enabled the members of the CTIRT to express themselves as teacher researchers, a fundamental aspect of their agency.

The interrelated nature of the five dimensions. El-Hussein et al. (2014) describe a theory as a statement regarding "possible relationships" between conceptual categories (p. 7-8). This emphasis on the *relationship between components* of a theory highlights that the five dimensions are more powerful as a coherent, interrelated theory, compared to a series of discrete concepts. While we may arrive at a partial understanding of teacher agency if agency is examined without considering the context in which the action takes place, our understanding of agency is incomplete. In addition, without examining how the microcontext nested within the macrocontext is both distinct and dependent on macrosociological discourses, we have only a shallow understanding of the context for agency. The three avenues for agency are also interrelated, and are only conceptually distinct, rather than distinct in practice. For while

constraints define the boundaries of agency, those boundaries are sometimes contested or ambiguous, and agency is expressed through exploiting the controversies or the ambiguities. Furthermore, structures are always being used to enable agency, and will be part of all expressions of agency. To arrive at a deeper understanding of teacher agency in a practical context, all five dimensions of the theory can be used as a multidimensional analytic tool, to provide a more complete picture of the nature of teaching.

Addressing tensions in the study of teacher agency. This dissertation introduced the study of teacher agency in chapter one by highlighting three tensions in how teacher agency is frequently characterized in the literature: (i) teacher agency as a “special” phenomenon, (ii) teacher agency as a “positive” phenomenon, and the conceptualization of (iii) agency occurring “despite” the context. Analysis of the agency of the members of the CTIRT reveals the problematic nature of these common conceptualizations.

While passionate, committed, and intelligent, the teacher researchers of the CTIRT were arguably not exceptional, and they enacted no notably “special” acts of agency. The power of their work was in the collective power of smaller, more mundane speech, choices, and decisions. I propose that teacher agency is a much more common and pervasive phenomenon, despite its frequent characterization as something “special” that “special” educators “do.” As conceptualized in this study, teacher agency is fundamental to all professional work, and this study seeks to understand the *avenues* of teacher agency, rather than seeking to highlight discreet acts.

A second tension in the study of teacher agency is the frequent characterization of teacher agency as a “positive” phenomenon. The conceptualization of “positive” agency necessitates a value judgment, a desired outcome that a teacher is working toward, or a desired outcome

identified by the researcher, with the teacher's choices being evaluated against this desired outcome. Through my analysis and research study, I contend that the inclusion of value judgments obscures the researcher's ability to see the nuances and complexity of teacher agency. What was the desired outcome of this co-generative research study? It may be easy to assume that successful completion of a collaborative research project was the desired outcome, but this would be a simplistic assumption.

As the facilitator and a researcher there to observe agency, my desire was to facilitate the desires of the CTIRT. However, what was the desire of the CTIRT? No one-dimensional answer would suffice to answer this question. Not all of the members of the CTIRT agreed on what they wanted. Some did not know what they wanted and were willing to be convinced by their peers. Desires also shifted from moment to moment, as conflicting desires had to be negotiated, such as when the desire to have more time for classroom instruction conflicted with a desire to engage in meaningful collaborative research on their professional practice. Sometimes desires were contingent on other desires being fulfilled, such as when willingness to engage in this research project was contingent on the administrative team identifying paid professional development time to honor the intellectual efforts of the CTIRT. To identify a single desired outcome on which to base an evaluation of "positive" agency necessitates a deliberate obscuring of the nuances of teacher decision-making, and does not contribute to a deeper understanding of teacher agency.

The third tension in the study of teacher agency has been repeatedly addressed in this dissertation study, and therefore will only receive a brief mention here. I assert that characterizations of teacher agency as something that occurs "despite" the context are fundamentally flawed, for it is the context that shapes teacher choices. Resistance narratives can

only occur if there is something to resist (the context!), and teachers who are effective within challenging contexts, I would argue, have figured out how to find agency within their contextual constraints, have found structures in their context to enable their agency, and have exploited ambiguities and contested spaces in their context. Agency happens within a context, not despite it.

Implications of the Theory to Teacher Education

Labaree (2004) suggests that the myriad struggles in education and teacher education are due to a core problem: “teaching is an enormously difficult job that looks easy” (p. 39). Because the reality of teaching is different than its reputation, teacher educators often see part of their responsibility as making the complex nature of the work of teaching more visible. The purpose of social foundations, for example, has often been understood as helping educators to “make informed and ethical choices within their educational practice” and “to understand the consequences of their actions as educators” (as cited in Philip, 2013, p. 203). Yet sometimes, the efforts to help education students or novice teachers understand the complexities of the work of teaching result in students feeling overwhelmed and powerless (Miretzky, 2010; Philip, 2013; Pollock, Deckman, Mira, & Shalaby, 2010; Tozer & Miretzky, 2005). The next sections consider the implications of the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency to teacher education as well as to any examinations of teaching as a profession.

Teaching novice teachers. Philip (2013), describing the challenges he found in teaching a social foundations course, wrote of his students,

They feel that the course played an important role in getting them to struggle with the relations of power that shape education, but they also express that they are left with a

feeling of uncertainty with respect to how they might address these issues as a teacher. (p. 204)

Pollock et al. (2010) describe similar feelings among their education students. In their study, they conclude that education students who are engaged in professional development on race struggle with three tensions, tensions that the authors encapsulate through the question, “But what can I do?” Pollock et al. change the emphasis on different words in this question to capture each of the three tensions: “But what can I *do*?” (desire for concrete action), “But what *can* I do?” (fear of powerlessness in the face of institutional structures), and “But what can *I* do?” (anxiety over personal readiness).

The tensions that Pollock et al. (2010) and Philip (2013) describe would, I suspect, be recognized by any social foundations instructor in a teacher preparation program. Yet comments such as, “But what can I do?” also signal that there is a serious disconnect between how novice teachers view their agency and the avenues for agency that practicing teachers regularly employ. Specific discussions of agency may be missing from many social foundations courses and yet may help novice teachers answer the question, “But what can I do?” A theory for understanding teacher agency, as developed in this study, could contribute significantly to the ability of social foundation educators to frame such discussions.

The distinction yet interrelationship between the macro- and microcontext, for example, is an aspect of agency that may be useful to address to what Pollock et al. (2010) identify as a reoccurring tension between the abstract and the concrete. Extremely concrete suggestions for what teachers “can do” may feel too simplistic, for both social foundation instructors and teacher candidates, yet Pollock et al. report that students also find abstract suggestions too vague. Perhaps concrete suggestions feel too simplistic when they are detached from *context*, both the

macrosociological and the microsociological. The theory for understanding teacher agency explains that teacher agency is fully embedded within a context, *and that context will be unique for every given teacher*. Social foundations courses are naturally more able to address the macrosociological context of teaching, due to the infinite variation of microcontexts. Yet keeping conversations at only the macrosociological level implicitly dismisses the importance of the microcontext, and may lead to critiques that a social foundations course is “too abstract” or “too theoretical.” Grounding conversations of “what you can do” within the theory for understanding teacher agency could address the tension between the abstract and the concrete, allowing social foundations instructors to help candidates consider how both the macrosociological and microsociological context are critical to answering all versions of the question, “But what can I do?”

The three interrelated avenues for teacher agency are also potential tools for helping novice teachers understand and envision their own agency. Teacher candidates can engage in hypothetical thinking exercises using the theory, either fully hypothetical if they are not simultaneously in a practicum, or using a specific “problem of practice” gleaned from their practicum experience. The language of the theory provides an organization for discussion, a way to directly address avenues of exerting power given the constraints, and using the structures available. This type of exercise could facilitate the integration of concepts from social foundations courses into candidates’ visions of their practice.

Understanding the profession. While the theory for understanding teacher agency is particularly relevant and critical to teacher education, it has the potential to be useful in other educational circumstances. When teaching an undergraduate course in education (titled “Teaching as a Profession”), I asked students to use the theory for understanding teacher agency

as a multidimensional analytical tool to analyze three teacher narratives from Au's (2014) *Rethinking Multicultural Education* (see Appendix M). After discussion and analysis of an additional teacher of his/her choosing (students could choose to analyze a teacher s/he had interviewed as part of the course, or any teacher featured in a previous course reading), I asked students if the concept of teacher agency was “useful” to them. While a handful of students responded that the concept was too theoretical or complex, the majority of students affirmed that the use of the theory for understanding teacher agency as an analytical tool had deepened their understanding of teaching as a profession.

Future Direction and Conclusion

Future research on teacher agency should continue to test the usability of the theoretical model for understanding teacher agency as a multi-dimensional analytical tool. While this study was not completed in a teacher education context, I have proposed that the theory would contribute to the study of social foundations in teacher education, and have shared some anecdotal data. Further research should be designed to further investigate questions such as: Is the theory a useful tool to help teachers and teacher educators talk about agency? Does its use help reduce the frequency of the prototypical novice teacher question, “But what can I do?” (Pollock et al., 2010)? Are the goals of a social foundations course, or more broadly, a teacher education program, better fulfilled through integration of the theory into work with novice teachers?

Teaching is a complex and nuanced stochastic art, inherently comprised of conjecture and the negotiation of random variables. A theory for understanding teacher agency can be an important tool to help teachers prepare to navigate the constraints, challenges, and opportunities of their context and to see themselves as potentially powerful agents of change.

Appendix A – Glossary of Terms

<i>teacher agency</i>	The capacity of a teacher to make an impact or exert power
<i>co-teaching</i>	When “two or more professionals deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space” .
<i>inclusion</i>	Policies and programs that place students who have been identified as needing specialized educational services, or Individual Education Programs (IEPs), in classrooms with peers who have not been identified as needing such specialized services
<i>co-generative methodologies</i>	Research that aims “to solve pertinent problems in a context through democratic inquiry in which professional researchers collaborate with local stakeholders to seek and enact solutions to problems of major importance to the stakeholders” (Greenwood & Levin, 2008, p. 72)
<i>emergent methodologies</i>	research approaches committed to theory development (Dick, 2007; Holton, 2007; Wells et al., 1995)
<i>reflexivity:</i>	“The manner and extent to which the researchers present themselves as imbedded in the research situation and process” (Olesen, 2007, p. 423)

Appendix B – Participant Participation Form

PARTICIPATION FORM

TEACHER PEDAGOGICAL THINKING:

PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL INCLUSION PROGRAM

Researcher: Tina Y. Gourdt, Ph. D. Candidate, University of Washington College of Education, 206-679-4857, gourdt@uw.edu

**Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent by email.*

Faculty Advisor: Walter C. Parker, 206-543-1847, denver@uw.edu

Researchers' statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this participation form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to deepen understanding of how teachers in a middle school inclusion program approach and think about their work. The research study seeks to prioritize what practicing teachers care about and think about, while documenting, observing, and analyzing teacher priorities and their reasoning for these priorities.

STUDY PROCEDURES

(1) If you choose to be in this study, I would like to **collect and use documents** that were generated at prior meetings of the inclusion program staff, at which you may or may not have attended, including notes, documents (including email), video, and audio data. I would be analyzing the data with questions like, "How is the inclusion program structured? How are decisions made in the inclusion program? What issues are most regularly addressed during meetings? What solutions are proposed? How are they proposed? How do individual teachers conceptualize "inclusion"? How are professional relationships negotiated?" You do not have to give me every document requested.

(2) I would also like to **observe** at inclusion program staff meetings. This would be for the length of a normal inclusion program staff meeting, between one to three hours, with no additional time commitment. I would be observing the interactions between you and your inclusion program colleagues, as well as the topics that you cover during this time, such as "How is time spent during a meeting? Who speaks during the meeting? What are personal relationships like between the staff? What do the educators characterize as challenges? How do educators characterize their practice to each other? What do educators want to know in order to do their work more effectively?" I would like to audio- and video-record these observations and take field notes so that I can have an accurate record of your conversations. In addition, I would like to collect copies of any documents used or made during this meeting. You do not have to give me every document requested.

(2) If you are chosen randomly from among the participating inclusion faculty, I would then like to **interview** you about your thinking about inclusion. An interview would last about 30-45 minutes and would focus on your vision of inclusion and your experience of collaborating with your colleagues on improving the inclusion program. For example, I would ask you, "What would an ideal inclusion program look like? What are the biggest challenges for you in being an inclusion teacher? What are the biggest challenges facing the new inclusion department? Do you have any ideas about how to meet these challenges? Did your thinking about inclusion and inclusion teaching

change after participating in discussion with your colleagues?” I would like to audio-record this interview and take field notes so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation, as well as collect any documents generated during the interview. You may refuse to answer any question in this interview.

(3) In addition, I would like to **collaboratively create an investigation** with you and the entire participating inclusion staff. This investigation-selection meeting would last about 90-120 minutes, and would take place during a regularly scheduled professional development meeting time, with no additional time commitment. The goal would be to collaboratively identify a challenge or question that is authentic to the challenges as defined by your inclusion program. In order to identify such a challenge or question, I would ask questions such as, “Given your discussion regarding the biggest challenges facing your inclusion program, what topics might be important to gather data on? What types of data might help you address the challenges facing your program? Given the types of data you are interested in seeing, what research methods might be the most appropriate?” I would collect ideas suggested during this session to help us choose the topic, time, and place of our future investigation. Together we will agree on a proposal for an “investigation.” I would like to video-record with two cameras, audio-record, and take field notes during this group interview so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation, as well as collect any documents generated during the session. You may refuse to answer any question in this session, and do not have to give me every document requested.

(4) If deemed necessary, I will then write up our **proposed investigation** to submit to the University of Washington Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subjects approval. Upon approval from IRB, I will provide you with another consent form that specifically addresses our proposed “collaborative investigation.”

(5) With the data from our collaborative investigation as a stimulus for discussion, I would like you and the entire participating inclusion staff to **analyze and discuss the data** and the larger topic of our investigation. I would ask probing questions such as, “What do you see in this data? What is this data evidence of? Given your research questions, did we design a study that helped us answer your questions? What have you learned through this data exploration? What questions do you still have? Given this data, what next steps can you envision?” I would like to video-record with two cameras, audio-record, and take field notes during this group interview so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation, as well as collect any documents generated during the session. You may refuse to answer any question in this session, and you do not have to provide me with every document requested.

(6) I would also like to conduct a **group interview** with you and the entire participating inclusion program staff about your thinking about inclusion. The group interview would take place during a regularly scheduled professional development meeting time, with no additional time commitment. It will last about 60-90 minutes and would focus on your reflections on inclusion and your work together as a program to improve the effectiveness of your practice. For example, I would ask you, “Given the stated intent of our collaborative research project, what is your reflection on the work that we did? Which of the data collection events was most memorable or helpful for you personally? Was there any part of this process that was unhelpful or particularly challenging for you?” I would like to video-record with two cameras, audio-record, and take field notes during this group interview so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation, as well as collect any documents generated during the session. You may refuse to answer any question in this interview, and you do not have to give me every document requested.

(7) If you are chosen randomly to participate in an individual interview, the total time required for this study outside of your regular professional commitment will be 30-45 minutes. All other data gathering activities will take place during your regularly scheduled professional development meeting time, with no additional time commitment. This study would be concluded by December 2013.

(8) **Student Involvement:** Students will not be involved in this portion of the study.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. Some people feel self-conscious or uncomfortable being audio recorded, video recorded, or observed. I have addressed concerns for your privacy in the **Confidentiality of Research Information** section below.

Before I share any audio, video, or photographic data from this study with other researchers or use them in presentations or publications, I will give you an opportunity to review the recordings and delete any portions.

ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and your professional expectations will remain the same if you take part in the study or if you do not.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The results of this study may help educators to understand the challenges as well as the potential of professional discourse and collaboration. You may not directly benefit from taking part in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

Because of the nature of our work together and this research, strict confidentiality is not possible. However, you will be provided with all transcripts to review, and you may request the visual artifacts, audio and video recordings, or the transcripts at any time and make changes or delete any of your comments. While pseudonyms will not be used during the data collection phase of this project, I will use a pseudonym for you in any presentation or written publication of this work if you request this of me.

I may also want to use samples from visual artifacts or recordings for presentations to educational audiences, such as at professional conferences or in teacher education courses. I would like your permission to keep the artifacts and recordings indefinitely to use them for these educational purposes. I will not use the artifacts or recordings publicly until you have an opportunity to review and edit the recordings and provide written consent.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Participation or withdrawal will not affect your standing in your school.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Tina Gourd at the telephone number or email listed on the top of this form. **If you choose to contact me via email, please remember that I cannot assure the confidentiality of any information sent by email.**

Tina Y. Gourd

Signature

Date

Participant's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask the researcher or her advisor listed above. I will receive a copy of this participation form.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

Please INITIAL next to EITHER YES or NO for each of the items below:

I give my permission for the researcher to observe and interview me during inclusion program staff meetings.

Yes _____ No _____

If randomly selected, I volunteer to be a part of the individual interview portion of this research study.

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission for the researcher to collect documents (including visual, audio, and video artifacts) used or generated during this study or at prior meetings of the inclusion program staff.

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission for the researcher to make audio-recordings of my participation during inclusion program staff meetings and individual interviews.

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission for the researcher to make video-recordings of my participation during inclusion program staff meetings

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission for the researcher to keep all artifacts, audio, and video recordings indefinitely for educational purposes, while reserving the right to give or withhold permission for use of specific artifacts and recordings with my voice, image, or writing in publications or presentations.

Yes _____ No _____

I request that the researcher use a pseudonym to protect my privacy in presentations or written publications.

Yes _____ No _____

Copies to: Researcher
 Participant

Appendix C – List of All Data Collection Activities by Date

Date	Session #	Participants	Activities
10/31/12	#1	CTIRT	Semi-structured group interview; goal setting
12/12/12	#2	CTIRT	Development of mission/vision statement
1/16/13	#3	CTIRT	Development of research question and data collection strategies
Feb 2013 & March 2013	N/A	Small research teams	Multiple meetings: Development of individual research questions and data collection strategies; sharing of raw data; coding of students
4/3/13	#4	CTIRT	Projects review (workgroups); sharing work across CTIRT
5/15/13	#5	CTIRT	Preparation for presentation (workgroups); Presentation dry run
5/22/13	N/A	CTIRT	Presentation to full Bernstein staff
6/1/15 to 6/15/13	N/A	Ella, Erica, Felipa, Regina, Luke, & Jim	Individual interviews
6/17/13	N/A	CTIRT	Debrief of project; mission/vision revisited; next steps

**Appendix D – Handout for 1/16/13 CTIRT Meeting,
Developed After Open-Coding of Previous Meeting’s (12/12/12) Transcript**

Inclusion Division Meeting

January 16, 2013

Facilitator Tina Y. Gourd

Drafted Research Questions	Thoughts and Responses	Potential Data Collection Strategies
1. <u>Affective Impact</u>: Do students truly feel nurtured, safe, and supported in the Bernstein co-taught inclusion program? How do the experiences of students in co-taught classes compare to students in non-co-taught classes at Bernstein? Do they feel more, equally, or less nurtured, safe, and supported?		- Analyze student climate data (disaggregated by type of program) - Identify and conduct a preexisting affective (concerning feelings and emotions) student survey - Self-design and conduct an affective student survey
2. <u>Evidence of Student Learning</u>: What does evidence of student learning demonstrate about students in co-taught inclusion classes in comparison with their grade level peers in non-co-taught, non-inclusion classrooms? - How does student academic growth compare, across co-taught and non-co-taught classes? Across time? - How does student social-emotional growth compare, across co-taught and non-co-taught classes? Across time?		<u>Academic</u> - Analyze preexisting summative measures (state and district assessments) - Analyze preexisting formative measures (building common formative assessments) <u>Social-emotional</u> - Identify and conduct a preexisting social-emotional growth student survey, and analyze the data - Create our own social-emotional growth measure and analyze the data - Interview: students, former teachers, parents, peers
3. <u>Co-teaching Effectiveness</u>: Does co-teaching really lead to more effective teaching and learning? - Do general education inclusion co-teachers feel more, equally, or less capable of effectively teaching a variety of learners compared to their non-co-teaching peers who teach students with IEPs? - Are students with IEPs more, equally, or less successful in classrooms where there is inclusive co-teaching compared to general education classrooms where there is a single teacher?		- Video-record co-teaching sample lessons for analysis - Create and conduct a survey of Bernstein general education teachers (both co-teaching and non-co-teaching general education teachers) on their feelings of efficacy in teaching students with IEPs - Compare preexisting, building-level data on student academic and social-emotional success in co-taught and non-co-taught general education classes for students with IEPs (such as grade reports and qualitative data such as disciplinary actions such as referrals)

4. <u>Community Understanding</u>: How do people in the Bernstein community understand and think about the concepts “inclusion” and “co-teaching”? • Are there differences in understandings of these concepts “inclusion” and “co-teaching” between teachers who have worked as part of co-teaching pairs and those who have not? • How do parents understand these concepts? Are there differences in the understandings of parents of students with IEPs compared to parents of students without IEPs? Are there differences in the understandings of parents of students in co-taught classes compared to parents of students not in non-taught classes?		• Create and conduct a survey on the understanding of “inclusion” and “co-teacher” with the Bernstein community, including parents, teachers (both co-teachers and those not part of a co-teaching pair), staff, administration, and possibly students, then analyze data • Conduct interviews with (randomly?) selected members of the Bernstein community, including parents, teachers (both non-inclusion and inclusion), staff, administration, and possibly students
5. [Open space for group-developed ideas]		•

Appendix E – Analytic Notes and Memos from 1/21/2013 to 3/18/2013

Analytic note from 1/21/13

What I've been thinking about as I'm working with the Bernstein teachers: My work will analyze teacher agency within constraints. What do they see as challenges, what actually does constrain their agency, how do they resolve or not resolve these constraints? What limits the creativity and agency of committed, passionate teachers? What enables their agency?

Literature/conceptual framework will be on agency, context of teaching (constraints, including from a historical perspective), teachers & school reform (including a historical perspective in general and literature on inclusion and co-teaching as examples of school reform). Then there's the methodological literature/conceptual framework on participatory action research (which I am not sure fits as part of a traditional Lit Review/Conceptual Framework chapter, or in the methods chapter).

Findings:

- ambiguity leads to agency
 - What does this ambiguity look like? What does the agency look like?
- teachers want to become more institutionalized
- institutionalization also leads to agency? Or security?

Potential Research questions

- How does ambiguity impact the work?
- how does the concept of social justice figure into teachers' work?

Drafts and Ideas as Working on Dissertation Proposal, 1/26/2013

Working Title for Dissertation Proposal

“What are the goals of our inclusion program?
How do we measure if we're meeting them?”

Professional discourse, collaborative research, and agency
in a co-taught inclusion program

Problem Statement

This chapter will frame the project three ways, from the macro to micro level.

On the macro level, the social context of teaching in 2013 will be explored, including the discourse of derision aimed at public education, the school reform movement, and the devaluing of teachers and their work. This section will frame the focus of this project on the work of teachers and teacher thinking, a project that seeks to disrupt the steady negative discourse surrounding teachers and teaching.

The second frame will be theoretical in nature, exploring the concept of agency. Components of agency that will be explored/introduced are (a) the relationship between structure and agency, (b) agency within contested and ambiguous spaces, (c) agency within constraints, (d) the relationship between discourse and agency, and (e) structure enabling agency.

The third frame will be at the micro level, articulating the challenges at Bernstein Middle School (EMS) itself that have led to this project. Contextual issues include (a) inclusion and co-teaching within Seattle Public Schools (SPS) and more specifically at EMS, (b) budget pressures within SPS, (c) professional development structures and culture at EMS.

These three frames will be tied together through this project's research questions:

- What is the teacher discourse around “inclusion”? What does this discourse accomplish?

- How do inclusion teachers approach their work as “inclusion teachers”? How does this approach differ among different inclusion teachers?
- How does the concept of social justice figure into inclusion teachers’ work?
- How do inclusion teachers characterize their practice to each other? How do they monitor their “Self” for others?
- What do inclusion teachers see as problematic when working in an inclusion program? What do they see as possible?
- How do inclusion educators characterize an effective inclusion program?
- What do inclusion educators want to know in order to do their work more effectively?
 - How does data support their work?
 - How does ambiguity impact the work?
 - When designing an action research project, what questions do they ask? What don’t they ask? What work do they choose to engage in and for what reasons?
 - How do teachers use reflection in dialogue with other educators? Do educators find reflection valuable and how do they explain that value or lack of value?

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical frame of this project will be explored in greater detail through the literature. The most significant theoretical concept is “agency.” As previewed earlier, multiple approaches to understanding agency will be explored through the literature, including (a) the relationship between structure and agency, (b) agency within contested and ambiguous spaces, (c) agency within constraints, (d) the relationship between discourse and agency, and (e) structure enabling agency.

The theoretical work with the concept of agency will provide a lens through which to explore the context of teaching and professional development, historically through to 2013. This will also lead to the literature on school reform, beginning with a historical perspective and introducing the literature on inclusion and co-teaching as specific examples of school reform.

Methodology

This chapter will begin with the methodological literature that grounds this study, specifically qualitative research and participatory action research methodologies. With this grounding, the details of this specific study will be described, beginning with the study design, the setting, the participants, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis procedures. A discussion of my role as researcher and participant will also be explored and described.

Findings

The findings from the study will be described in this section. Preliminary findings include:

- Ambiguity leads to agency (multiple examples)
- Ambiguity leads to uncertainty around program longevity
- Structure enables agency, and these teachers want to be part of creating and articulating the structures of their inclusion program

Analysis

This chapter will analyze the significance of the findings for teachers, professional development, the school reform movement, the inclusion movement, and educational researchers.

References

Analytic Note, specific to Proposal Draft, 3/1/2013

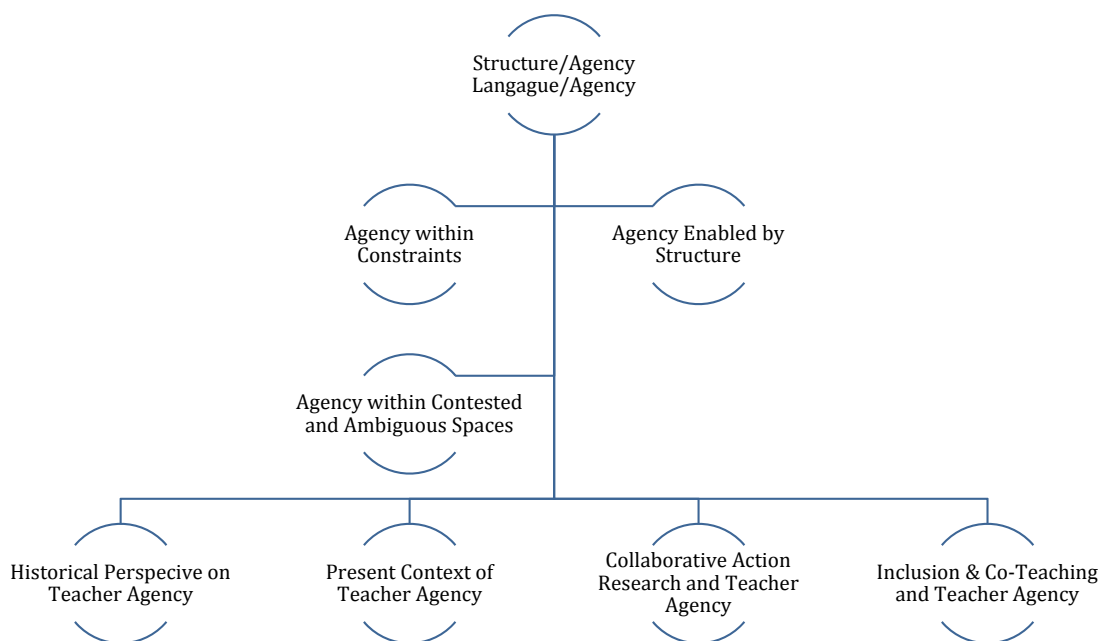
This study can also be framed theoretically as an exploration of the concept of agency. What is the relationship between the structures of public schooling and teacher agency? How do teachers enact agency within constraints? Do the structures of public schooling serve to enable or constrain teacher agency? Does the ambiguity and contested nature of public schooling sometimes serve as an opportunity for teachers to exercise their agency?

Walter, what do you think about these questions that I wrote to try to introduce agency? Are they research questions? I think of them as analytical/theoretical questions, but perhaps that means they belong with my research questions?

Analytic Memo Regarding Developing Conceptual Framework, 3/11/2013

The most significant theoretical concept in this study is “agency.” In order to better understand “teacher agency,” two foundational approaches to understanding agency will be explored through the literature, (a) the relationship between structure and agency, and (b) the relationship between language and agency. Within the literature exploring these two broad theoretical relationships are three themes that are particularly relevant to the current context of education and educators: (i) agency within contested and ambiguous spaces, (ii) agency within constraints, and (iii) how structure enables agency. These three themes will be highlighted within the exploration of agency’s relationship to structure and to language, as well as within the review of the literature on teacher agency from a historical perspective, teacher agency in the present context, collaborative action research as a form of teacher agency, and inclusion and co-teaching as examples of school reform movements.

Analytic Memo Drafting Conceptual Framework Visual, 3/18/2013



First Level: Foundational Theory

- relationship between structure & agency
- relationship between language & agency

Second Level: Three theoretical themes highlighted within the foundational theory

- agency within constraints
- agency enabled by structure
- agency within contested and ambiguous spaces

Third Level: Specific literature pertinent to this study, discussed through the lens of teacher agency

- historical perspective on teacher agency
- present context of teacher agency
- collaborative action research and teacher agency
- inclusion & co-teaching and teacher agency

Appendix F – Six Independent Research Projects, by Grade Level/Subject Teams

	Teacher Researchers	Academic or Social Emotional?	Qualitative or Quantitative Data?	Comparison Groups	Research measure(s)	Research Question(s)
6th Grade Mathematics	Drew, Luke*	Academic	Quantitative	Students who completed formative tasks compared to students who did not	Internal team summative and formative assessments	Is there a relationship between student completion of formative assessment tasks (homework and classwork) and growth in mathematical understanding as demonstrated on a summative assessment (“growth” determined through the change in score between a pre- and post-test)? Is there a statistically significant unique relationship between either classwork or homework and growth in understanding for students with IEPs and students without IEPs?
7th Grade Mathematics	Felipa*, Madelaine	Academic	Quantitative	Non-IEP and honors students in CTI compared to non-IEP students and honors students in non-CTI	Cross-team summative assessment (singular)	(1) Do general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion classrooms do better than general education students (no IEP) in a non-inclusion classroom, as demonstrated by their scores on a variety of assessments? (2) Do honors education students (regardless of IEPs) in inclusion classrooms do better than honors education students (regardless of IEPs) in a non-inclusion classroom, as demonstrated by their scores on a variety of assessments? (3) Are the scores of students who took a retest of the assessment higher than the scores of students who did not take the retest (before the retest and after the retest)?
8th Grade Mathematics	Kristopher*, Jim	Academic	Quantitative	Non-IEP and honors students in CTI compared to non-IEP students and honors students in non-CTI	Internal team summative assessments	(1) Do general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion classrooms do better than general education students (no IEP) in a non-inclusion classroom, as demonstrated by their scores on a variety of assessments? (2) Do honors education students (regardless of IEPs) in inclusion classrooms do better than honors education students (regardless of IEPs) in a non-inclusion classroom, as demonstrated by their scores on a variety of assessments?
6th Grade Humanities	Erica*, Willis, Ester, Aline*	Academic	Quantitative	a) Non-IEP students in CTI compared to non-IEP students in non-CTI b) Non-IEP students compared to IEP students in CTI	Cross-team formative assessments (4x repeated measure)	(1) Is there a difference between the change in score for general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion classrooms versus general education students (no IEPs) in non-inclusion classrooms, as demonstrated by their change in scores on a summarizing assessment? (2) Is there a difference between the change in score for students with IEPs in inclusion classrooms versus general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion classrooms, as demonstrated by their change in scores on a summarizing assessment?
7th Grade Humanities	Dolley*, Regina, Chuck	Social-Emotional	Qualitative	[not relevant – qualitative]	Cross-team scenario and interviews	How do students respond to an “empathy dilemma”? How do they conceptualize “fairness” and “equity”? How do their understandings connect to (a) their preferences for responses to an empathy dilemma, and (b) their explanations for their preferences for responses to the empathy dilemma?
8th Grade Humanities	Bea*, Ella, Raya*, Jasper	Social-Emotional	Quantitative	Students with IEP compared to students w/o IEPs	Internal team survey	(1) Do all of our students in inclusion classes feel safe, nurtured, supported and academically challenged? (2) Is there a difference between the responses of students with IEPs, students without IEPs, and parents/guardians on an adapted survey addressing students’ perceptions of their inclusive classroom?

* indicates certified special education teacher

**Appendix G –
Discourse Events Linked to the Exclusion of Science Teachers
from the Co-Taught Inclusion Program**

How should science teachers and science students with IEPs be supported?		
Session	# of times science's role in Bernstein's inclusion program was introduced as a subject of discussion (discourse event)	Issue was raised by ...
10/31/12	9	Erica, Aline, Ella, Regina, Chuck, Drew, Crysta*
12/12/12	8	Ester, Aline, Crysta*, Dolley, Willis
1/16/13	2	Aline, Kristopher
6/17/13	10	Katrina, Crysta*, Willis, Ester, Kristopher, Kirstin, Ella
Individual Interview	5	Erica, Felipa, Regina

*indicates administrator

Appendix H – Mission/Vision Draft Statement from Bernstein Middle School Co-Taught Inclusion Program, June 2013

**Notes were recorded on the document to record feedback on this working draft.

The Mission, Values, and Vision
of the Co-Taught Inclusion Program at Eckstein Middle School

Mission [short encapsulation]

We are a community of professionals dedicated to an inclusive, nurturing, safe, and supportive learning environment which honors individuality, encourages self advocacy, values pride in our school, and where *ALL students are able to achieve academic, emotional, and social growth and success* or which fosters confident, creative, active learners and problem solvers

Values [our beliefs]

We believe ...

- *Students should learn together in less isolated environments*
- All students can show evidence of growth in academic, social, and emotional areas that is supported by data
 - Student growth should be measured by a variety of means (including, but not limited to, state/district tests, teacher observations, work samples, etc.)
- Co-teaching leads to more effective teaching and learning,
 - Collaboration
 - Reflection
 - Data collection
 - Curriculum
 - Differentiation
 - Behavior support
 - Increases professional development and continued learning
 - Enhances knowledge/expertise
 - Integrity and accountability
- That sharing of knowledge
 - Improves professional practice and impact on student learning
 - Increases rigor of academic behavior expectations
- That teachers are responsible for creating and perpetuating an inclusive community that reflects and affirms diversity
 - This should reflect the larger community in which the students (and teachers) live
 - We value the role of an ongoing discussion about the role social justice plays in middle school education
 - We are committed to treating all students fairly, recognizing that fair may look different for each individual
- We believe in promoting student independence and progress towards being productive members of the community.

Tina Yush... 1/15/2013 12:18 PM

Comment (1): Notes from full group discussion on 12/12/12:

- What is it about inclusion program where we are doing ___ in ___ way that is distinctive?
- Do we want to define what co-teaching is?
- Since science is not co-taught – is this more like traditional mainstreaming? (Will this come in our values section?)
- Inclusion: direct support of student needs, targeted support, flexible grouping.
- If we don't specify "co-teaching" in our mission, this might allow for more authentic research.

dyespania 1/15/2013 12:19 PM

Comment (2):

- I think we do need to differentiate inclusion and co-teaching in the mission statement
- I took a statement from "vision" section and added to mission as it seemed to fit better up front

Tina Yus... 12/16/2012 11:53 AM

Comment (3): Do students also learn better in less isolation? Since these are beliefs, we could articulate that if that is a belief.

dyespania 1/2/2013 10:59 AM

Comment (4): Is this our research question? What data can we look at that shows students learn better in diverse learning communities?

- We are members of professional learning communities who are supportive, accountable and recognize the multiple commitments that team members have.
- Through patience and persistence, we are committed to respectfully resolving challenging situations.
- We believe in the importance of teaching and supporting the academic, social/emotional and physical needs of every student.

Vision [to achieve; our business; what we are always striving for]

1. Reciprocal communication between Eckstein Middle School and its families is integral to the success of all students. Our families feel welcome, valued, informed and supported.
2. Teachers promote a safe environment where staff recognizes students' academic and social/emotional strengths in addition to their areas of needs.
3. Teachers provide specially designed instruction in the least restrictive environment.
4. Teachers, administrators, families and students are actively engaged with feeder elementary and high schools to provide for a smoother transition.
5. SPED teachers advocate for the needs of students with IEPs and act as a liaison between home and school.
6. Special Ed and General Ed teachers collaborate and support each other to differentiate instruction, materials and environment for students with IEPs.
7. Teachers track and support progress of students with IEPs to meet their academic, social, and behavior goals and support them in moving towards greater independence.

Tina Yush... 12/16/2012 1:19 PM
Comment [5]: Whole building; vague, important

Tina Yush... 12/16/2012 1:19 PM
Comment [6]: Whole building & move to values

Tina Yush... 1/2/2013 10:54 AM
Comment [7]: ** VISION, summary statement?

Tina Yush... 12/16/2012 12:10 PM
Comment [8]: Other notes on Gina's paper:
 •What are the benefits for every student involved within inclusion?
 •Working with cooperating teacher?
 •Co-teaching
 •Keep with inclusion

Appendix I – Survey for the 8th Humanities Research Project

Inclusion Family Survey

March 2013

1. My student FEELS SAFE in his/her classes that have students with a range of social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

2. My student FEELS ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGED in a variety of ways (homework load, studying, participation, discussion, content, etc.) in his/her classes that have students with a range of social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

3. My student FEELS SUPPORTED by the multiple teachers or adult professionals in his/her classes that have students with a range of social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

4. My student feels that all students are treated by teachers and other adult professionals as equal members of the class, regardless of his/her social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

5. My student feels that all students are treated by other students as equal members of the class, regardless of his/her social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

6. My student has friends who have a range of social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

7. My student's teachers provide instruction and learning support in a lot of different ways in classes that have students with a range of social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

8. My student learns better in classes that have students with a range of social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

9. My student learns better in classes that have multiple teachers or adult professionals helping students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

10. Because of classes that include students with a range of social and academic abilities, my student better understands that having a disability does not really mean "not able" but does mean "learns differently."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

11. Because of classes that include students with a range of social and academic abilities, my student is more comfortable around people with different social and academic abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

12. Because of classes that include students with a range of social and academic abilities, my student has more respect for people that are different than him/her, like those that have different beliefs, different ethnic backgrounds, different social backgrounds, etc.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix J – Scenario for 7th Humanities Research Project

Empathy Dilemma

STUDENT A, STUDENT B, STUDENT C and STUDENT D are in a small group working in their humanities class. The teacher hands out a single sheet of directions to each group and then reads the directions aloud to the class. Each group is also given 3 rolls of masking tape and a large pile of news paper. The teacher tells the class that each group needs to work together to build the tallest tower possible. Each group must work together to complete the task.

While the teacher is giving instructions STUDENT A begins to rock back and forth in the chair and make a giant tape ball. By the time the instructions are given the tape ball is the size of a baseball and STUDENT A has used an entire roll of tape. STUDENT B leans over to STUDENT A and asks the instructions are clear and offers to reread the instructions to the group. STUDENT C tells STUDENT A to sit down and then raises a hand to tell the teacher that STUDENT A is being disruptive and asks to leave the group. Meanwhile STUDENT D has gathered the remaining materials and has moved to a new table to begin building the structure.

What do you think about STUDENT A's actions?

What do you think of STUDENT B's actions?

What do you think of STUDENT C's actions?

What do you think of STUDENT D's actions?

Which person made the best decision?

If you were a fifth member of this group, describe what you would have done? You can mention things outside the dilemma.

Appendix K – Comparison of 6 Independent Research Projects, Questions and Findings

	Research Question(s)	Summarized Findings
6th Grade Mathematics	Is there a relationship between student completion of formative assessment tasks (homework and classwork) and growth in mathematical understanding as demonstrated on a summative assessment (“growth” determined through the change in score between a pre- and post-test)? Is there a statistically significant unique relationship between either classwork or homework and growth in understanding for students with IEPs and students without IEPs?	- The findings were very inconsistent between each of the units, leading to the potential conclusion that the impact of classwork and homework on mathematical understanding depends on the unit under study. Based on these three units, formative assessment work was more frequently related to change in score for students with IEPs than students without IEPs. - I ran a series of sequential regressions to determine whether there is a statistically significant unique relationship for either classwork or homework and the change in score for each unit. (In other words, which one matters more, classwork or homework?) These results indicate that classwork appears to have more of an impact on the change in score on the assessments than homework.
7th Grade Mathematics	(1) Do general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion classrooms do better than general education students (no IEP) in a non-inclusion classroom, as demonstrated by their scores on a variety of assessments? (2) Do honors education students (regardless of IEPs) in inclusion classrooms do better than honors education students (regardless of IEPs) in a non-inclusion classroom, as demonstrated by their scores on a variety of assessments? (3) Are the scores of students who took a retest of the assessment higher than the scores of students who did not take the retest (before the retest and after the retest)?	- Based on the t-tests, there is no statistically significant difference (significance = less than .05) between the scores of general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion versus non-inclusion classes. - The second t-test compared honors students, and I also found that there is no statistically significant difference (significance = less than .05) between the scores of Honors education students (regardless of IEP) in inclusion versus non-inclusion classes. - The third t-test compared the original score of students who took the retest to the score of students who did not take the retest. I found that there is statistically significant difference (significance = less than .05) between the original scores of students who did do a retest and those who did not. - The fourth t-test compared the original scores of the retakes to the final scores of the retakers. I found that there is a statistically significant difference (significance = less than .05) between the two test scores of the students who took the retest.
8th Grade Mathematics	(1) Do general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion classrooms do better than general education students (no IEP) in a non-inclusion classroom, as demonstrated by their scores on a variety of assessments? (2) Do honors education students (regardless of IEPs) in inclusion classrooms do better than honors education students (regardless of IEPs) in a non-inclusion classroom, as demonstrated by their scores on a variety of assessments?	Based on the t-tests, there is no statistically significant difference (significance = less than .05) between the scores of - General education students (no IEPs) in inclusion versus non-inclusion classes - Honors education students (regardless of IEP) in inclusion versus non-inclusion classes
6th Grade Humanities	(1) Is there a difference between the change in score for general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion classrooms versus general education students (no IEPs) in non-inclusion classrooms, as demonstrated by their change in scores on a summarizing assessment? (2) Is there a difference between the change in score for students with IEPs in inclusion classrooms versus general education students (no IEPs) in inclusion classrooms, as demonstrated by their change in scores on a summarizing assessment?	- The t-test comparing general education students in inclusion and non-inclusion classes found that there is no significant difference between the groups. In other words, the change in score of general education students in inclusion and non-inclusion classes were statistically similar, and any differences can be accounted for due to random chance. - The t-test comparing students with and without IEPs in inclusion classes found that there is no significant difference between the groups. In other words, the change in score for students with IEPs were statistically similar to students without IEPs in inclusion classes, and any differences can be accounted for due to random chance.

7th Grade Humanities	How do students respond to an “empathy dilemma”? How do they conceptualize “fairness” and “equity”? How do their understandings connect to (a) their preferences for responses to an empathy dilemma, and (b) their explanations for their preferences for responses to the empathy dilemma?	1. Student B is widely regarded in a positive light (28 positive comments, by far the most, and only 3 mixed comments and 1 negative), yet is not the character chosen as having made the best decision (Student D is chosen 14 times, and Student B is only chosen 12 times). 2. Student C is a fairly controversial figure, with an even split of positive, negative, and mixed comments (11, 12, 12). In contrast, Student A is not at all controversial, with only 3 positive comments, 4 mixed comments, and 26 negative comments. 3. Student D is a little controversial, but not to the same degree as Student C, with 19 positive comments, 10 mixed, and 7 negative. When we look only at the inclusion data set, some other patterns emerge: 1. Student D is very popular among the inclusion students interviewed, notably more so than with the non-inclusion students. a. Inclusion students account for 13 out of 19 positive comments for D, and only 2 out of 10 mixed comments. b. No inclusion student made a negative comment about Student D, although 10 negative comments about D were made by non-inclusion students. c. Student D was picked 9 times as the person making the best decision by students in the inclusion classes by the inclusion students. To compare, Student B was only picked 2 times by your inclusion students, and Student C 3 times. Student D was also only picked 5 times by non inclusion students (compared to the 9 times by your inclusion students). 2. The top reasons provided by your inclusion students for appreciating Student D’s actions were: a. s/he gets stuff done on the project b. s/he walked away from conflict 3. The most popular reason for why Student C was seen in a positive light by your students (your students made 8 of the total 11 positive comments about Student C) was, “Don’t work with people who will hold you back.” Your students accounted for 7 out of the 9 times this code emerged in the full data set.
8th Grade Humanities	(1) Do all of our students in inclusion classes feel safe, nurtured, supported and academically challenged? (2) Is there a difference between the responses of students with IEPs, students without IEPs, and parents/guardians on an adapted survey addressing students’ perceptions of their inclusive classroom?	1. Descriptive statistics indicate that the mean of students and parent responses all fell within 4.40 to 5.47 on a 6-point scale, thus an overwhelmingly positive response. 2. Is there a statistically significant difference between any of the means? This means is there a difference between any of the means for a given question that cannot be explained through <i>random chance</i>? I ran ANOVA tests for each question, comparing the mean of responses for each of the three groups (no IEP, IEP, Parent/Guardian) to determine if there is a significant difference. The result is that there is no statistically significant difference between the means in all cases but one (“statistically significant” = less than .05). The one set of mean responses that have a significant difference is the response of students with IEPs and parent/guardians to the question about FEELING SAFE.

Appendix L – Exit Ticket Comments after 5/22/13 Staff Meeting

What information was new or surprising or interesting to you?

- IIIIIIII Little or no statistical difference in scores in inclusion and non-inclusion classrooms
- IIIIII Inclusion classrooms don't appear to hold back General Ed students
- IIIIII Inclusion seems to work well for IEP students
- IIII Honors kids are not held back in an inclusion class
- I Importance of homework
- IIIIIIII Appreciated the use and analysis of so much data
- Overall findings were similar across departments
- Nothing new or surprising – data can be interpreted any way you want if you try hard enough
- II Results confirmed my own observations and thoughts on the topics discussed
- III Found the jump in scores the year inclusion/co-teaching started to be very interesting
- II The direct results of co-teaching seen in assessment data
- The success of inclusion classes seems to imply that our district should eliminate APP and move to a system of neighborhood inclusion schools
- III Great news!!!
- III Students' different views on what constitutes a "good student"
- II Didn't realize this research was being conducted, but appreciate hearing the results
- Social/emotional results seem to align with the other data
- II Multi-grade level class comparison of t-test numbers

Wonders? What data was missing?

- IIIIIIII Would like to see data over a longer time period/ see how data changes over time/see data analyzed at different times of year/larger sample sizes /more data
- III How are non-IEP students chosen for inclusion classes?
- IIII Data broken down by IEP type or FRL, ELL, race, across grade levels, honors kids tallied separately
- II Is there any statistical significance in one or two years ahead in math?
- II Would like to see trends in other schools & districts
- Don't understand why the bigger the difference, the less significant it is
- II Why did the mainstream teachers all present while SPED teachers stood by (except for Raya and Dolley).
Is the mainstream teacher the teacher and the SPED teacher the supporting teacher? Is it considered the mainstream teacher's class?
- II More data comparing co-taught classes to non co-taught classes
- II How will this data be used to support inclusion programs when it comes to such high numbers of students with IEPs in inclusion classes?
- III Would results have been different if students taught by non-inclusion teachers had been compared?
Inclusion vs. non-inclusion IEP students?
- IIII Would like more info on how honors curriculum is being developed , differentiated & assessed/If you spend less time explaining step-by-step, could you not then cover more content for honors students?
Could they be challenged more and learning new concepts in a non-inclusion class?
- III What about other subjects? Humanities?
- Would like to see information about inclusion when we don't have full FTE for co-teaching (ELL)
- III Would like more data on empathy and social emotional areas
- Does "no statistical difference" mean all teachers are equally effective?
- Does scoring on a 4-point scale give the same level of precision as scoring on an 11-point scale (A, A-, B, B- . . . D)?
- How does this correlate with PGE Evaluation scores, MAP scores, MSP scores?
- What is the definition of "least restrictive environment"?
- III How is growth connected to instruction methods or teaching styles?
- Why do we conflate grade level performance with "not being held back"?
- How many students who qualify for APP were in these studies?

- Do IEP students benefit more in inclusion classes than in a smaller, pull-out, self-contained class?
- IIII Time for discussion of a full-inclusion school?

How will this data influence your own practice?

- II Will think about what intentional language and expectations I will set up for students
- IIIIIIIIII Will be more aware of the need to provide explicit support on group work/teach group work problem solving/focus on “work” vs. “task completion”
- Inspires me to break down the data more with PLCs to see what’s working
- III Will keep making modifications/differentiate instruction
- Seeing that “high” kids don’t suffer from inclusional differentiation strategies helps me feel ok about making my classes so structured
- IIIIII Will continue: to support students both with and without IEPs in my classrooms/continue to differentiate instruction/with the same practices
- Will teach more empathy/build culture and relationships
- III Will be more explicit with my instructions and breaking things down step-by-step
- IIIIII I will continue to support/am more supportive of inclusion
- Will reflect and look at current practices on keeping data to determine possible changes
- IIII It won’t influence my practice/I don’t know how it will influence my practice
- III Will continue to act on my understanding that guided classwork is more significant to learning than homework
- I need to review the procedure involving doing t-tests/looking for statistical significance

How do you think this information or this process can inform our work as a building in improving student achievement?

- I Revisit our mission/vision statements related to inclusion
- IIIIIIII Would like training on how to understand and support inclusion kids better/PD on the topic next year/more tools and info on working with inclusion kids/more social & emotional training/more info on working through conflict and inclusion students’ perception of “fairness”
- We need to work on making Eckstein a more inclusive environment school-wide (not only in inclusion classes)
- IIIIII More opportunities for teachers to do action research on student learning pertaining to their classes/opportunities for this level of data analysis with our own data on a more frequent basis/incentivize PLCs or other groups to do more of this kind of real, honest research
- Employing the format used would help focus work of PLCs and help us focus on student work and teacher effectiveness
- IIIIIIIIII Reinforces support of our school’s inclusion program/challenges assumptions
- More school-wide focus on teaching kids to work effectively in groups
- Spread out kids with IEPs to more classrooms
- IIIIII More inclusion classes/Co-taught inclusion in science/more inclusion and co-taught classrooms/multiple grade level classes (especially math) should be co-taught

**Appendix M – Analyzing with the Theoretical Proposition for Understanding Teacher Agency:
Assignments and Lecture Notes from EDC&I: Teaching as a Profession**

	Macrosociological Context	Context-Specific Opportunities and Constraints	Agency within Constraints	Agency within Contested and Ambiguous Spaces	Structures Enabling Agency
Gonzales (2014), “Who Can Stay Here?”	<i>ICE Raids, immigration law that privileges some groups over others</i>	<i>A school with many students with undocumented family members</i>	<i>Can not change the current immigration policy, but can shape instruction to better support students impacted by the policies</i>	<i>“immigration” is on the learning standards for many/most states. How a teacher teaches about immigration can be space for agency</i>	<i>“Immigration” is an expected unit; there is a wide-variety of literature available; she is choosing to educate other teachers</i>
Peterson (2014), “Presidents and Slaves”	<i>Limited access to information like presidents and slaves; traditional narrative of presidential study</i>	<i>Fairly flexible curriculum, students who were curious and motivated</i>	<i>Has a text book that is problematic ... what does he do with it?</i>	<i>Teaching “text analysis” can be an ambiguous space, for which texts students analyzing can be a shaped by teacher interest/agency</i>	<i>Uses internet; uses feedback formats of writing letters to the publishes</i>
Smith (2014), “Reconstruct-ing Race”	<i>Simplified understandings of race (racism is bad),</i>	<i>Mostly white, privileged community,</i>	<i>“How do you know I am white?” (using knowledge of students to question preconceived notions)</i>	<i>Race is a social construction, and a very ambiguous concept. By teaching about its ambiguities, he is pressing on pushing students to have a more complex view of the world. What should we teach in a “Language Arts” class?</i>	<i>Uses study of literature to incorporate sociological study into secondary curriculum</i>

Name: _____ TVS #7: Working Against and Within Structures, EDC&I 351, W15

Entrance Task: Choose a teacher, either someone from a previous teacher voices series (not the teachers for today) or one of your oral history interviewees, and consider how s/he navigated his/her teacher agency.

Teacher: _____

Macrosociological Context	Context-Specific Opportunities and Constraints	Agency within Constraints	Agency within Contested and Ambiguous Spaces	Structures Enabling Agency

Exit Task: Is *teacher agency* a useful concept for you? Explain.

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